

Labour market policies

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JOHN BRAUER

Labour Market Policies
Structure and Content, Space and Time

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Abstract

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Labour market policies has two aims: cushioning the economic hardship caused by unemployment and increasing employment rates. In many welfare states, responsibilities for such policies are divided between different political-administrative levels. This dissertation aims to enhance the understanding of labour market policies and especially the involvement of sub-national governmental actors, by analysing the role of municipalities in the Swedish context. The dissertation also investigates the involvement of social work and social workers within labour market policies. A theoretical framework consisting of four pillars, structure, content, space, and time, is used to analyse labour market policies. The analysis combines a historical review with empirical data. The findings show that the involvement of municipalities, in active labour market policies, has taken place against the background of three processes: the multi-level governance of financial support, the shifting role of active labour market policies, and the dialectic relationship between financial support and active labour market policies. The divided responsibility for financial support generates incentives for municipal measures that qualify social assistance recipients for nationally funded social insurances. The fear of work disincentives has also been a driving force in the development of municipal activation. The reliance on municipalities to design and deliver active labour market policies opens for greater cross-municipal differences. An ongoing reform of the Public Employment Service, the national agency that provides active labour market policies, that decreases the number of local offices and increases the reliance on private service providers, is likely to change the role of municipalities within active labour market policies. Many scholars criticise the involvement of social workers, within labour market policies, given the use of conditionality through activation. This criticism calls for further empirical investigation, not least in terms of how practicing social workers position their work.

Keywords: labour market policies, activation, unemployment, multi-level governance, local governance, social work, institutional change, scale

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List of papers

- Paper I** Brauer, J. (submitted). Modes of governance in interorganizational collaboration. Manuscript.
- Paper II** Brauer, J. & Johansson, B. & Bruhn, A. (2021). Social Representations in Street-Level Bureaucracies: Production and Reproduction of Knowledge Within Public Administration. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, 25 (2), 99-122.
- Paper III** Brauer, J. (2021). Labour market policies on a sub-national level. *SN Social Sciences*, 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-021-00163-0>

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1. Introduction

Capitalist welfare states recurringly responds to unemployment with interventions that, taken together, have two aims: cushioning the economic hardship caused by unemployment and increasing employment rates. Such interventions, commonly referred to as labour market policies, are characterised by conflicts over ideology, as well as effect in terms of making people enter or re-enter the labour market. The ideological conflicts concern not least the division of responsibility between the unemployed and public institutions. Conflicts of effect stem from divergent explanations of unemployment, which in turn are based on questions about the motivation and skills of unemployed people, as well as about the functioning of the labour market. Further complicating the ideological and descriptive conflicts, labour markets are continually changing, among other reasons because of new modes of production. Labour market policies are also subject to changes in governance. In many countries during the last 40 years, municipalities and other levels of local government have increasingly initiated labour market policies, or been either encouraged or forced to do so by national authorities. The involvement of local governments may result in unequal access to services within a country, as local governments differ in their ambition and ability to deliver such services. In many countries, local labour market policies have emerged as a supplement to national policies, which has resulted in fragmented services because of the division of responsibilities between sub-national and national agencies. This fragmentation is often addressed through multi-level governance strategies. Such strategies are commonly enacted on the local level, where actors need to overcome institutional fragmentation by various means, including collaboration. Despite being well intentioned, these interventions often generate new problems that stem from conflicts concerning the means and/or ends of policies. Another aspect relating to service delivery within the framework of labour market policies by local governments is the increased involvement of social workers, as such policies are often realised in the realm of social services. This raises questions concerning how social workers ought to approach unemployment. Taken together, public interventions in the labour market comprise a broad range of issues that must be problematised.

This problematisation of labour market policies can be contrasted with a more idealised representation. Successful labour market policies decrease public spending on financial support, such as unemployment benefits and

social assistance, because labour market participation increases. Having more people in employment enhances economic growth and increases tax revenues, which enables increased spending on public services such as care, education, and health. At an individual level, unemployment is associated with numerous problems including health issues, social deprivation and, of course, economic hardship (Bask, 2011; Angelin, 2009; Jahoda, 1982). The United Nations designates paid labour a human right and requires states to enact labour market policies to secure people's access to employment (UN General Assembly, 1966). Taken together, public efforts to help people find employment concern both the welfare state and its inhabitants.

When comparing the idealisation and problematisation of the issue, we find that there are a range of factors that complicate the former. One critical issue concerns the relationship between financial support and measures to increase the number of people in employment. The latter are often referred to as *active* labour market policies, and comprise interventions aiming to “remove obstacles to employment, motivate jobseekers to actively seek and accept employment, and/or to retain or improve jobseekers’ employability” (Weishaupt, 2011, p. 67). Examples of active policies are counselling, subsidised employment, and workplace training. *Passive* labour market policies concern financial support during periods of unemployment and are often considered to be at the core of welfare state policies, as they cushion economic hardship. However, many argue that overly generous policies, with too little monitoring of recipients, involve moral hazard, specifically by creating situations where people choose not to work in order to receive financial support instead. The extent to which such situations occur is contested and difficult to evaluate. However, some argue that the risk of moral hazard itself calls for preventive control mechanisms to be put in place to maintain the legitimacy of welfare institutions (Eriksen & Molander, 2019). The increased use of active labour market policies since the 1980s can be understood in the light of this ideological discussion. In many member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), unemployed persons must participate in active policies, such as workplace training, to receive financial support. Put differently, financial support has been made conditional upon participation in activation or welfare-to-work programmes (Weishaupt, 2011). From this perspective, active labour market policies can be seen as involving elements of control and repression, which clearly deviates from the idealised vision of active labour market policies.

The increased use of, and emphasis on, active labour market policies is part of a broader transformation of welfare states. It concerns the gradual merging or blurring of borders between labour market policy and other social policies. Social problems such as segregation and youth delinquency have to a large extent been reframed as issues of unemployment. Some argue that these processes exemplify a shift from a Keynesian welfare state, where the financial security of citizens was the main priority, towards a more competitive understanding of the state as being concerned with people as potential workers rather than citizens (Zats & Boris, 2014; Jessop, 1999). These changes are illustrated in the notion of employability (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004), which focuses on how individuals are expected to take greater responsibility to adapt to changing markets and demands for skills.

The relation between the notions of passive and active as well as the concept of employability illustrate the ideological core of labour market policies. The question of the generosity of the welfare state is not simply a matter of whether financial support creates disincentives to work. It also concerns public solidarity with inhabitants who are less well off. Because labour market policies are founded upon ideological stands, they are not neutral means for addressing objectively framed problems. Instead they are based on assumptions concerning the relation between state, market, and inhabitants. For instance, the increased use of conditionality can be problematised in relation to the idea of human rights, as it limits people's access to an adequate standard of living (cf. Panican & Ulmestig, 2016).

Another challenge is posed by the continuous changes in supply, i.e., the people and groups targeted by active labour market policies. The reframing of other social problems into problems of unemployment is one explanation of this change. When unemployment is represented as the main problem in areas such as youth delinquency and support for people with disabilities, the target group of active labour market policies expands. But changes in supply can also have other explanations. From the perspective of the global North, increased migration has become a pressing issue, as people born abroad tend to be overrepresented among unemployed people (Hammarstedt, 2019). These are some examples of how the target group of labour market policies has changed, a change which must also be seen in relation to changed demands in the labour market.

From a demand-perspective, labour market policies can be viewed in the light of changing modes of production and the future of work. Many countries in the global North transformed from agrarian to industrial

economies around the turn of the last century. After the 1970s oil crises, many of these countries have gravitated towards increased reliance on production of services rather than goods (Jessop, 1999; Bell, 1999/1973). More recent developments in information technology, and especially artificial intelligence, continue to transform labour markets. Some predict that the ongoing automatisisation of production and services will result in the “end of work” (Rifkin, 1995; see also Ford, 2015). Whether or not these prophecies will be fulfilled, labour markets are under constant reconfiguration, which influences demand in terms of both the number of workers and the skills that are required.

Another issue related to demand has to do with forms of employment in the Global North. Many working people have low earnings and/or insecure employment, which means they are highly vulnerable to increased prices or economic downturns. Others might even need public financial support while working, due to an imbalance between wages and the cost of living (Lohmann & Marx, 2018; Standing, 2011a). These types of situations are a distinct feature of post-industrial market economies, and take place against the backdrop of increasing wage inequalities and deregulated labour markets (Bonoli, 2007). Returning to active labour market policies, one can ask to what extent they help people overcome poverty or only change its characteristics. While active measures might reduce public spending on financial assistance, increased reliance on precarious employment instead of financial support may not help the target group experience greater security (Seikel & Spannagel, 2018).

There is also a range of questions concerning the governing of labour market policies. Welfare states in the global North typically consist of several political-administrative levels, ranging from nation to region, city or municipality. The expansion of the welfare state after World War II (WWII) often depended on increased national responsibilities. However, since the oil crises in the 1970s, there has been an increased involvement of subnational levels (Scarpa, 2016; Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 1999). Today, the responsibility for various aspects of both active and passive labour market policies is commonly scattered across different levels. Many countries have implemented multi-level governance arrangements to overcome institutional fragmentation. Network coordination, formal agreements, and national funding for local projects are just some of the means used to combine resources from national and sub-national levels (van Berkel, Graaf & Sirovátka, 2011). On the one hand, such arrangements are often considered necessary to avoid fragmentation. On the other hand, they are

notoriously complex to govern and may generate new problems such as rent-seeking behaviours and conflicts between actors. In a European context, the expansion of the European Union (EU), both in terms of member states and scope of action, must also be taken into consideration, as it further promotes the role of sub-national actors in the realm of labour market policies (Zimmermann, 2019).

Policies aimed at reducing employment target a specific territory, be it a city, region, state or even a continent. Territories differ in characteristics such as natural resources, infrastructure, and population. These types of characteristics tend to correlate with unemployment rates. Some territories attract private companies as well as skilled labour, while others experience economic decline as production is moved to other places (Rodríguez-Pose & Wilkie, 2018). These differences in characteristics and unemployment rates are likely to affect the conditions for delivering labour market programmes, and might even affect governments' interest in developing such policies to begin with. These aspects become more pressing with the involvement of sub-national governments, which calls for a sub-national analysis of the welfare state. On the one hand, increased decentralisation might lead to policies that are better suited to local conditions. On the other hand, sub-national differences might be amplified, as the public burden of financing programmes is lower in more prosperous territories.

Labour market policies are not only a matter of policymaking and governance. Unemployed people do not encounter policy documents, but public officials, either in person or at a distance. These officials and their supervisors are the ones who face the above-described multifaceted complexities inherent in labour market policies. It is often on these levels that collaboration and other multi-level governance structures aimed at overcoming fragmentation are implemented. The use of such means is often unavoidable, either legally or in practice. Much of contemporary labour market policies rely on the exchange of information and resources between organisations on different administrative levels. However, such exchange is often fraught with conflict. When collaborating, both individual and organisational actors occasionally find themselves in disagreement about issues related to regulations, the organisation of the collaboration, and how best to understand the task at hand. These conflicts sometimes result in situations where collaboration does not solve problems associated with fragmentation, but instead enhances them or creates additional problems. Critics of collaborative governance point to its use for highly sym-

bolic purposes, where collaboration is more about projecting a positive image than substantially improving public services.

A group of public officials that has increasingly been involved in labour market policies is social workers. With social problems increasingly being reframed into issues of unemployment, and in accordance with the notion of employability, social workers increasingly take on the role of either assessing clients' need for activation programmes or delivering such programmes. The increased attention to issues of unemployment within social work can also be viewed against the background of the above-mentioned rescaling of welfare state policies to sub-national level, as social services have become an arena for implementing local labour market policies. Employment is considered a human right and a source of independence. Services that increase the likelihood of receiving employment can thus be seen as empowering – a key value of social work. But critics of the “activation turn” argue that it erodes the welfare state, as the morality of financial assistance recipients is questioned and the access to services is significantly reduced. This erosion is argued to conflict with an emphasis on solidarity and human rights within social work (Raitakari, Juhila & Räsänen, 2019; Vandekinderen, Roose, Raeymaeckers & Hermans, 2019). This conflict is commonly traced to the emergence of neoliberalism from the 1980s and onwards (Kamali & Jönsson, 2018; Lorenz, 2001; Marthinsen, 2019; Garrett, 2019). There are important reasons to pay attention to this process, given its impact on current social and labour market policies. However, one can easily overlook the historical continuity of these issues. Questions of poverty and unemployment are perennial in both the practice and study of social work, as well as in the development of welfare states (Midré, 1990; Ulmestig, 2007). Modern social work emerged alongside, and in response to, the social and economic consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation around the turn of the last century (Rogowski, 2010). Lorenz (2016) shows that social work constantly oscillates around welfare state dilemmas caused by the tension between care and control. These are not problems that can be solved once and for all, but rather there is a “necessity to keep asking the question anew in changing circumstances” (Lorenz, 2016, p. 10). Hence, even while acknowledging more recent neoliberal constraints on social work, it is important to see the historical continuity of social work as well as to consider its future position in the welfare state.

The relation between social work and labour market policies also involves questions concerning professionalism and management. Several

scholars argue that the above-mentioned conflict between conditionality and the ethical foundation of social work plays out in the field of tension between organisational adaptation and professional autonomy. The possibility for social workers to overcome, or at least navigate, the tensions in this policy area seems to depend on their possessing substantial professional autonomy (Dall, 2020; Lorenz, 2016; Raeymaeckers & Dierckx, 2013; Andreassen & Natland, 2020; see also Freidson, 2001; Evetts, 2013; Zacka, 2017). Another aspect concerns the emerging specialisation that comes with the institutionalisation of activation, as a growing number of street-level bureaucrats work solely with these issues (van Berkel, Penning de Vries & van der Aa, 2021). This development can be seen in the light of a perennial discussion of social work as a generalist profession with regard to the need for specialisation through increased intra-professional division of labour. Some fear that too much of an increase in the division of labour prevents the adoption of a holistic approach to social problems. Others point to the necessity of developing specialised knowledge because of the complexity of contemporary societies (Raeymaeckers, 2016).

Sweden manifests the difficulties and dilemmas associated with the labour market policies that have been described here. The Swedish welfare state developed as an attempt to balance between offering relatively generous financial support and maintaining work incentives as manifested in the famous “work ethos” (Sw. *arbetslinjen*). After WWII the work ethos was manifested in the Social Democrats’ emphasis on the mutual responsibility of the welfare state and citizens, where the latter were expected to find employment with the assistance of the former. But ever since the financial crisis in the 1990s, both Social Democratic and non-socialist governments have emphasised the responsibility of individuals by reducing the ambition of labour market policies. This development can be viewed against the background of more fundamental changes regarding the macroeconomic debate after the 1970s oil crises (Bengtsson & Berglund, 2012; Erixon, 2010; Junestav, 2004; Calmfors, 2021). When it comes to governance, one perennial question within Swedish labour market policy is the division of responsibilities between the national and municipal level. During the 20th century, the responsibility for providing labour-market services gradually shifted from the municipal to the national level. But in the 1980s, the involvement of municipalities began to increase once again. Today, the municipalities are an established actor within the framework of Swedish labour market policies, alongside national agencies (Panican &

Ulmestig, 2017a). This development has not taken place without friction. There have been repeated attempts to coordinate the scattered responsibilities through multi-level governance arrangements (National Board of Health and Welfare 1990; Andersson, 2016; Directive 2014:157). Still, many observers point to continuing discomfort with current solutions for how to overcome institutional fragmentation within Swedish labour market policies (Panican & Ulmestig, 2017a). At present, in spring 2022, the national Public Employment Service is being transformed in the direction of increased reliance on private providers. Considering the many unintended consequences of relying on private providers (e.g., O’Sullivan, McGann & Considine, 2019), as well as persistent long-term unemployment and the uneven Swedish demographics, it is unlikely that the transformation of the Public Employment Service will solve the institutional fragmentation of Swedish labour market policies. Some municipalities fear that the transformation will continue the recent reduction of national labour market policies, thereby increasing the municipal burdens. Others argue that this is a positive development, as municipalities have greater possibilities to adapt policies to local conditions than the Public Employment Service (SKR, 2021a). Despite the outcome and its framing, there are good reasons to believe that the municipalities will remain central actors, and even expand their engagement, after the reformation of the Public Employment Service.

The reliance on municipalities in Swedish labour market policies has also affected social services and social workers. The expansion of municipal programmes has taken place alongside an increased division of labour, as in many municipalities social assistance assessment has been separated from other sectors of social services (Lundgren, Blom, Morén & Perlinski, 2009; Bergmark & Lundström, 2004). Social assistance and unemployment thus seem to be undergoing an intra-professional specialisation among social workers, which is at odds with the emphasis on generalist social work and holistic services. Furthermore, the increased use of conditionality raises ethical questions, as these practices are at odds with the ethical principles of social work.

Aim of the dissertation

The overarching aim of the dissertation is to contribute to the understanding of labour market policies and especially the involvement of sub-national governmental actors. Sweden is used as an empirical case, specifically regarding the role of municipalities in the context of national policies

and agencies. The dissertation also investigates the role of social work and social workers in labour market policies. Labour market policies will be approached through four theoretical perspectives: structure, content, space, and time. Three levels are covered empirically: (i) the inter-organisational level, (ii) the street level, (iii) the cross-municipal level. The dissertation also aims to situate the part played by municipalities and social workers in Swedish labour market policies within a historical perspective. Taken together, the findings from the empirical investigations, represented by three papers, are analysed together with the historical overview in chapter three.

The following research questions guide the dissertation:

1. How have changes in national labour market policies affected the involvement of municipalities in Sweden?
2. How is the multi-level governance of labour market policies embodied on municipal level?
3. How is the role of social work and social workers affected by their involvement in labour market measures?

Some conceptual clarifications are needed. Beginning with “labour market policies”, the dissertation follows the aforementioned division between passive and active labour market policies. The former designates cash support for people who are not self-sufficient through employment, savings, or private networks (for instance a spouse). I will use the term “financial support” instead of “passive labour market policy”, as it is shorter and more concrete. It also reduces the risk of conflating financial support with active labour market policies. Financial support is used for adults below retirement age in cases of unemployment because of sickness. This use excludes general cash benefits such as child allowance, and also student loans.

“Active labour market policy” is not as simple to define, because scholars as well as politicians and people working in public administration differ in how they use the concept. There is also a wide range of related concepts such as activation, welfare-to-work, and workfare. Another source of confusion is that one type of active labour market policies concerns reduction of financial support which blurs the distinction between passive and active. I will use the concept “active labour market policy” as a label for political interventions aimed at reducing unemployment. These

interventions can be delivered on the demand-side (for instance job subsidies) or supply-side (such as job search requirements or upskilling programmes).

Regarding the concepts “activation”, “welfare-to-work”, and “workfare”, I consider all of them to be subsets of “active labour market policies”. Further, I take the latter two to be subsets of “activation”. “Activation” will be used as a label for supply-oriented policies that target claimants or recipients of financial support with the aim of making them more active so that they stop applying for financial support. This use does not consider whether “activation” is intended to enhance people’s ability to find employment (for instance through counselling or upskilling) or making receipt of financial support less convenient (through job search requirements or workfare). I use “welfare-to-work” and “workfare” as synonyms referring to programmes where people must perform work, typically but not necessarily unskilled labour at a public facility, to receive financial support.

Disposition

The dissertation is structured as follows. The introduction is followed by a chapter that introduces the studied policy context and contains a description of the institutional setting, including the public organisations that are responsible for labour market policies.

The third chapter consists of a historical review which focuses on two processes: (i) the development of labour market policies in Sweden, and (ii) the creation and restructuring of Swedish municipalities.

Chapter four reviews research in the field of labour market policies, mainly focusing on European countries. The review concerns research on active labour market policies emerging from the intersection between social policy, political science, and social work. It also includes reviews of scholarly contributions within geography. Further, the review covers the relation between social work and labour market policies. The chapter concludes with a description of the research on the Swedish context.

The fifth chapter describes the theoretical framework of the dissertation, which comprises four pillars. The first pillar concerns theoretical concepts relating to the structure of policies. It introduces the concepts of governance, street-level bureaucracy, and the logic of professionalism. The second pillar examines the content of labour market policies by discussing explanations and responses to unemployment on three levels: policy, organisation, and profession. The third pillar discusses geographical perspec-

tives based on the concepts of territory, scale, and place. The fourth pillar examines temporal aspects of labour market policies drawing on literature on institutional change and stability.

Chapter six begins by discussing the meta-theoretical approach of the dissertation, including issues of social theory and the use of mixed methods. The chapter continues with a discussion of the research design, including an assessment of its research quality. The chapter ends with a discussion of research ethics.

The seventh chapter summarises the three papers included in the dissertation.

The eighth chapter analyses the three papers in relation to the historical review, the review of previous research and the theoretical framework. By doing so, the chapter enriches the analysis of the welfare state and labour market policies as well as the changing role of social work and social workers in the context of the growing municipality-level responsibility for implementing labour market measures.

The final chapter consists of a Swedish summary of the dissertation, including the three papers.

2. Policy context

This chapter introduces the policy context studied in the dissertation, to provide the reader with necessary background information. The first section describes formal institutions and actors. The second section describes the two central policy areas studied: public financial support and active labour market policies. A caveat is necessary. Due to the ongoing transformation of the Public Employment Service, its structure and role may change before the printing of the dissertation.

Public institutions and actors

Sweden has three political-administrative levels: national, regional, and municipal. General elections at all three levels are held every fourth year. The national elections determine the composition of parties in the unicameral parliament. The parliament has legislative power and appoints the prime minister who in turn appoints ministers of the government. The government governs the national agencies, such as the Public Employment Service through annual appropriations directives (Sw. regleringsbrev) and ordinances (Sw. förordningar).

Among national agencies serving to implement active labour market policies, the Public Employment Service is the most central actor. It has several responsibilities which can be summarised in the following targets: (i) to match job-seekers with employers, (ii) to assist people less likely to be employed, (iii) to assess eligibility for unemployment benefits, and (iv) to administrate subsidised employment (Public Employment Service, 2022).

As mentioned, the Public Employment Service is currently being reformed. The reform can be seen in the light of the parliamentary elections of 2018. The election had no clear winner, as became clear during the subsequent process of forming a government. After several attempts, the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party were able to form a government with support from the Liberal and Centre parties. The latter was successful in demanding a full marketisation of the individual support provided by the Public Employment Service (January Agreement, 2019). In June 2021, however, a government crisis resulted in a government consisting solely of the Social Democratic Party, which modified the reform. In the proposition concerning the reformed Public Employment Service (Ds 2021:27), published in September 2021, the government suggested that services will *mainly* (sw. huvudsakligen) be provided by external actors.

They no longer proposed full marketisation, but argued that the agency would retain much of its discretion in choosing providers (Ds 2021:27). At present, April 2022, the proposition has not been taken up in parliament.

Another part of the reformed Public Employment Service is a reduction in the number of local offices, which originates from the government budget process of 2019. At that time, parliament rejected the Social Democratic/Green budget in favour of a budget proposed by the Moderate and Christian Democratic parties, which reduced the funding of the Public Employment Service. The budget for 2020, which was formulated by the Social Democratic/Green government, retained the limited funding of the agency (Public Employment Service, 2021a). At the beginning of 2019, the agency had 242 local offices. In March 2019 it announced the closing of around 130 offices because of the reduced funding (Public Employment Service, 2019). The government ordered the agency to secure local representation through other means than local offices, such as by locating Public Employment Officers at the local offices of other national agencies or in municipal facilities. In a report published in October 2021, the agency lists their future “web” of local representation (Public Employment Office, 2021a). According to my calculations, there will be 112 local offices in 2023. The agency will also provide services at 106 additional locations through collaboration with other agencies. Again, uncertainty remains concerning the future structure of the agency.

Another national agency that is of relevance but is not studied empirically in the dissertation is the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. It administers social insurance, including sickness benefits. Its relevance, in relation to *active* labour market policies, lies in the fact that the approval level of social insurance schemes and active measures is affected by the political ambition to decrease recipients of sickness benefits through more restrictive time limits and assessments of work ability. If the agency becomes more restrictive, claimants who have been rejected often need to apply for social assistance, which in turn means that they can become subject to municipal active measures. They can also be targeted for active measures through the Public Employment Service (Ulmestig, 2020; Lindqvist & Lundälv, 2018; Jacobsson & Seing, 2013).

The regions are not discussed more extensively in the dissertation, which is motivated by the data and research questions. The regions are responsible for providing health services, which can be seen against the background of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency’s relevance in active labour market policies, as mentioned earlier. The political effort to reduce

the number of sick-listed people involves the participation of health organisations and the medical professions (Ståhl, Svensson, Petersson & Ekberg, 2009). Looking at labour market policies more broadly, the regions have become increasingly involved through the idea of regional development, which includes strategies to enhance economic growth. This involvement can be seen against the backdrop of the Swedish membership in the EU, as the union emphasises active involvement at the regional level (Stegmann McCallion, 2016).

The Swedish municipalities have a wide variety of tasks, not least regarding provision of welfare services. Key services in the domain of labour market policies are listed in table 1. From a comparative perspective, Swedish municipalities have extensive autonomy. For instance, a large share of income taxation is decided upon by the municipalities. They are also relatively free to choose how to organise political boards and public administration (Ladner, Keuffer & Baldersheim, 2016).

A recurring topic of political and scholarly discussion is the uneven conditions of municipalities. The municipalities differ in area, size of population and density (see figure one in paper III). Further, there are also differences in demographics, age dispersion, number of migrants, and education. It is perhaps not surprising that economic growth and employment rates correlate with these conditions. Taken together, these differences are reflected both in the need for welfare services and the ability to fund such services. There are political efforts to reduce these differences with the intention of ensuring equal access to welfare services. This is to be achieved through the tax equalisation system, which aims to balance and redistribute financial resources between municipalities with differing levels of tax revenue and needs (Vanhuysse, Nilsson, Arra, Requena & Agerström, 2021)

<i>Level</i>	<i>N. of units</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
Nation	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active labour market policies - Labour market establishment of immigrants (PES) - Social insurance schemes (SSIA)
Region	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional development - Health services (including rehabilitation)
Municipality	290	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social assistance - Active labour market policies* - Adult education - Receiving and introducing migrants - Swedish language education for migrants

Table 1. Political-administrative levels and central responsibilities in the realm of labour market policies (*=voluntary)

Policies

Public financial support

This section describes the central forms of public financial support in the realm of unemployment. Returning to the previous chapter, the term “financial support” refers to cash support in cases of unemployment and sickness for adults below retirement age. There is a range of support forms covering other areas, such as child allowances, housing allowances, and student loans, which have consequences for what I refer to as financial support. For instance, increased benefits levels in housing allowances can decrease the number of social assistance recipients. These other forms of support are excluded from the description, as they are less relevant to understanding the interaction between state and municipality regarding labour market policies than the systems described below.

The administration of publicly funded financial support is shared between national agencies and the unions, on the one hand, and the municipalities, on the other hand. The support administered by the former is based on the idea of insurance, as it is conditional upon recent and relatively stable employment in Sweden. The benefit level is set in accordance with the *income loss principle*, which means that previous earnings correlate with the amount of financial support received up to a certain level. Unemployment benefits are administered and co-funded by the unions, but the bulk of the funding comes from the national government in accordance with the Ghent model (Lindellee, 2021). The Social Insurance Agency administers financial support in case of sickness: sickness benefits (Sw. sjukpenning) for temporarily sick-listed employees and sickness compensa-

tion (Sw. sjukersättning) for permanently sick-listed people. These types of support are funded through the governmental budget. Again, unemployment benefits and sickness benefits are both conditional upon previous employment.

For people who lack previous employment (in Sweden) it is sometimes possible to receive financial support administered on national level. For instance, participants in programmes offered by the Public Employment Service sometimes receive activity support (Sw. aktivitetsstöd) which is calculated based on number of days of participation. A similar solution is used for labour market establishment of immigrants administered by the Public Employment Service. People without recent employment can also be eligible for sickness compensation, but only at base level. However, the base level is often too low to allow for self-sufficiency, which generates a need for social assistance.

From a legal perspective, there is a distinction between social insurance schemes and unemployment benefits in Sweden. From this perspective, unemployment benefits are not considered a form of social insurance. However, it is common to refer to both of these systems as forms of social insurance (e.g., SOU, 2015:21). I follow this praxis in the dissertation. Hence, “social insurance schemes” will refer to financial support administered by the Social Insurance Agency and to unemployment benefits (again, administered by the unions but funded by the state).

What happens when people have little or no experience of employment (in Sweden)? The financial support available in such cases is social assistance, administered by the municipalities. Social assistance is often referred to as the lowest level of the public safety net (Salonen, 1993). To receive social assistance, claimants must show that they cannot receive any other type of income such as wages, social insurance, or student loans. Social assistance is intended for short-term dependency. For this reason, benefits levels are generally lower for social assistance than for unemployment benefits or sickness benefits. Social assistance is means-tested, which means that other sources of income, such as wages, reduce the amount of social assistance received. Further, the means-testing of social assistance is done at the household rather than individual level, because it looks at the total income within the household. This means that domestic partners, married or not, are expected to provide for each other.

Applying for social assistance differs from applying for national social insurance schemes in terms of predictability, as the Social Services Act, which regulates social assistance, allows for differences both between and

within municipalities. Stranz (2007) found significant differences in generosity between municipalities and between individual social assistance officers in the same municipality. He argues that the assessment of social assistance is largely arbitrary. Since the end of the 2010s, an increasing number of municipalities have become reliant on automation of social assistance administration. In these cases, an algorithm sums up costs and incomes and also issues payments. This ongoing change may result in decreased differences – however, it is too early to make confident claims on this point (Svensson, 2020).

Active labour market policies

The municipalities are able, but not obliged, to deliver active labour market policies. Such policies can be made a condition for social assistance. The law states that programmes must be adapted to the needs of individuals, to increase their competence and chances of future self-sufficiency. Other than that, the municipalities have discretion to choose if and how to arrange such programmes. This means that the municipal programmes differ in terms of both reach and approach (Panican & Ulmestig, 2019; Jacobsson, Hollertz, & Garsten, 2017; Bergmark, Bäckman & Minas, 2017, Vikman & Westberg, 2017). The diversity makes it hard to accurately approximate of the size of, and spending on, municipal programmes. In 2020, municipal active labour market programmes had around 100,000 participants, 5,000 employees, and cost the municipalities around 5 billion Swedish krona (approximately 476,500,000 €) (SKR, 2021b).

On national level, active labour market policies are administered by the Public Employment Service. Because the provision of services is in the process of being reformed, it will be described as it was delivered until 2019. Services are provided through Public Employment Officers who function as gatekeepers that refer clients. The agency provides programmes delivered in-house as well as by both municipalities and private providers. As mentioned, the agency also administers subsidised employment. Employers, whether public or private, can hire long-term unemployed people and receive funding through the national government budget. The role of the Public Employment Service is to assess people's eligibility and check that prospective employers have fulfilled their obligations concerning taxes and debts.

Looking at comparative data for OECD (2022), the costs for active labour market policies on national level during 2019 amounted to 1.02% of GDP (as compared to the OECD mean spending, which is 0.63% of GDP).

So far, national and municipal labour market policies have been described separately, but there are also services that overlap. As mentioned, the Public Employment Service purchases services from municipalities. During 2020, approximately 29% of the participants in municipal programmes were referred by the Public Employment Service (SKR, 2021b). There are also government initiatives to enhance local collaboration, including financial coordination (Finsam), where the government funds local networks that gather one or several municipalities, the region, the Public Employment Service, and the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. Another national initiative to enhance local collaboration is The Delegation for the Employment of Young People and Newly Arrived Migrants (Dua) which operates through soft power by promoting collaboration between the municipalities and the Public Employment Service. Dua was introduced 2015 with an expected end date in 2018, but has been prolonged until 2023 (Directive 2014:157; Directive 2021:73).

3. The historical context

This chapter presents key historical events and processes that relate to the topic of the dissertation. As described by Salonen (1993), the role of municipalities within Swedish social policy must be considered in the light of national reforms concerning such areas as social insurance. The inclusiveness and benefits levels of national social insurance schemes affect municipal social assistance spending (with a more generous national system decreasing municipal costs). Similarly, Ulmestig (2007) shows that municipalities developed labour market policies as a reaction to national policies toward the end of the 20th century. Considering this systemic nature of both passive and active labour market policies, the historical review will focus on the mutual development of national and municipal policies. It covers two interconnected topics: first, the development of labour market policies in Sweden; and secondly, the creation and restructuring of municipalities. The review begins in the middle of the 19th century, focusing on the public discussion of mobility and the changing nature of poverty at the time, and ends with the reforms made by the non-socialist Alliance governments between 2006 and 2014.

A methodological challenge when describing developments on both national and sub-national level is that literature on the former is more accessible. A large body of text data describing the national developments is available, such as government committee reports and national statistics, which often can be accessed via the internet. In comparison, historical data concerning municipalities is less accessible. During the first half of the 20th century, there were around 2,498 municipalities in Sweden. After reforms in 1952 and 1971, the number of municipalities shrank to 1,037 and 278 respectively (Wångmar, 2003). There are studies that have examined smaller numbers of municipalities (e.g., Hollertz, 2010; Östberg, 1996; Johansson, 2001; Gustafsson, 1988), but to thoroughly cover local varieties in this dissertation would require too much space. Sub-national differences will therefore be treated more generally in the review.

A recurring theme during the described period is the concept of the work ethos, though with different meanings that require a brief introduction here. Before the 1930s, the work ethos is expressed in the fear of introducing work disincentives when offering poor people financial support. Overly generous poor relief or unemployment benefits would generate moral hazards, according to critics of welfare reforms. As the Social Democratic Party became the dominant governing party, from the 1930s until

the 1970s, they established a more extensive interpretation of the work ethos that combined the right to work with the right to financial support based on prior income. This interpretation is grounded in a reciprocal relation between the state and its citizens, where the former is responsible for providing both active labour market policies for enhancing employment and financial support. Citizens are expected to work, but can expect financial support above the level of poor relief. The Social Democratic party wanted to replace what they considered to be humiliating poor relief with rights-based insurance that reflects prior employment and earnings. Taken together, Social Democratic governments were not solely concerned with preventing work disincentives through restricting access to, or the levels of, financial support, but also emphasised the responsibilities of the welfare state. After the financial crisis in the 1990s, the non-socialist government of 1991–1994 and its Social Democratic successors brought about a reorientation toward work disincentives assumed to stem from overly generous financial support. This reorientation was not least manifested by the non-socialist governments of 2006–2014 (Junestav, 2004).

The second half of the 19th century (1847-1900)

Poor laws reforms

The 19th century is characterised by a conflict between the dominating patriarchal control of people at the bottom of society, and an emerging market-liberal idea of people's freedom of mobility and labour. These issues can be seen against the backdrop of changed social relations during the period. Partition reforms (Sw. skiftesreformer) that had begun in the 18th century, together with technical innovations within the farming sector, increased the number of non-landowning people in rural areas. Nilsson (2003) argues that the changing class structure caused a political debate over how to deal with the increasing number of people in poverty. This debate was grounded in a fear of social instability caused by the growing numbers of poor people in rural areas and, later, the growing proletariat that accompanied industrialisation.

The financial responsibility for non-landowning people became a pressing issue for both the national parliament and the parishes (Sw. socken), as this group often had to rely on temporary employment. The national parliament ordered the formation of a Poor Relief Committee in 1837 which resulted in the Poor Law of 1847, which was the first major reform

since the Begging Act of 1642. The committee preparing the legislation listed groups to be covered by the new law. A new group was people suffering from non-self-caused unemployment. On a discursive level, this was an innovation, as it acknowledged unemployment as a structural problem (Olofsson, 1996). But Edling (2002) emphasises that the new law was still dominated by an understanding of unemployment as stemming from personal moral defects.

A manifestation of the emerging liberalism was the acknowledgement of mobility in the Poor Law of 1847. Before the reform, access to poor relief was conditioned by residence. Poor relief recipients who moved outside their home parish were not guaranteed poor relief in their new parish. This order was contested during the first half of the 19th century, as it did not harmonise with the increased reliance on paid labour, which required the freedom to move to find provision, according to liberal politicians. With the new Poor Law came a more dynamic interpretation of residence. If someone had resided for more than three years in a parish, he or she was eligible to apply for poor relief there. The new order was contested, not least by representatives of the peasantry in the parliament, and took time to establish (Salmonsson & Spross, 2021). Still, it was an important step in rethinking the relation between space and people, as the bond between poor people and their parish of birth became weaker.

Another example of the increasing emphasis on mobility was the removal of domestic passports in 1872. Lövgren (2000) situates this change in the broader discussion concerning the mobility of poor people seeking employment. It is important to stress, however, that it was a crime for poor people not to have a job; they could be sentenced to forced labour, for instance in workhouses or on public construction sites such as canals and roads. Nilsson (2003) shows that the regulations, which consisted of several laws, continued to restrict poor people's freedoms after the removal of domestic passports, but gradually declined in impact.

In 1871 the parliament passed a more substantive revision of the poor law. A central aim was to make the law less favourable to work-capable persons, for instance by increasing the discretion of municipal poor relief officers to deny poor relief in cases where work-capable claimants did not make any substantial effort to become self-sufficient. In preparing the legislation, members of parliament expressed concern about the reform of 1847. They feared that the (semi) rights-based foundation would encourage indifference to labour among poor relief claimants. By making poor relief less generous, the parliament intended to encourage poor people to

take responsibility for their own lives (Broström, 2015). It also removed the possibility for applicants to appeal to the county administrative boards (Sw. länsstyrelserna) which had been introduced in the previous reform (Olofsson, 1996).

The types of poor relief differed widely between municipalities, both before and after the Poor Law reforms. These differences can in part be explained by geographical location and degree of urbanisation. Some municipalities arranged workshops or workhouses where poor relief recipients had to perform manual labour, while in rural municipalities, the workhouse could take the form of a farm. Many municipalities did not provide public institutions but relied on poor auctions (Sw. utackordering), where poor people were put to work in private homes where they received room and board (Hansson-Preusler, 1962). Hence, poor relief was often not a question of financial support but provision through payments in kind.

From parishes to civic municipalities

In 1843, the administration of parishes was reformed through national legislation. The parishes were now to be managed through parish boards. Even though the boards were often led by the local priest, the reform enabled broader social representation in the governance, as non-land-owning people became electable. With the Poor Law reform four years later, these boards were made responsible for the administration of poor relief in rural parishes (Jansson, 1987). A more definitive separation between the church and poor relief administration came with the municipality reform of 1862. The responsibilities of the parishes were divided between the church and the newly established civic municipalities. The responsibility for poor relief was transferred to the latter (Nilsson, 2002). Together, these reforms initiated a secularisation of poor relief by moving the responsibility from the religious to the political domain. Harald Gustafsson (1989) emphasises that the 1862 reform was part of a longer and gradual process of bureaucratisation of local government, which over time reduced the influence of religion on municipal responsibilities. This process proceeded more quickly in the cities due to their extensive regulations and large numbers of inhabitants, compared to rural municipalities where social cohesion was stronger.

The beginning of the 20th century (1900-1914)

The first employment services

Around the turn of the last century, unemployment became an increasingly debated topic in parliament as well as among intellectuals. These debates should be considered against the background of several issues. One was the ongoing process of urbanisation, which increased the number of people dependent on paid labour. Another issue was the high share of seasonal unemployment, as many workers were only able to find employment for shorter periods during the year. Thirdly, the emigration from Sweden to America created shortages of manpower. The question was how public institutions should react to the changing situation that accompanied these issues. This question was affected in turn by conflicts in both parliament and the labour market. The former concerned disagreements between rural and urban representatives, as well as between conservatives and liberals. In the labour market, the period was characterised by conflicts between employers and the growing unions (Edling, 2015).

With inspiration from Europe, a liberal member of parliament submitted two bills, in 1900 and 1901, proposing the formation of a national employment service. Both bills were rejected. Instead, several municipalities, as well as some counties, took the initiative to start employment services beginning in 1902. Delander, Thoursie and Wadensjö (1991) explain the national parliament's rejection of the bill as rooted in the parishes' historical responsibility for poor relief. They also argue that it was a desire to reduce social assistance rates that motivated the municipalities to develop their own employment services.

In 1906, the question of a national policy on unemployment agencies was again raised in parliament. The initiative for this debate came from municipalities that had started employment services. The parliament approved an annual grant for municipalities and counties to arrange local employment services. The legislation increased the national control over the employment services, as funding was conditioned upon compliance with a number of guiding principles. The services had to be provided for free to both employers and employees. They were also obliged to "provide the employer with the best workers and the job seeker with the position he or she was best suited for" (Edling, 2015, p. 101). The national legislation also demanded that the offices had to remain neutral in conflicts between employers and unions. The offices were to be led by a non-political manager and include representatives of both employers and employees on their

boards. These basic principles, free and conflict-neutral services aimed at maximising exchange for both employers and employees, would continue to guide the Swedish employment offices during the 20th century (Edling, 2015).

Emerging social insurances

Around the same times as the first employment services were emerging, there was also a growing debate over national reforms in social insurance. In the 1880s, liberal members of parliament argued for political interventions at the national level, which was at odds with the historic reliance on municipalities to provide for poor people, and voluntary associations among workers. Olofsson (1993) argues that this political initiative was motivated by both humanistic ideals and an interest in curbing the growth of socialism. Liberal politicians were able to establish the idea of national interventions despite opposition from conservative politicians, employers, and to some extent the unions. Bills concerning social insurance and other early welfare policies were sometimes resubmitted several times before being approved in the second chamber – and often were rejected by the more conservative first chamber. Johansson (2003) shows that the debate was also affected by an urban-rural divide, where the Farmers' Party argued against making overly extensive reforms, as they feared this would transfer financial resources from rural to urban areas. This argument was reflected in the reforms during the last two decades of the 19th century, as they were based on modest subsidies to voluntary and local associations that insured members in case of illness.

The issue of voluntarism continued to be important, not least within unemployment benefits, which remain voluntary today. Edebalk (1975) points to the difference between unemployment benefits and other types of insurance, such as pensions and sick-leave insurance. The former was politically more sensitive as it concerned conflicts between the social partners – what role would the state take in industrial conflict? The debate over unemployment benefits must also be seen in the light of the shifting economic conditions of different occupations. The introduction of unemployment benefits differed between the unions, which were divided by occupational affiliation. The union for unskilled labourers, which had the largest number of members but also represented workers with lower incomes and more insecure employment conditions, did not provide unemployment insurance until 1941 (Beckholmen & Vallstrand, 1981; Edebalk, 1975). Hence, a relatively large group of labourers were not covered by

unemployment benefits during the first decades of the 20th century and had to rely on workfare through the Unemployment Commission (described below), poor relief, or non-public support.

In comparison, the pension reform of 1913 covered all elderly people in Sweden. As such, it had the character of a right that people possessed independent of prior earnings or residence. Meanwhile, the reform also had elements of insurance, as the benefits level was based on prior earnings. Olofsson (1993) shows that the pension reform was ground-breaking as it shifted the cost from the municipal poor relief budget to the national budget, which decreased the uneven distribution cost for poor relief between municipalities.

World War I (1914-1918)

Nationalised responsibility for active labour market policies

1914 marked a change of responsibilities. In response to the outbreak of the First World War, the government launched the Unemployment Commission (Sw. Arbetslöshetskommisionen – abbreviated AK below) for national coordination of labour market policies. The AK began as an advisory board, but expanded to be a central actor during the following 36 years (Axelsson, Löfgren & Nilsson, 1987). Rothstein (1982) shows that during the war, much of its work concerned relocating unemployed people to regions with greater demand for labour. But the AK also distributed workfare and cash benefits, which were administered by local labour market committees subordinated to the AK (Eriksson, 2004). Meanwhile, the municipalities continued to open and run employment offices partly funded with national grants (Delander et al., 1991).

The AK distinguished between work-capable and non-work-capable people. The latter would be supported by the municipal poor relief (SOU 1936:32). The work capable would also receive financial support from the municipalities. In turn, the municipalities received funding from the national budget for work-capable people. Initially, the AK argued that financial support would be conditional on working. Gradually this suggestion was institutionalized, as will be further described below (cf. Axelsson et al., 1987). To avoid work disincentives, the AK had to rely on the employment services to assess support recipients' capability and conduct (Edling, 2015).

The poor law of 1918

In 1918, the parliament approved a new poor law. It is described as less restrictive than its predecessors (Rauhut, 2002; Broström, 2015). The law of 1871 explicitly disallowed poor law receipt caused by unemployment. From 1918, the law made a distinction between mandatory and voluntary groups. The municipalities were obliged to serve the mandatory groups but were given discretion on whether to serve the latter. The mandatory groups included claimants who were unable to work due to old age, sickness or physical or mental disabilities – given that the claimant did not receive support from family or an employer. The voluntary group included unemployed but work-capable people (Broström, 2015). Hence, the municipalities were now legally able, but not required, to provide work-capable people with poor relief.

The expansion of the poor law can be seen as an attempt to close the gap between poor relief and the active labour market policies delivered by the employment services and the AK. As shown by Broström (2015), the authors of the investigation that preceded the new law argued that the existing regulation had severe limitations. The prohibition of serving unemployed but work-capable people did not reduce unemployment. Instead, the investigators claimed, it decreased the authorities' ability to control and support unemployed persons. With the law of 1918, the municipalities were given increased authority to demand that work-capable poor relief claimants perform labour. The poor relief administration was also obliged to collaborate with the unemployment services. Further, the poor relief began to change character with the gradual abandoning of institutions for poor people in favour of direct cash support (i.e. financial support).

The Interwar period (1918-1939)

The survival of the Unemployment Commission

The original intention was to dismantle the AK after the end of the First World War – but the opposite occurred. Politicians had assumed that the more active labour market policies would not be necessary after the war, due to expected economic growth. But after a short period of growth the economy faltered, and from 1920 unemployment rates were around 25 per cent. In brief, the crisis was initiated by an international decline in economic activity. The economic consequences were exacerbated by changes in monetary policy, as Sweden reinstated the gold standard (Fre-

gert & Magnusson, 1994). Instead of cancelling the AK, the government and parliament decided to expand it. The AK was given control over who was eligible for workfare, which increased its scope of action in relation to the municipalities, as the latter now needed to get approval before hiring workers paid through national grants. Even though the AK's financial resources grew, poor relief recipients did not decline. One reason was the growing unemployment rates. Further, the AK gradually restricted its target group during the 1920s, first by excluding women and unmarried men. They later also excluded large groups of male workers that relied on seasonal work, for instance in the construction and timber industries. Hence, even though the number of AK workers grew, so did the number of people in need of poor relief (Broström, 2015). Rothstein (1982) shows that the AK also reconsidered the wages for workfare. Before 1921, the wages for workfare and ordinary work were equal. But with the steep increase in unemployment rates, and employers' complaints about workfare participants' disinterest in ordinary employment, the AK decided to reduce wages for workfare to a level just below the lowest wage for ordinary manual labour.

The Social Democrats comes into power

The 1920s were a turbulent period in Sweden, both economically and politically. Unemployment remained high until 1934, by which time there had been a political shift. Two years before, the Social Democratic Party formed a government. With the exception of a four-month period in 1936, and a coalition government during WWII, the Social Democrats remained in power until 1976. During this time, several reforms restructured the relationships between state, municipalities, employers, and people. In 1938, the government and the social partners made an agreement, known as the Saltsjöbaden Agreement, which stipulated that the state would not intervene in questions of wages and other issues within the labour market, but instead would leave these matters to employers and unions to handle. This discretion on the part of the social partners was paired with a political expectation that employers and unions would adapt wages to the economic situation (Rothstein, 1986).

The Social Democratic party was critical of the path followed by the AK after WWI, as it had kept wages for workfare down, which made some municipalities replace ordinary workers with workers paid for by the AK. The AK also undermined the position of the unions by demanding that unemployed people serve as strike-breakers (Rothstein, 1986). Unga

(1976) shows that several municipalities governed by the Social Democrats refused to collaborate with the AK toward the end of the 1920s, because of the above-mentioned points of criticism. Other Social Democratic municipalities used the national funding, channelled through the AK, in ways that deviated from the law, which led to political debates on the municipal level. Rothstein (1982) shows that the Social Democrats lacked parliamentary support to replace the AK during the 1930s. They did however introduce a second national actor, a bureau that acted on direct orders from the government. During the decade, the government gradually decreased the funding for the AK, making it a marginal actor. This gradual change enabled the (Social Democratic) municipalities that refused to collaborate with the AK to receive funding directly from the government through the new bureau.

In terms of financial support, an early Social Democratic reform was the 1934 restructuring of unemployment benefits. Until then, the unemployment benefits, which were administered by the unions, were characterised by low coverage among workers, short duration, and low replacement rates (Edebalk, 1996). Parliament approved the implementation of the so-called Ghent system, which meant that the unions remained responsible for administration while the costs were divided between the unions and the state. The state gradually came to shoulder the primary economic responsibility. Meanwhile the number of eligible workers increased as the coverage level was decreased (Boström, 2015).

With the introduction of the Ghent system, the government feared that the municipalities would lose interest in maintaining the unemployment services. Prior to this point, the government argued, the municipal incentives for unemployment offices were secured through the wish to reduce poor relief spending. Parliament voted for mandatory unemployment services to be administered by the municipalities. It also increased the annual grant (Delander et al., 1991).

World War II (1939-1945)

Replacing the AK and nationalising the employment services

It was with the outbreak of WWII that the Social Democrats were able to fully dismantle the AK through the introduction of the Labour Market Commission (Sw. Arbetsmarknadskommiten). The commission, that replaced the AK, enabled a more flexible labour market policy on a national level in comparison with its predecessor. The employment services were

fully nationalised, which meant that the municipalities were not expected to take part in active labour market policies (Rothstein, 1986).

The number of poor relief claimants increased during the war. But the increase differed widely between municipalities. The most severe increase took place in regions where the timber industry dominated the labour market. A combination of previous rationalisations and reduced demand due to the war led to increased poor relief in municipalities in these regions. The sub-national inequalities were not new. Broström (2015) shows that they had been increasingly noticed in governmental investigations during the 1930s. However, the growing differences during the war became an important argument for a more thorough centralisation of labour market policies.

The Record years (1945-1975)

Rehn-Meidner model and the The Labour Market Board

Remembering the economic downturn after WWI, many feared a similar development after 1945. In the Swedish case the opposite occurred. Swedish industries were intact and soon export rates grew steeply. Unemployment was not a problem – rather the opposite. People could easily find new jobs, not least in the industrial sector (Furåker, 1976). Rather than having to handle the expected crisis, the Social Democratic government initiated a series of reforms. The reforms were guided by the Rehn-Meidner model, developed by two economists at the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (Sw. Landsorganisationen). The ambition was to combine “full employment and fair wages with low inflation and high economic growth” (Erixon, 2008, p. 367). In brief, the model emphasised a stricter fiscal policy, in comparison with the dominant Keynesian doctrine. A central means to achieve the goals within the model was the use of active labour market policies including marginal use of subsidised employment (Erixon, 2010).

A distinctive feature of the Rehn-Meidner model was the national scale of its interventions. With central collective bargaining, wages were increasingly harmonised between more and less productive companies, as well as between blue- and white-collar jobs, and between men and women. The centralisation was intended to enhance structural reforms in the private sector. The idea was to make it harder for less productive companies to survive, which would transfer the labour force to more productive companies and/or sectors. As the productivity in the private sector was geograph-

ically dispersed, workers relocated to more productive regions. This relocation was stimulated by national funding, administered by the new Labour Market Agency (Sw. Arbetsmarknadsverket, abbreviated AMS), which supported individuals who moved to find employment.

The reforms stemming from the Rehn-Meidner model required more flexible active labour market policies. In 1948, the temporary Labour Market Commission had been replaced by the above-mentioned Labour Market Agency. The new agency was an umbrella construction that included the Labour Market Board (Sw. Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen), Local County Labour Boards (Sw. Länsarbetsnämnder) and the Employment Services (Sw. Arbetsförmedlingarna). On paper, the new agency was hierarchical, with the Labour Market Board allocating funds for the Local County Labour Boards. In practice, however, the latter were given relatively extensive autonomy to develop local programmes. Employment Services officers had relatively extensive discretion in assessing the needs of clients as well as deciding upon eligibility for training and other programmes. Officers were not required to have a college degree. Rather, the agency emphasised the need for officers to have practical experience of the labour market, and many were recruited from the unions. The agency provided in-house training for officers (Rothstein, 1986).

The Great municipal reform of 1952

While the governing of labour market policies and social insurance schemes gradually became a national affair during the 20th century, the Social Democratic governments came to rely on the municipalities for other welfare services. Ekström von Essen (2003) situates the growth of the municipal social sector within the Social Democratic embracement of social rights, with inspiration from the International Labour Organisation. The idea of social rights is that citizenship should not be limited to political and civil rights, but should also guarantee access to basic financial security and recognition as an equal member of society. Meanwhile, Andersson (2003) emphasises that social welfare was also seen as a vehicle to secure financial growth. During the 1950s, the twin goals of individual welfare and growth were considered compatible; the Social Democrats viewed both of these goals as important.

As described, the responsibilities of parishes were divided into religious versus civic administration in 1862. The territorial divisions were kept relatively intact despite repeated efforts by several governments to encourage voluntary municipal amalgamations. Soon the limitations of relying on

municipalities to administer welfare services, such as poor relief, basic education, child protection, and care of elders, became apparent. The problem, according to the Social Democratic Party, was that the municipalities were often too small in terms of population. In 1939, Social Democratic members of parliament called for a committee to investigate a possible municipal reform. By reducing the number of municipalities through municipal amalgamations, the Social Democrats wanted to secure sufficient population sizes to enable the expansion of welfare services. Proponents found support in the Social Care Committee (SOU 1942:56), which problematised the costs for social services for rural municipalities. The uneven demographics had been exacerbated through urbanisation since the reform in the 19th century. The committee argued that the increased municipal welfare responsibilities, including political boards and public administration, had become a heavy burden for the small municipalities (Wångmar, 2003). In 1943, the parliament assigned a committee to investigate the question of reducing the number of municipalities. The committee delivered their proposition (Proposition 1946:236) in 1946 and argued that the minimum population of a municipality ought to be 2,000.

The proposition was met by criticism among many, but not all, parliamentary representatives of the non-socialist parties. Although few disputed the need for municipal amalgamation, many argued for reducing the minimum population limit to 1,500 people. Hence, the political disagreement did not concern whether a reform was necessary, but rather how radical it should be. The criticism from non-socialist members of parliament, especially among representatives of the Farmers' Party, was partly a matter of the location of their constituencies. Representatives from areas expected to be affected were also the ones most critical of the reform. In the end, parliament approved the committee's proposition, thereby reducing the number of municipalities from 2,498 to 1,037 (Erlingsson, Ödalen & Wångmar, 2015; Wångmar, 2003).

From poor relief to social welfare

After WWII, the poor relief rates decreased steeply. Korpi (1975) reports a change from 16 per cent in 1945 to 1–2 per cent during the 1950s. Broström (2015) shows that the reduction had multiple explanations. One was national reforms that further redistributed income over the life cycle, such as universal child benefits and improved pensions. Another explanation is the improved labour market, not least due to increased opportunities for full-time labour, which both improved the possibilities for self-

sufficiency through labour and increased the number of people qualifying for unemployment benefits during periods of unemployment. Taken together, the reformed labour market policies, and the reduction of social assistance rates, made unemployment among social assistance recipients a relatively marginal issue.

In 1956, the poor law of 1918 was replaced with the law of social welfare. The distinction between mandatory and voluntary groups was kept intact. Claimants with self-caused unemployment were not eligible for social assistance for the first four weeks of unemployment. Also, those who had participated in strikes were not eligible. Hence, the unemployed had no absolute right to social assistance. Even though the distinction between mandatory and voluntary groups remained, other aspects of the law were changed. To increase mobility among social assistance claimants, the new law stipulated that an applicant's registered address would determine which municipality is responsible. This development can be seen as a response to the aforementioned lock-in-effect of previous poor laws, i.e. the limited possibility to receive poor relief when moving to a new municipality to seek employment (Broström, 2015). Another addition was the increased emphasis on preventive measures to facilitate future employment. The committee preparing the new law (SOU 1950:11) argued that the law from 1918 was too reactive. It is important to acknowledge the connection between enhanced mobility and the emphasis on preventive measures. The committee expressed concern that the unclear regulations in terms of division of responsibilities between municipalities due to mobility, did not create incentives for municipalities to prevent future recipients. The regulations would increase the pressure on municipalities to develop procedures to avoid passivity among recipients.

The contested municipal responsibility for social welfare

After WWII, the Social Democratic government expanded the national social insurance schemes as the party's influence increased. The decreasing proportion of social welfare recipients after WWII was in line with the labour movement's ambition to overthrow the humiliating logic of poor relief (cf. Ulmestig, 2007). Despite the expansionist national policies, parts of the population still depended on social welfare. It might seem natural to assume that the Social Democratic aversion to social welfare would lead to its nationalisation or even replacement – but such a change did not occur. Why? Junestav (2004) argues that one explanation is that the Social Democratic Party's approach to expanding national insurance was based on

the idea of the work ethos. By widening the coverage of such forms of insurance, not least unemployment benefits, the labour movement focused on continuing to reduce the reliance on social welfare in the population, rather than removing social welfare altogether. However, there were attempts to reform the social welfare system, which we will now look at.

Returning to the social welfare reform of 1956, the question of nationalising social welfare was discussed by the committee preparing the law. They argued that such a nationalisation would be desirable, but was impractical to implement. Instead, they argued for national grants to municipalities with the aim of overcoming the unequal social-welfare burden in different municipalities. The suggestion was heavily criticised, not least by several municipalities that argued it would limit their discretion. The Minister of Finance rejected the proposal because the idea of national responsibility for social welfare diverged from the historical reliance on local communities to support individuals in times of hardship. He also pointed to the many critical responses to the committee's proposal from municipalities and other public actors. In the end, the municipal responsibility was kept intact (SOU 1942:56; SOU 1950:11; Prop 1955:177).

A reform that did pass was the labour market cash support plan (Sw. Kontant arbetsmarknadsstöd, abbreviated KAS), which was constructed for unemployed people who did not qualify for the regular unemployment benefits; that is, the requirements of regular benefits, paid membership and previous employment did not have to be fulfilled to receive KAS. The level of support was lower, however, than with ordinary unemployment benefits. The explicit target group was young people in unemployment (SOU 1971:42). This group tended to be reliant on social welfare, as they lacked previous employment. The design of KAS combined national funding and a fixed benefits level. It thereby acknowledged a limitation with the reliance on social insurance stemming from the Social Democratic work ethos. If people could not find employment to begin with, they would not qualify for unemployment benefits or other forms of social insurance, and would thus remain reliant on social welfare.

The question of social welfare and the scale of political responsibility for it was also discussed in the late 1970s. A committee responsible for investigating social welfare argued for a social insurance supplement (Sw. socialförsäkringsstillägg – abbreviated SOFT). The proposal was that SOFT would be financed nationally and administered by the national Public Insurance Agency. It would offer a basic level of economic security that did not depend on prior earnings. Among other groups, SOFT would cov-

er the unemployed (SOU 1977:40). If implemented, SOFT would not fully replace the need for social welfare. Still, it did shift a substantial amount of costs from the municipalities to the state.

SOFT was part of a larger reform that eventually would result in the Social Services Act in 1982. Johansson (2001) situates the Social Services Act reform in the growing critique of the social services. The critics, among others municipal managers within social services as well as unions, argued that the administration of social welfare was still characterised by the poor relief logic of the previous century. The Social Democratic Party was positive to the reform, including SOFT. But when it was treated in the parliament in 1979, the Social Democratic Party had recently lost its long-standing hold on government power. The new non-socialist government was largely positive to the committee's suggestions to reform social services. But SOFT was resubmitted for further investigation, and later ignored. In the end, the SOFT reform, which could have been influential in overcoming the divide between national insurance and social welfare, was not enacted. There are reasons, however, to remember the abbreviation SOFT, as it would receive another meaning, as we will see when looking at the Social Services Act of 1982.

The municipal block reform 1963-1974

Only seven years after the municipal reform of 1952, the Social Democratic government took the initiative to further reduce the number of municipalities. Wångmar (2013) shows that the motivation for further municipal amalgamations was the increase in municipal responsibilities – not least in consideration of the social welfare reform of 1956. Further, the continuing urbanisation meant that a growing number of municipalities deviated from the minimum-population goal of the 1952 reform. Around 10 per cent of the municipalities had less than 2,000 inhabitants in 1959 (Erlingsson et al., 2015). This time, the government encouraged voluntary amalgamations. A committee, initiated in 1959 to investigate the question, presented its report in 1961 (SOU 1961:9), and the following year the parliament's two chambers passed a plan to work towards more municipal amalgamations. As with the previous reform, non-socialist members of parliament were critical of municipal amalgamations, arguing that they threaten local democracy. They suggested alternative solutions, such as transferring municipal responsibilities to the counties or to the national level. However, the socialist parties, together with the Liberal party, approved the reform. There was a gradual reduction of municipalities during

the period from 1963 to 1975. The initial ambition of encouraging voluntary amalgamations was not preserved intact. The parliament decided upon coerced amalgamation in 1971 and 1974, and the number of municipalities decreased from 1,006 in 1963 to 278 in 1974 (Wångmar, 2003, 2013).

Between the oil crises and the 1990s crisis (1975-1991)

The labour market after the record years

1975 is commonly considered to be the end of the Record Years in Sweden. However, the number of people employed within the industrial sector had been slowly decreasing since 1965. This gradual decrease did not affect the unemployment rates to any greater extent. However, the number of social welfare recipients began to grow (Broström, 2015). In a global perspective, the 1970s are characterised by the first oil crisis in 1973, which resulted in sharply increased unemployment. Sweden deviated from this pattern somewhat, as the increase in unemployment was modest. A common explanation of this deviation is a combination of repeated devaluations between 1977 and 1982 and active labour market policies, along with expansion of the public sector. Meanwhile, large parts of the industrial sector deteriorated because of rising oil prices and the global recession – but also due to increased international competition, as Sweden's comparatively high wages were a disadvantage. The question of wages was increasingly debated during the 1980s, as the Social Democratic government questioned the social partners' ability to adapt wages to the lagging economy. The emphasis on central collective bargaining in the Rehn-Meidner model was downplayed in favour of more differentiated wage levels (Ohlsson & Olofsson, 1998; Erixon, 2010).

The relatively fast recovery during the 1980s, in terms of unemployment rates, did however deviate in terms of social welfare spending. During the 20th century, unemployment and social welfare rates were negatively correlated – as employment rates increased, social welfare spending decreased. During the 1980s, social welfare spending increased faster than the unemployment rates. Broström (2015) suggests two explanations of this. The first is an increase of hidden market supply, not least consisting of part-time employees who wanted full-time jobs but could not find them and therefore had to rely on social assistance to supplement their earnings. The second explanation is a combination of decreased labour market participation among inhabitants born outside of Sweden and changes in the

Swedish migration policy. During the initial Record Years, labour migration was needed to meet the expanding demand from industry. In the 1980s, Swedish migration policy increasingly focused on asylum seekers, which resulted in increased financial responsibility of the municipalities. Migrant workers were only entitled to social welfare during shorter periods, and could be forced to leave the country if they were not self-sufficient. This was not the case for asylum-seeking migrants. The decreasing integration of migrants into the labour market meant that many asylum-seeking migrants were unable to find employment. Because they lacked employment in Sweden, they did not qualify for unemployment benefits and had to rely on social welfare.

The Social Services Act of 1982

In 1982, the law of social welfare was replaced by the Social Services Act. It came from the same committee (SOU 1977:40) that suggested SOFT. The new law replaced several older laws in areas such as child welfare and addiction care. The idea behind the merge was to overcome institutional fragmentation in different parts of the municipal social services. The key phrase was a “holistic perspective” (Sw. *helhetssyn*), as the social services would avoid the compartmentalisation of clients caused by the previous laws. Clients would be served by one case worker rather than two or three, as was sometimes the case for families with multiple problems (Proposition 1979/80:1).

Looking at social assistance (the new label for social welfare), the new law removed the division between compulsory and voluntary groups. The municipalities now became responsible for all people, citizens or not, residing in their territory. It also included unemployed persons with insufficient or no unemployment benefits (Boström, 2015). Because the SOFT reform had been neglected by the government, the new law maintained the sharing of responsibilities between state and municipality concerning financial support to unemployed persons (even though KAS had increased the national share of the cost). The consequences of this continuation, or even enhancement, of the dualisation would become highly visible as the labour market changed in the 1990s.

Although SOFT was not implemented, some municipalities adopted ideas from the committee report. In addition to shifting costs from the municipalities to the state (which again was rejected), SOFT was intended to simplify the application process for social assistance by having administrative staff (i.e. non-social workers) handle the administrative procedures.

The committee argued that such a simplification would decrease the stigma associated with receiving social assistance. It was also a means to enable a holistic perspective within social services, as economic questions would not receive as much attention during meetings with social workers (Stranz, 2007; SOU 1977:40). As an experiment, three municipalities implemented the simplified application procedures in accordance with SOFT during the period 1978 to 1980 (Bergmark, 1987), and the approach was subsequently adopted by several municipalities during the 1980s and 1990s (Bergmark & Lundström, 1998, 2004). While the introduction of SOFT assessment simplified matters for both municipalities and clients, it also generated pressure for more active measures, as will be discussed later.

Decentralisation to/within municipalities

All three municipal reforms, from 1862 and onwards, were characterised by conflicts concerning the balance between local democracy and equal access to welfare services (Wångmar, 2013). After the municipal block reform, criticism of the expanding municipalities increased from both left and right (Lindholm, 1983; Strandberg, 1998). This led to political efforts, by both non-socialist and Social Democratic governments, to overcome the (assumed) rigidity caused by the top-down relationship between national institutions and the municipalities. For the non-socialist governments between 1978 and 1982, the reforms agreed with their earlier resistance towards centralisation. For the Social Democratic governments after 1982, the renewed interest in decentralisation deviated from the party's previous approach. Strömberg and Lindgren (1994) offer a public-choice interpretation by explaining the change of direction in terms of growing voter dissatisfaction with the impersonal welfare bureaucracy. But there are also reasons to consider critical voices within the labour movement, such as Lindholm (1983) who argued for a renewal of local democracy.

In 1977, the non-socialist government appointed a committee to investigate ways to strengthen municipal democracy. Since 1970, municipalities were able to create specialised local social-service boards (Sw. socialnämnd). With a new law in 1979, the municipalities were given increased autonomy to create sub-municipal boards (Sw. kommun/stadsdelsnämnder) by dividing municipalities into geographically based political-administrative units (Montin, 1989). The new law enabled municipalities to include social services as one area of competence of the

sub-municipal boards. The government mentioned social development as an area of interest for the new local boards (Proposition, 1979/80:54). Even though the reform had little direct effect on labour market policies, it shows an ambition to enhance bottom-up innovation of services within municipalities. As such it exemplifies a more fundamental ambition to enhance the municipalities' discretion and promote local democracy by removing national regulations of municipal administration. As we will now see, the Social Democratic government strengthened this process after replacing the non-socialist government in 1982.

The reform that most clearly connected labour market policies with the growing emphasis on local autonomy was the autonomous municipality experiment (Sw. Frikommunförsöket) initiated by the Social Democratic government in 1984. The overarching aim was to enable a more flexible public sector, governed locally and bottom-up through increased municipal autonomy. The reform was iterative and took different expressions in the around 40 municipalities and counties that participated in the experiment (Strömberg & Lindgren, 1994; Proposition 1991/12:13). The experiment played a significant role in shaping the new Municipality Law, passed in 1991, which increased the autonomy of the municipalities (Gustafsson, 1996). It also affected active labour market policies, as we will see in the next section.

A third manifestation of the increased emphasis on decentralisation during the 1980s is the organisation called Rural Sweden (Sw. Hela Sverige ska leva, which translates into "The whole of Sweden shall live") which was founded in 1989 as a collaboration between civil society organisations. Herlitz (2000) situates the organisation in the growing criticism of centralisation which had increased under the Rehn-Meidner plan during the Record Years. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the political ambition to relocate workers was heavily criticized, not least by people living in northern Sweden. This criticism was famously summarized in the claim that the abbreviation AMS was an acronym for All Must [move] South (Sw. Alla måste söderut). It spurred a political interest in regional planning among both Social Democratic governments, during the 1960s and the 1970s, and non-socialist governments, during 1976–1982. Rural Sweden focused on even smaller territories by promoting the potential role of sub-municipal village councils (sw. byalag). Since the 1990s, the organisation has arranged workplace trainings in collaboration with the Public Employment Service. But the organisation has also played a more indirect role

by establishing “The Whole of Sweden Shall Live” as a slogan that is hard for any political party to ignore (Hela Sverige ska leva, 2014).

Before proceeding to local labour market policies, one should add that additional reforms increased the municipalities’ responsibility for welfare services during the early 1990s. One such reform, which had a future impact on labour market policies, was the 1992 municipalisation of responsibility for people with psychological disabilities. The slogan in this sector became *normalisation*, which included access to employment. Even though national agencies had the main responsibility for integrating peoples with psychological disabilities into the labour market, the municipalities were expected to take more responsibility in these matters as well (Proposition, 1993/94:218).

Increasing interests in activating social assistance recipients

The developments within the area of social assistance during the 1980s illustrate the difficulty of describing the process on sub-national level. As we have seen, some municipalities adopted SOFT assessment, which means that they reduced their efforts to monitor recipients. But the last years of the 1980s are also characterised by increasing efforts to prevent passivity among social assistance recipients. Much of these efforts were centred around collaborations with the Labour Market Agency. Because many of these projects were small-scale bottom-up initiatives, it is hard to know exactly how many municipalities introduced them and how many people took part. Judging from official reports, it is best characterised as a marginal phenomenon during the period. On the other hand, many of these projects were touted as “success stories” regarding municipalities’ attempts to decrease the number of social assistance recipients, for instance by the National Board of Health and Welfare in the early 1990s (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1990; Isaksson, Stål & Svedberg, 1993).

An early example of municipal inclusion occurred as part of a government initiative to address growing youth unemployment. Until the mid-1970s, unemployed youth were not considered a special target group of active labour market policies. They received the same type of services as other unemployed persons. But toward the end of the decade, youth unemployment was increasingly acknowledged as a special type of unemployment problem. The government framed the issue as a matter of education, arguing that unemployed youth 16–17 years of age would be referred to high school studies rather than subsidised employment or labour mar-

ket education. This ambition meant that the responsibility for this age group was shifted from the employment services to the municipalities (Proposition 1979/80:145). In 1984 the responsibilities of municipalities increased as they were also made responsible for arranging workplaces for unemployed people between 18 and 20 years of age, in cases where the employment services were not able to find suitable programmes (Proposition 1983/84:46).

Another early source of municipal programmes was the above-mentioned autonomous municipality experiment. Its impact on local active labour market policies is well documented in two scholarly reports written for the Ministry of Labour (Ds 1988:67; Ds 1989:21). The municipalities were able to form a local labour market board together with representatives of the Local County Labour Board. The outcomes were mixed, judging from the reports. There were examples of projects with beneficial street-level collaboration between the municipality and the local employment services, according to the authors of the reports. But the ambition to involve the municipalities also led to conflicts between (on the one hand) the Ministry of Labour and (on the other hand) the municipalities and the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The former argued that it was necessary to maintain the national scale of intervention, while the other actors called for a more decentralised approach to active labour market policies. The Social Democratic government supported the former by limiting the scope of action for municipalities initially. But, as we will return to, the idea of involving municipalities would become more influential during the 1990s.

The conflict that occurred within the autonomous municipality experiment illustrates the political tensions around the weakening boundaries between labour market policies and social services at the time (cf. Ulmestig, 2007). Looking at government reports from the period, we can differentiate between two approaches to social assistance. The first is that social assistance spending depends on the rate of unemployment, which in turn depends on the outcomes of (national) active labour market policies. The second is that the municipalities should activate clients to take part in the active labour market policies to reduce unemployment rates. The first approach had dominated much of the debate during the Record Years, and continued to hold a strong position at the time. For instance, a 1988 publication by the Ministry of Labour (Ds 1988:16) barely discusses social services at all. But the increasing social assistance spending created political pressure that resulted in several investigations to curb the development

(Ds S 1987:2; Ds 1988:14). These investigations seem to have sparked governmental interest in the activation approach to social assistance, as is manifested in the publications by the National Board of Health and Welfare mentioned previously (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1990; Isaksson et al., 1993). At the same time, as we shall discuss below, the question of the role of the municipalities was by no means settled.

So far, we have looked at government actions on national level that spurred municipalities to activate social assistance recipients. But some municipalities took the initiative themselves to activate social assistance recipients. An influential example is the Uppsala model (named after the fourth largest Swedish municipality, where the method was developed) where caseworkers intensified the monitoring of recipients by increasing the number of meetings as well as increasing job-search requirements. The model was spread widely by one of its founding caseworkers (Rönnlund, 1992). A second example is the Hallstahammar model (named after the rural municipality where the method was developed) which required social assistance recipients to work part-time for the municipality to receive social assistance (Karlsson, 1994). Again, these were exceptions, when looking at the bigger picture in the 1980s. But in the 1990s, these models would come to play an important role in influencing other municipalities to develop and expand active labour market policies (Bergmark & Lundström, 1998, 2004; Karlsson, 1994).

Between the 1990s crisis and the Alliance reforms (1991-2014)

The crisis and reoriented active labour market policies

The 1990s began with turbulence. In 1985, the Swedish Central Bank removed interest rate regulation as well as the loan cap, which spurred spending, financed through low-interest loans taken by both private households and companies. Much of the spending was channelled through the commercial construction sector. In 1990, parliament approved a tax reform that reduced interest subsidies, which in turn decreased the incentives for private spending. And in 1991, the Swedish Central Bank responded to increasing international interest rates by raising the Swedish interest rates. Households, as well as banks and companies, suffered huge losses and the construction sector ran out of new investments (Jonung, 2003).

The crisis resulted in increased unemployment, from two to eight per cent, between 1990 and 1993, which was met with massive active labour

market policies. Around five per cent of the labour force participated in a programme, and the national spending on active programmes was 1.79 per cent of GDP in 1995 (Calmfors, Forslund & Hemström, 2001). However, because the unemployment rates were high, the spending per person decreased during this period. Several scholars point to the non-socialist government's (1991–1994) decision during the crisis to reorient the active programmes toward decreased spending per person and focus instead on supply-oriented measures (Ulmestig, 2007; Anxo and Niklasson, 2006; Olofsson & Wadensjö, 2009). This direction affected the measures taken during the crisis, but also continued to guide Swedish policies later. To contextualise this process, we will begin by looking at changes in economic policy before and after the crisis.

During the 1980s, influential economists in academia as well as the labour movement criticised the reliance on devaluations by both non-socialist and Social Democratic governments. They argued that devaluations only resulted in short-term improvements in the industrial sector. With inspiration from monetary scholars, they argued for the need to downplay the goal of full employment in favour of tighter macroeconomic control aimed at maintaining low inflation. The approach, labelled “norm politics”, rested on the assumption that the labour market would gain from more long-term stability, as social partners could not expect the government to make sudden monetary adjustments in cases of decreasing international demand for Swedish goods (Calmfors, 2021).

The proponents of norm politics also argued for changes within fiscal policy. During the 1970s and 1980s, the budgets of both Social Democratic and non-socialist governments were characterised by substantial deficits, among other reasons in order to provide extensive aid to industries during crises. Jonung (2003) argues that these deficits were natural, given that full employment was the dominant priority at the time. But within the Social Democratic government during the 1980s, economists at the ministry of finance became influential in redirecting the party towards a stricter fiscal policy. Andersson (2003) describes this process as a reorientation of the dual emphasis on individual welfare and the productivity of the welfare state, as social expenditures were increasingly reframed as costs rather than investments.

The idea of norm politics, with its combination of strict monetary and fiscal policy, led to major conflicts within the labour movement. Especially the prioritisation of combating high inflation over full employment was at odds with the with the Social Democratic goals during the Record Years.

But after a governmental crisis in 1990, the Social Democratic government, with a new minister of finance, acknowledged the priority of controlling inflation ahead of achieving full employment. The following year the non-socialist parties won the elections and formed a government. As these parties had already embraced the idea of norm politics, they continued the course set by the preceding government (Calmfors, 2021). Both governments framed the course change as an adaptation to the EU's fiscal policy requirements for member states (Erixon, 2010). The non-socialist government, through the Lindbeck commission (SOU 1993:16), initiated several reforms to restrict government spending, such as a fiscal policy framework (Sw. finanspolitiskt ramverk). In 1999, the Social Democratic government gave the Swedish Central Bank discretion over monetary policy with the goal of maintaining price stability (Jonung, 2003)

Returning to active labour market policies, the changed monetary policy curbed inflation but at the price of increased unemployment. With the monetary policy window closed, the non-socialist government chose to fight rising unemployment rates by enhancing economic productivity. The self-imposed restriction on fiscal policy limited the prospects for more encompassing reforms. From this perspective, the government's decreased spending on, and reorientation of, active labour market policies make sense. They argued that the Swedish labour market needed to be more flexible. Active labour market policies should create incentives for people to work rather than relying on financial support. Junestav (2004) shows the renewed interest in the work ethos during the period, as exemplified by the introduction of membership fees in the employment benefits system, a qualifying day (Sw. karensdag) in the sick-leave insurance and decreased financial generosity in the social insurance schemes. These examples were all part of a reorientation of the work ethos toward a more one-sided focus on creating incentives to work – as well as creating disincentives to receiving financial support. Junestav emphasises that the Social Democratic government, in power after 1994, accepted this change of direction. And as we will soon see, they were also active in enhancing the work ethos in the realm of social assistance.

Many of the taken-for-granted assumptions about social relations and labour markets were reassessed by politicians, people working in public administration, and the general public during and after the financial crisis. Here, the ideological framing matters. While some referred to the need for, and benefits of, individual adaptation to the demands of global competition, others pointed to the increasing inequalities and hollowing-out of the

welfare state that came with the reoriented work ethos (cf. Lindvert, 2006). Alongside the cutbacks in social insurance, the introduction of staffing agencies (Sw. bemanningsföretag) is an illustrative example of the deregulations. Between 1935 and 1992 employment services were more or less monopolised by the state. After a minor reform by the preceding Social Democratic government that made the monopoly less restrictive, the non-socialist government removed all regulations in this area (with minor exceptions because of international agreements). The deregulations came into place in 1993, despite criticism from both socialist parties and the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (Bergström, Håkansson, Isidorsson & Walter, 2007). Returning to the ideological framing, one can consider the reform a success, as it made the Swedish labour market more flexible and thus more competitive. On the other hand, one can also point to the increasing insecurity for the people employed by staffing agencies.

The crisis and the political response were followed by a steep increase in social assistance rates, which did not decline until 1996. As during the 1980s, much of the increase took place among three groups: young people, people born outside of Sweden, and single parents (Halleröd, 2003). This pattern is consistent with Ulmestig's (2007) description of the uneven impact of the crisis on union-members in full-time employment and people in part-time work who did not qualify for unemployment benefits. Even though the crisis also affected many established workers, the impact was greater for people with poor labour market attachment – especially when looking at the long-term outcomes (see also Angelin, 2009). According to Salonen (1997), the increased social assistance rates must be seen in the light of the austerity measures within national social insurance. He argues that the national governments were essentially passing the buck to the municipalities.

The European Union

In 1995, Sweden joined the EU. As we have seen, Swedish governments of the early 1990s made explicit reference to the EU in introducing fiscal restrictions. From this perspective, joining the union was a continuation of the path chosen by these governments. Here, institutional adaptation, such as the single market and the Maastricht treaty, decreased future Swedish governments' freedom to undertake more comprehensive interventions (cf. Ryner & Cafruny, 2017).

In the area of active labour market policies, Weishaupt (2011) shows that Sweden came to influence the European Employment Strategy that

came into place in 1997. The strategy echoed much of the post-crisis measures taken by the Swedish governments, as it emphasised supply-oriented measures such as training and activation, but also enhancing entrepreneurship. The strategy was a soft-power measure that had limited impact on Swedish policies. But over time, redistributive institutions within the EU bureaucracy, not least the European Social Fund (ESF), would play an important role in funding activities delivered by both national and municipal agencies. These activities are characterised by supply-orientation in accordance with the European Employment Strategy and, later, the Lisbon treaty.

The ambivalent critique of municipal activation

The interest in municipal active labour market policies increased during and after the financial crisis. Ulmestig (2007) traces this interest to a growing dissatisfaction with the national employment services. Many municipalities argued that social assistance recipients received insufficient support from the national agency. This dissatisfaction was reflected in the findings of a committee that investigated a reform of the Social Services Act (SOU 1994:139). The committee acknowledged social assistance recipients' limited access to national support and reported that the municipalities reacted differently to this situation. Some maintained that it was a question for the employment services to handle and demanded that the national agency should enhance its efforts to support social assistance recipients. Other municipalities chose to enhance collaboration with the agency, for instance by placing staff at employment services offices or developing collaborative projects. But there were also municipalities that ran their own active labour market policies without the involvement of national agencies. Hence, the committee observed an ambition among some municipalities to strengthen their influence in the realm of active labour market policies. The committee makes explicit reference to the earlier mentioned Hallstahammar model, which illustrates how ideas had travelled between municipalities at this time (see also Karlsson, 1994).

The committee reported that some municipalities requested a clause that would explicitly allow municipalities to make social assistance conditional upon participation in activation programmes. On the one hand, the committee agreed that social assistance should not be demand-free, and that it was reasonable for work-capable clients to be required to look for employment and participate in active labour market policies offered through the Labour Market Agency. On the other hand, they rejected the

idea of general demands, i.e. demands that are not adapted to the abilities and needs of individual clients. The committee stressed that activation programmes must appear reasonable to the participants.

The committee illustrates the ambivalence that came with the weakening boundaries between labour market policies and social services during this period. It was also present in a research report from 1998, where the authors pointed to increasing municipal criticism of the less restrictive application processes that emerged from the experiment with the SOFT reform. The critics argued that less restrictive control caused passivity among social assistance recipients. The authors point to municipalities that developed more active measures with the specific intention of avoiding passivity (Mosesson & Jönsson, 1998). This discussion illustrates a tension. The SOFT-inspired application process was intended to reduce costs by letting other staff than social workers handle the administrative routines. This argument, however, rested on the assumption that the number of applicants would remain constant. As mentioned, critics argued that this was not the case, as the less restrictive control removed some of the disincentives to receiving social assistance.

Johansson (2001) shows that the debate was also framed as a conflict between the idea of rights-based financial support and preventing misuse of social assistance. The members of the 1994 committee disapproved of the municipal practice of placing conditions on social assistance. On the other hand, they were eager to emphasise the work ethos to avoid situations of moral hazard.

The response of the Social Democratic government reflected many of the described ambiguities. They shared the ambition to enhance the work ethos in social assistance, as well as to increase the autonomy of the municipalities:

The municipalities ought to have greater autonomy to adapt the social assistance system to local conditions as well as to make demands that strengthen the work ethos, such as job search requirements or demands for active studies. Hence, the municipalities ought, to a greater extent, to assist social assistance claimants in becoming self-sufficient. (Translation of Proposition 1995/96:25, p. 57)

But while they acknowledged the potential benefits of municipal active labour market policies, they also expressed concerns:

While decentralisation can increase coordination and improve efficiency, such a development is not without possible objections. The possibility of

being offered active labour market policy interventions, as well as the quality of these interventions, must not be dependent on one's place of residence. (Translation of Proposition 1995/96:25, p. 69)

We will return to the governmental preference for collaboration in the next section. Looking at the quotations, we find that they echoed the conflicts that arose during the autonomous municipality experiment, i.e. between the need to rely on national labour market policies, with equal access to services, and the potential to reduce social assistance spending through municipal interventions.

In 1998 the government made an amendment to the Social Services Act (Proposition 1996/97:124) which enabled municipalities to require clients under the age of 25 to participate in “upskilling programmes” (Sw. kompetenshövande program). However, Johansson (2001) and Ulmestig (2007) show that the clause legitimised an existing practice, as several municipalities activated recipients both under and above the age of 25. The government proposition was ambiguous. Rather than focusing on demands placed by the municipality on the recipient, the government emphasised that municipalities were required to *offer* active measures to recipients 25 years and below. From this perspective, the government shifted the focus from demands on the recipient to demands on the municipality. Another source of ambiguity is that, while the clause restricted the age limit to 25, the proposition seems to include a loophole allowing municipalities to make social assistance conditional on programme participation for claimants above 25:

Participation in such programmes must be part of a strategy that aims to improve the individual's chances to enter the ordinary labour market... It mainly concerns youth that have been in, or are on the verge of falling into, long-term dependence on social assistance. But other persons assessed as being in need of special interventions should also be considered potential subjects for such programmes. (Translation of Proposition, 1996/97:124, p. 77)

Again, the government seemed to be seeking a middle way. The quote exemplifies the ambiguity between a critique of the municipal initiatives to activate social assistance recipients and maintaining the work ethos in social assistance programmes.

In 2001, when the Social Services Act was reformed, the Social Democratic government more explicitly approved the municipal practice of activating recipients above the age of 25. The municipalities were now able to

make social assistance conditional upon programme participation for people who, due to “certain conditions”, needed to take part in an upskilling programme, as well as for people in education during the breaks between terms. As with the 1998 amendment, it legitimised existing practices.

Even though the municipalities were given more extensive discretion in the realm of active labour market policies, the Social Democratic government still emphasised the importance of a national perspective. In a proposition (1999/2000:98), the government discussed the local labour market boards that had emerged from the autonomous municipality experiment and been implemented nationally. While acknowledging the municipalities’ knowledge about, and engagement in, the local labour market, the government expressed concern that the “limited self-interest of municipalities must not be prioritised for the sake of the fight against unemployment” (translation of Proposition 1999/2000:98, p. 71). The local boards were to prioritise the national goals of the labour market policies, including geographic and occupational mobility.

The (re-)specialisation of social assistance administration

While the new Social Services Act of 1982 had emphasised holism, the organisation of social services within municipalities developed differently. Bergmark and Lundström (2007) show that already during the 1980s, many municipalities separated social assistance administration from other parts of the social services. This development was enhanced during the 1990s. In 2000, over 90 per cent of medium and larger municipalities had made such a separation. The implementation of SOFT administration seems to have enhanced this development, as many municipalities developed units that solely administrated the simplified applications.

The move towards specialisation within social assistance can also be viewed against the backdrop of national reforms in the late 1990s. The government introduced a national norm to reduce cross-municipal differences in benefits levels. The law from 1982 had emphasised local autonomy by giving the municipalities discretion to assess what levels would be considered reasonable. This was justified by regional differences in the cost of living. By implementing the national norm in 1998, the government reduced the municipal discretion. It also reduced the discretion of case workers to assess reasonable costs for the sake of standardisation (Stranz, 2007).

Attempts to integrate national and municipal efforts

Despite its ambivalence about municipal measures, the Social Democratic government acknowledged the need to integrate the national and municipal efforts to reduce unemployment. The perhaps most extensive demonstration was the increased involvement of municipalities in the Local Employment Service Committees, which were local committees that aimed to coordinate national and municipal actors, and social partners, as well as develop active measures adapted to the local conditions. The municipalities appointed the chairman and a majority position in the committee boards (Lundin & Skedinger, 2006).

Two groups in particular were targeted the early attempts to integrate active labour market policies: unemployed youth and people in need of rehabilitation. Beginning with the former, we can return to the amendment of the Social Services Act in 1998. The chosen age span can be seen in the light of a law introduced the previous year which allowed a municipality to make an agreement with the employment service to take their place as the party responsible for offering active labour market policies to young adults unemployed for more than 90 days. The government required such an agreement to be grounded in collaboration between the municipality and the Public Employment Service, where the agencies would develop individual action plans together with the affected individuals.

Regarding rehabilitation, there had been several government attempts to enhance collaboration in this sector in the 1990s, the objective having been to enhance local collaboration between the Public Employment Service, Swedish Social Insurance Agency, counties, and municipalities. Several committees had identified growing numbers of long-term social assistance recipients with unclear work ability and/or a need for rehabilitation that involved services from several of the mentioned actors. In 2003, the parliament approved a government proposition (Proposition 2002/03:132) concerning collaborative associations. Since 1994 there had been eight municipal experiments where the four actors collaborated to develop more integrated services. With the 2003 reform, all municipalities became eligible to form such associations with national funding. The government characterised the reform as addressing the fragmentation of services within labour market rehabilitation, where responsibilities were shared between the four mentioned actors. The funding was intended to spur improved collaboration and, as of today in 2022, it is still being used as a tool intended to overcome fragmentation.

A “competence ethos”

At the end of the 1990s, the Social Democratic government focused its attention on upskilling. A catchphrase was that Sweden would meet the challenges of globalisation with high skills rather than low wages. The consequences in terms of policy grounded in this discourse are mixed. A programme that clearly followed the ambition to upskill the labour force was the Adult Education Initiative (Sw. Kunskapslyftet). Between 1997 and 2002, unemployed people were able to participate in adult comprehensive education (Sw. komvux) without having to take student loans (Stenberg, 2007). But Bengtsson and Berglund (2012) show that much of what took place under the heading of the “competence ethos” focused on making unemployed people more active, for instance through individual action plans. As these activities were often mandatory for receiving unemployment benefits, it seems that they were also used as means to increase the work ethos in the national systems. In this sense, many of the programmes introduced by the Social Democratic government during this period preceded much of what would come with the change of government in 2006.

Alliance reforms

In 2006, Sweden got its first non-socialist government (referred to as the Alliance government) since the crisis of 1994. The government consisted of four non-socialist parties that together held more than half of the positions in parliament during 2006–2010. This strong position in parliament enabled the Alliance government to pass several reforms with the explicit intention of enhancing the work ethos in accordance with its interpretation since the 1990s. Many of these reforms were delivered right before the 2007 financial crisis. Scarpa (2015) shows that these reforms are cited as an explanation of the relatively mild consequences of the crisis in Sweden as well as the fast recovery. Meanwhile, he also argues that the reforms brought an enhanced dualisation, as the structural unemployment, especially among young people and migrants from outside the EU, was perceived as stemming from overly generous welfare levels rather than the international economic downturn. He traces this development within the contested debate over outsiderhood/alienation (Sw. utanförskap), regarding which the Alliance government’s main objective was to reduce the number of people in long-term unemployment. As we will return to below, much of these efforts concerned enhanced austerity in social insurance

schemes, but also work incentives within both social insurance and social assistance.

The Alliance reforms covered both national social insurance and social assistance, as will be discussed below. But we will begin with the institutional setting. In 2007 the government closed one of the Social Democrats' most iconic post-WWII creations: The Labour Market Board. The new government ended the local attachment of the Local County Labour Boards. The agency that replaced the Labour Market Board, simply called the Public Employment Service, had a more bureaucratic and centralised structure, with county and local offices. Skoog (2008) shows that the Labour Market Board had already investigated the possibility of centralisation in 1999. The suggestion to centralise the agency was criticised by politicians on county and municipal levels, as well as by the unions and county governors (Sw. *länshövdingar*). The Social Democratic government at the time did not fully centralise the Labour Market Board, but circumscribed the influence of local representatives by enhancing the discretion of the national directorate-general (Sw. *generaldirektör*). The positions held in the debate over centralisation accordingly seem to have had less to do with partisanship than with the political level at which one operated. Minas (2011) situates the Alliance reform in a longer time-period of recentralisation of active labour market policies, not least in the realm of youth unemployment. It can thus be seen as a reaction to the emphasis on decentralisation in the early 1990s.

Another area that became an object of centralisation was the integration of migrants. In 2010, the Public Employment Service was made responsible for coordinating this issue, which until then had been a municipal responsibility. The Alliance government argued that the policy area was dominated by the idea of caring rather than the work ethos. The shifting of responsibility would, according to the government, strengthen the work ethos, as finding employment became the main priority. The reform included a new type of financial support, introduction benefit (Sw. *etableringsersättning*), administered by national agencies, which replaced the previous benefits administered by the municipalities. The municipalities received national grants for the former, and hence the new benefit was not primarily a matter of who was responsible for the costs. Rather, the government intended to strengthen the work ethos, as receiving the benefit was conditional on conforming to the requirements of the individual action plan at the Public Employment Service. They also increased the incentives to work by changing the basis for calculation of financial support.

Prior to this, the level was calculated on the household level, which meant that the compensation level for the household as a whole decreased if one of two spouses worked. With the reform, calculations were made individually. While the reform streamlined the integration of migrants, the municipality remained central, as it was still responsible for providing Swedish language instruction for immigrants (Qi, Irastorza, Emilsson & Bevelander, 2019).

Strengthening the work ethos was also a central theme in the reform of national social insurance schemes. Unemployment benefits were made less generous through increased membership fees, stricter qualification requirements, increased conditionality, and gradual reduction of benefits in cases of long-term recience (Proposition 2006/07:15). Similar changes were made in sick-leave insurance, where the government increased conditionality with enhanced monitoring of long-term sick-listed persons. They also made the sick-leave insurance less favourable for longer period of recience. Lastly, the possibility of receiving temporary sick-leave compensation was removed (Sw. sjukersättning) (Proposition 2007/08:136).

Looking at active labour market policies on the national level, the Alliance government introduced a new programme, called the Job and Development Guarantee Programme (Sw. Jobb- och utvecklingsgarantin) targeting persons in long-term unemployment. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, unemployment benefits were subject to gradual reduction. The new regulations meant that after 300 days, unemployed people no longer could receive unemployment benefits. After that, they entered the Job and Development Guarantee Programme, which involved both decreased generosity and increased monitoring and conditionality. Instead of unemployment benefits, programme participants received activity support (Sw. aktivitetsstöd), if they conformed to their individual action plan (Proposition 2006/07:89).

The Job and Development Guarantee Programme, as well as the reduction of generosity within social insurance, was criticised by socialist politicians, the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, and not least by programme participants in media. One of the most criticised aspects was the last phase (“phase three”) of the Job and Development Guarantee Programme. Phase three required participants to take part in workplace training supplied by external providers, which included both for-profit and non-profit organisations, as well as municipalities. Critics argued that the activities were intended to punish unemployed people with meaningless

unpaid labour, rather than to help them find employment (Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, 2012, Lundälv & Lindqvist, 2013).

Phase three illustrates another new feature of the national active labour market policy during the Alliance government: an increased reliance on services provided by non-governmental organisations. In phase three, non-profit organisations had the largest share of programme participants (Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, 2012). In the other phases of the Job and Development Guarantee Programme, as well as in other services, the agency relied on for-profit organisations, as was stipulated by the government. The government's intention was to provide a more diverse set of services (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 2006)

The Alliance not only made unemployment less favourable, through decreased generosity and increased activation, but also made employment more favourable. Through a series of tax credits (Sw. *jobbskatteavdrag*) the government intended to stimulate the supply of labour. It was assumed that unemployment was partly caused by work disincentives that arise when comparing levels of financial support and net income. The government also pointed to the disincentives to working full time caused by the effects on net income of the progressive income tax (Proposition 2006/07:1).

Another legacy of the Alliance government was its reliance on demand-orientation, which is manifested in the reform labelled RUT (abbreviation for Sw. “*rengöring, underhåll, tvätt*”, which translates into “cleaning, maintenance, laundry”). The inspiration came from a reform first introduced by the non-socialist government in 1993 labelled ROT (abbreviation for Sw. “*reparation, ombyggnad, tillbyggnad*” which translates into “repairs, conversion, extension”). ROT was intended to stimulate increased private spending on home improvement and repairs through tax reductions. The Alliance government mimicked this construction for domestic services. The RUT reform was motivated by a three-fold aim: (i) to reduce undeclared work, (ii) to increase labour market participation among woman by reducing unpaid housework, and (iii) to stimulate demand for unqualified workers (Proposition 2006/07:94).

Looking at the municipal level, it is important to recall the systemic nature of social assistance and national social insurance schemes – when the coverage of national insurance becomes less inclusive, the municipal costs increase. Due to the mentioned reforms of the unemployment benefits, social assistance spending caused by unemployment increased during the financial crisis of 2007. Meanwhile, it is important to keep in mind the

continuity of the austerity within unemployment benefits since the crisis of the 1990s (Broström, 2015). The austerity within sick-leave insurance also seemed to increase the social assistance spending, as fewer sick-listed people were eligible for sick-leave insurance, and therefore more of them had to rely on social assistance (Angelin, Johansson, Koch & Panican, 2013). Taken together, the cutbacks in the national insurance schemes, together with the financial crisis, strengthened the role of the municipality in providing financial support.

Social assistance was also a target of reforms to strengthen the work ethos. One example is the removal of the age limit in section 4.4 of the Social Services Act, i.e. the possibility for municipalities to activate social assistance recipients (below 26 years), which had been introduced by the Social Democratic government in 1998. From 2013, the municipalities were able to demand activation for recipients of all ages. As with the reform in 1998, the reform was more of an adaptation to practice than a cause of changed practice.

The other reform, also enacted in 2013, concerned a more generous means-testing of long-term recipients of social assistance. The government argued that means-testing of social assistance generated work disincentives – especially for people working part-time, as they would still need social assistance (which in practice meant that they worked without receiving any financial reward for it). The government changed the means-testing procedure to decrease the reduction in social assistance in relation to wages. The idea behind this change was that it would create incentives for social assistance recipients to work (Proposition 2012/13:94).

4. Previous research

This chapter introduces the research context in which the dissertation is situated. The review mainly focuses on the European situation. This is partly for pragmatic reasons, because of the large body of research. But it also reflects the fact that much of the existing research focuses on European states. The USA will also be mentioned, especially when looking at early contributions of, and labels for, active labour market policies. As will be apparent, including the USA can be viewed in the light of the (contested) influence of US policy on European countries.

The review focuses mainly on research lying within the intersection of social policy, political science, and social work, presented in the first subsection under the heading of “Social policy”. Much of this work compares European countries, either on a national or sub-national level. There are also many case studies of single countries or cities that have a comparative theoretical orientation. The second subsection introduces research that offers a geographical perspective on labour market policies. The final subsection introduces the relation between social work and labour market policies.

Social policy

Comparative research

A large stream of research has grown out of political efforts to activate recipients of financial support in Europe and the USA since the 1980s and onwards. An early and influential publication is Lødemel and Trickey's (2001) edited volume *An offer you can't refuse: Workfare in international perspective. A comparative study of the USA and six European countries*, it investigates how reforms during the preceding two decades reshaped the relationship between the welfare state and citizens. In a nutshell, these reforms aimed to avoid passive receipt of financial support by introducing, or expanding the use of, active labour market policies. Several other edited volumes (e.g., Eleveld, Kampen & Arts, 2020; van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka & Larsen, 2017; Lødemel & Moriera, 2014; Brodtkin & Marston, 2013) as well as papers (e.g., Fredriksson, 2020; Knotz, 2018; Bonoli, 2010) have looked more closely into these matters. These subsequent publications reflect a continued interest on the part of welfare states in activating people in need of financial support.

There are two broad themes within the research on the reforms mentioned in the previous paragraph, and in later research. The first concerns the renegotiated relationship between the welfare state and citizens. The second theme concerns the governance of the policies that bring about this renegotiation. These two themes can be roughly translated into the theoretical framework of this dissertation, with the first relating to *content* and the second to *structure*. Some scholars argue that reforms took place in two waves which differed in focus. The first wave of reforms took place between 1990 and 1998, and focused on the content of policies. The second wave, dating roughly between 1998 and 2008, focused on changes in governance (Moreira & Lødemel, 2014; Nybom, 2012). Even though there is some evidence for such a chronology, it runs the risk of cloaking the continuity between early and later reforms, and more recent reforms have also concerned both content and structure. Before describing the two themes, we will delve into theoretical approaches to comparative research.

Theoretical approaches to comparative research

One influential approach is Esping-Andersen's (1990) classification of welfare regimes, which connects research on active labour market policies to a wider discussion of social policy (cf. Powell, Yörük & Bargu, 2019). With the categories of liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare-regimes, Esping-Andersen describes three ideal-typical ways of organising the relations between state, market, and citizens. From this perspective, activation reforms can be understood against the backdrop of these relations (e.g., Fredriksson, 2019, 2020). For instance, the workfare orientation in the USA, UK and Australia (described below) reflects Esping-Andersen's categorisation of these countries as liberal welfare regimes, where the welfare state is kept as small as possible. In comparison, the greater interest in upskilling seen in Scandinavian states is said to reflect the more extensive de-commodification within social democratic, or universal, welfare states (Brodkin & Larsen, 2013; Barbier, 2004).

An alternative to the welfare regime-approach derives from the edited volume *Varieties of Capitalism* (Hall & Soskice, 2001). Similar to Esping-Andersen's (1990) work, it treats a wider range of topics than just active labour market policies. The contributions in this volume and in subsequent publications in this vein, assume that much of the current similarities and differences between states can be explained by the historical development of public and market institutions within countries. The primary axis for explaining these patterns is the degree of public coordination, i.e.

the extent of state involvement in issues such as training and employment services. To some extent, the analysis of active labour market policies resembles analyses stemming from the welfare-regime approach. For instance, the American workfare-orientation can be understood with regard to the ambition to minimise the welfare state (Pontusson, 2005). But varieties of capitalism also open up the analysis to more recent developments within traditionally more coordinated welfare states in Europe. Thelen (2014) investigates different approaches to understanding the growing difficulty for welfare states to coordinate because of globalisation. She shows that the welfare-regime approach overlooks important nuances, as it does not clearly distinguish between coordination and social solidarity, but rather assumes that they correlate. In a similar vein, Clegg, Bennett, Eichhorn and Heins (2021) situate the poor productivity of the British labour market in the disincentives for employers to make more long-term investments in skill formation and innovation. These disincentives are derived from the emphasis on flexibility through limited regulation in uncoordinated regimes. Employers operating in more coordinated market economies, such as Germany and Sweden, have greater incentives to invest in skill formation, as stricter employment protection is enshrined in regulations.

The theoretical orientations of both approaches, welfare regime and varieties of capitalism, direct attention to clusters that explain divergence between different types of welfare states or economies. Some scholars argue that the benefit of such clustering is limited when looking at active labour market policies, as this policy area reflects convergence rather than divergence. They argue that several states have raised demands in relation to recipients of financial support, or have even made it conditional on participation in workfare or activation programmes. Baccaro and Howell (2011) situate this convergence within a neo-liberalisation of capitalistic welfare states that limits the power of states and unions (see also Lødemel & Moreira, 2014). One aspect of this development is the increased influence of supranational organisations, foremost the OECD and the EU, on labour market policies since the 1990s and onwards (Borghetti, 2011; Weisshaupt, 2011; Eichhorst & Konle-Seidl, 2008). On the other hand, some scholars argue that the influence of such organisations has been limited, considering the preference for soft power, i.e. the use of recommendations rather than rules or financial incentives, which leaves room for national interpretations (e.g., Tosun, Treib & De Francesco, 2019; Graziano, 2012).

Returning to Thelen, she has criticised the limitations of both the typological approaches and the idea of convergence among welfare states. Together with colleagues, she has advanced theories of institutional continuity and change to consider the influence and persistence of previous institutions while also acknowledging that these institutions are not static (Thelen, 2014; Streeck & Thelen, 2005; Thelen & Conran, 2016). This approach is introduced more thoroughly in the theoretical framework in chapter five.

Content of active labour market policies

As mentioned, much of the early literature concerned with content can be seen as a response to reforms in the 1990s aimed at activating people in need of financial support. This aim has continued to be central within the European policy context during the 21st century, among other reasons because of the financial crisis in 2007–2009 as well as the impact of the EU on national policy. Weishaupt (2011) views the reforms of the 1990s as part of a wider reorientation in many welfare states after the oil crises in the 1970s. Both critics and proponents of the welfare state argued for a renewed approach to unemployment, not least by curbing the costs for financial support. The reforms can be seen in the light of both the neoliberal interest in monetarist reforms during the 1980s and the social democratic idea of a “third way” in the 1990s, which sought to combine free markets with public responsibility (cf. Giddens, 1998). This dual origin is a source of confusion when discussing both the ideological and substantial aspects of reforms. Part of this confusion is rooted in the difference between how policies are framed and their implementation. The confusion is also caused by the comparative approach, as scholars do not always make it clear whether they are discussing differences in kind or degree. These issues are manifested in the diverging use of concepts, to which we will now turn.

Independent of ideological framing, the common theme among reforms is the intention to make unemployed people more active in becoming self-sufficient. On a conceptual level, this intention depends on the distinction between active and passive labour market policies. Beginning with the easier one to define, passive labour market policies are what I refer to as financial support, i.e. the transfer of money to people who are not self-sufficient. The term “active labour market policies” is not used univocally. Its most accepted usage seems to be as a label for policies aimed at enhancing employment – in contrast to passive policies that cushion the ef-

fects of not being self-sufficient (Godec & Benčina, 2018). But when looking more closely at the use of the label “active labour market policies”, we find that the picture becomes more complex.

Many scholars point to two different approaches to enhancing the transition from financial support to employment, i.e. to achieving the aim of active labour market policies. The first is to make access to, and dependence on, financial support less convenient or more *demanding*. This goal can be realised through two means. The first is to make financial support less generous, for instance through time limits and/or reductions in the amount of support received. The other means is to introduce mandatory work or other activities. Again, these are two ways of making dependence on financial support less attractive. The other approach to active labour market policies is to *enable* people to more easily become employed. Here we find a wide range of policies, that can be divided into supply-side and demand-side orientations. Examples of supply-side policies are vocational training and counselling. Demand-side policies can be exemplified by subsidised employment and minimum-wage reductions (Dinan, 2019; Bonoli, 2010; Torfing, 1999; Eichhorst & Konle Seidl, 2008; Barbier, 2004). However, there are reasons to problematise this fairly straightforward conceptual division between demanding and enabling.

One problem with the distinction between demanding and enabling is that it does not clearly distinguish between form and aim. Making financial support conditional is clearly a trademark of the demanding approach, as claimants are required to perform work to receive support. But conditionality is often used in combination with the enabling approach. For instance, Scandinavian countries are often categorised as enabling with regard their active labour market policies (Brodtkin & Larsen, 2013; Barbier, 2004). But looking at policy and practice, we see that there are obvious elements of conditionality in the Scandinavian countries (e.g., Andersson, 2022; Sadeghi & Terum, 2020). Hence, one must distinguish between the form (mandatory versus non-mandatory) and the aim (demanding versus enabling).

Another aspect of this discussion concerns labels, not least the differences and similarities between *activation* and *workfare*. There is disagreement about whether the latter is a subset of the former or if they mean the same thing but in different contexts. Many of the policies in the USA and UK are referred to as *workfare* or *work-for-welfare*, which means that claimants must work, often in public facilities, to receive financial support. Scholars looking at other parts of Europe have been more prone to use the

label *activation*. One reason for making this distinction is to acknowledge the more punitive aspects of the US and UK contexts. Many of the other European welfare states seem to have approached the issue with a broader palette of interventions that often reflect an enabling approach more than a demanding approach (cf. Daguerre, 2004; Brodtkin & Larsen, 2013). Others use the different concepts interchangeably, as they are difficult to distinguish when looking at the actual delivery of services (Caswell, Kupka, Larsen & van Berkel, 2017).

A similar discussion concerns the use of the term “active labour-market policy” (ALMP). Again, it is often used analytically to differentiate policies for preventing unemployment and enabling (re)entrance to the labour market, in relation to financial protection (i.e. passive labour market policies). However, in their comparison between Europe and the USA, Brodtkin and Larsen (2013) use ALMP in a narrower sense by applying it to the European context. They argue that the European orientation is intended to “advance the employment prospects of the unemployed” (Brodtkin & Larsen, 2013, p. 60). Such an interpretation recalls the initial distinction between demanding and enabling approaches by implying that ALMP only refers to the former. Although the authors point to undeniable differences between most of Europe and the USA, their interpretation weakens the analytical benefits of the ALMP concept, as it overlooks the complexity of many European welfare states, which again can be exemplified by conditionality within the Scandinavian countries.

There are attempts to overcome the conceptual discussions by pointing to the continuity of labour market policies. Dostal (2008) argues that many scholars use labels such as activation and workfare paradigmatically, i.e. as discrete changes of policy. Taking the UK as an example, he argues that much of the workfare debate associated with New Labour around the turn of the millennium had more to do with changes in discourse than with substantial policy. The supply-orientation emphasised in the discourses of activation and workfare had already been promoted after the oil crises in the midst of widespread criticism of Keynesianism. Thus, New Labour and the Third Way were part of an incremental, rather than abrupt, process of change (cf. Streeck & Thelen, 2005).

Another aspect of these labels concerns the mismatch between the framing and implementation of active labour market policies. For instance, Bengtsson, de la Porte and Jakobsson (2017) point to a gap between the EU’s emphasis on social investment and the member states’ implementation, which seems more to focus on control and work incentives than help-

ing individuals to become employable (see also Cantillon, 2011). Rice, Fuertes and Monticelli (2018) come to a similar conclusion in a comparative study of three European cities. They find that insufficient funding and organisational structures constrain the possibility to implement the ambitious goals of the EU's employment strategy.

Critical perspectives on activation and workfare

As already mentioned, there is scholarly criticism of the gap between discourse and implementation. But there is also a more fundamental critique of workfare and activation – beyond the question of implementation. A common starting point is the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. Dahlstedt (2013) points to how the emphasis on activation and employability (cf. Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004) has changed the discourse of employment. He exemplifies a broader European trend by analysing the political debate over employment and the welfare state in Sweden. He argues that “the right to work”, which dominated Social Democratic labour market policies during the 20th century, was replaced by “the duty to work” in the 1990s. This reorientation directs attention to the responsibility of the individual to become self-sufficient rather than the responsibility of the state to assist the individual. This process of responsabilisation aims to discipline individuals to tackle their situation themselves – although their situation originates from structural inequalities. according to the author.

Another stream of research that partly resembles the Foucauldian critique is Loïc Wacquant's (2009, 2010) works on the “workfare state”. He sees the turn toward workfare, in both the USA and many European welfare states, as part of a wider development focused on “punishing the poor”. Other aspects of this development are the increased reliance on prisons, as well as reduced funding of social aid. These three fields of policy all affect the working class and, according to Wacquant, must be viewed in the light of the neo-liberalisation of society and the state. Much of Wacquant's work concerns the US context, but scholars analysing European welfare states have come to similar conclusions. Wright, Fletcher and Stewart (2020) argue that the increased reliance on punitive benefit sanctions in the UK tends to punish poor people rather than supporting them in their search for employment. They also approach these issues from a Foucauldian perspective by noticing similarities to the monitoring efforts in workfare and Foucault's (1979) metaphorical use of the panopticon.

There are also observers who criticize workfare and activation on legal grounds. Briefly put, scholars argue that increasing the conditionality of financial support, such as social assistance, is at odds with the idea of social rights. The latter are commonly associated with T. H. Marshall's (1950) work on social citizenship, where the state is seen as an important vehicle in promoting social justice. One aspect of promoting this goal is access to financial protection. Through the introduction of, or stronger emphasis on, conditionality, welfare states erode citizens' access to social rights (Zats & Boris, 2014; Panican & Ulmestig, 2016, 2017b).

Types of individualisation

Reviewing the critical perspectives, we saw that workfare and activation are criticised because of their individualisation of responsibilities. When discussing individualisation, it is important to consider the diverse uses of the concept. Valkenburg (2007) as well as Borghi and van Berkel (2007) distinguish between different discourses. Individualisation of responsibilities again concerns the renegotiation of responsibility and its transfer from the state to the individual. Another discourse concerns individualisation in terms of personalised services. Valkenburg (2007) traces this discourse in the criticism of welfare state bureaucracy as indifferent to individual needs because of its rigid structure. Proponents of personalised services, not least in the EU, argue that services need to be "tailored" to "fit" the needs of the individual. On a more critical note, Valkenburg (2007) connects this issue with the sociological discussions about flexibility (Bauman, 2001) and reflectivity at the end of the 20th century (Giddens, 1991; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). From these perspective, active labour market policies enhance the focus on the individual as a life-project in late-modernity.

Structure of active labour market policies

This section presents scholarly contributions concerned with what I refer to as structure. Much of this literature is grounded in the concept of governance, which is introduced more thoroughly in the next chapter. Briefly put, it opens up the analysis of policy by focusing on the continuous interaction between public as well as non-public actors. From such a perspective, policies are not simply implemented through public administration, but are negotiated through the afore-mentioned interactions. Such an approach to policy processes acknowledges the need to consider interactions within and between organisations. A similar case can be made for another

influential, and partly overlapping, field of research: the role of street-level bureaucrats in active labour market policies, which is also covered in this subsection. The last field to be covered concerns the growing literature on the dualisation of welfare states.

The governance of labour market policies

Much of the scholarly work on governance of labour market policies is comparative and relates to the initial topic discussed in the chapter, namely different approaches to making international comparisons. However, several scholars question the relevance of these analytic grids for analysing governance. López-Santana (2015) finds diverging paths among countries within similar welfare regime clusters, and concludes that “the nature and extent of reconfigurations trends is independent from state structure and welfare regimes” (López-Santana, 2015, p. 145). Similarly, in a comparative study, Heidenreich and Aurich-Beerheide (2014) argue that their findings “do not conform to any previously developed typology” (Heidenreich & Aurich-Beerheide, 2014, p. 20; see also Berthet & Bourgeois, 2014). Taken together, reforms within governance of active labour market policies seem to take different forms of expression in states, independent of regime-type.

Two central tendencies have dominated the governance of labour market policies in the European context since the 1990s: political decentralisation and service provision by non-public actors. Beginning with the former, decentralisation concerns the increased reliance on local authorities, not least cities and municipalities, to provide services, either by shifting responsibilities from national to sub-national actors, or through multi-level governance where responsibilities are shared between actors on different political levels. What characterises both approaches (shifting responsibilities and multi-level governance) is that sub-national agencies become more involved in the design and delivery of labour market policies. Champion and Bonoli (2011) show that these measures were introduced to overcome the institutional fragmentation that occurs due to the vertical division of labour between different political-administrative levels. The measures differ in their inclusiveness and intensity, with some states developing more extensive coordination measures, such as merging local offices of national agencies with local authorities, and others enhancing interagency collaboration.

While several scholars acknowledge the importance of national regulations in processes concerning political decentralisation, they stress that

decentralisation must also be studied on the local level. As national politicians and planners increase the discretion of local authorities, the sub-national variation is likely to increase. Several case studies, including both intra- and international comparisons, look at regions or cities. The findings indicate that local conditions, for instance in terms of demographics and labour market conditions, mediate the local interpretation of national regulations (e.g., Fuertes, McQuaid & Heidenreich, 2021; Scalise, 2020; Johansson & Panican, 2016; Künzel, 2012).

The other tendency, reliance on non-public service providers, concerns the inclusion of for-profit and non-profit organisations, in providing employment services. Like political decentralisation, the degree of reliance on non-public service providers differs between European states. Some have introduced quasi-markets by enabling job seekers to choose among listed providers. Others have employed more hierarchical structures, where public agencies have greater control in mediating between service providers and service users (Greer, Schulte & Symon, 2018). Some scholars point to the gradual adaptation that has taken place in many states since the introduction of private providers in the 1990s, as governments have decreased the discretion of private providers to prevent unintended consequences of quasi-markets, not least “creaming” and “parking”. These latter phenomena arise in systems where actors receive funding if their clients find employment. Creaming refers to a situation where easy-to-place clients are prioritised while more challenging clients are “parked”, that is, are not offered any services by service providers (Jantz, Klenk, Larsen & Wiggan, 2018; Larsen & Wright, 2014; Whitworth, 2020).

Some states have combined political decentralisation and marketisation, for instance by encouraging partnerships between local authorities and non-public actors (Lindsay, Pearson, Batty, Cullen & Eadson, 2020, 2021). Zimmermann, Aurich, Graziano and Fuertes (2014) show that the degree of discretion of local authorities, as regulated at the national level, affects the implementation at local level. In states where non-public providers are included in nationally regulated quasi-markets, the role of local authorities is reduced to monitoring the system to prevent abuse. Local agencies that operate with greater discretion than non-public actors have greater opportunities to adapt cross-sectional collaboration to local conditions.

Several scholars point to the influence of the EU on its member states in rethinking the governance of both financial support and active labour market policies. Recalling the previous discussion of the EU’s reliance on

soft power measures, member states differ in their responses to these measure in terms of governance. Hence, the guidelines provided by the EU do not seem to have generated one distinct trajectory of governance reform, but rather have spurred national adaptations (Scalise, 2021; Tosun et al., 2019).

Street-level perspectives

The governance reforms described above have generated scholarly interest in the role of street-level bureaucrats in the realm of labour market policies. Much of the literature emphasises the dual nature of working with active labour market policies, which involves representing both the client and the state. This duality stems from the incongruity between the aims of enabling and restricting clients that street-level bureaucrats face in day-to-day interactions. Eriksson and Johansson (2021) show that Public Employment Officers deploy different coping strategies, as they alternatingly interpret rules rigidly (to distance themselves from clients) and bend rules (to adapt services to fit clients' needs). Senghaas, Freier and Kupka (2019) argue for the need to look beyond the dichotomy between demanding and enabling. They argue that street-level bureaucrats can use their relational skills and "persuasion" to overcome, or at least downplay, the seemingly conflicting modes of enabling and restricting. In a similar vein, Andreasson and Natland (2020) argue that the distinction between enabling and restricting is an unavoidable aspect of active labour market policies. Hence, the interesting question is not whether street-level bureaucrats should identify themselves as either enabling or restricting, but rather how they can balance these two modes.

Scholars have asked whether activation workers can be viewed as constituting a distinct profession, and if so, what forms of knowledge that are required in such a profession. Sadeghi and Fekjær (2018) discuss two knowledge dimensions: market competency and user-oriented competency. The former includes knowledge about the labour market and the possibility for clients to find employment. The latter includes motivational and communication skills to be used in interaction with clients. Van Berkel et al. (2021) expand the conceptual discussion by suggesting eight dimensions: knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, knowledge use, client-centred practice, collaboration, accountability, and methodological work. Both contributions to the literature stress that the question of professionalism within activation is still developing.

Dualisation

One aspect of the welfare state and active labour market policies is captured in the notion of dualisation. It was recognized already in the 1970s (Tussing, 1974; Marklund & Svallfors, 1987) but has gained increased attention more recently. Scholars have shown that there is a tendency for divisions to arise within welfare states. These divisions are caused by the insurance-based configuration of financial support. For instance, access to unemployment benefits and how generous they are depends on prior earnings. People who do not qualify for unemployment benefits must rely on the second tier of the welfare state, typically means-tested social assistance, which often results in significantly less generous support (Emmenegger, Hausermann, Palier & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2012).

The concept of dualisation has also been used to characterise the step preceding financial support: the labour market. During the Fordist era, after WWII and up until the 1970s oil crises, full-time employment was a political priority in many European states (Emmenegger et al., 2012). But with deregulated labour markets there has been a gradual increase in dependence on part-time work among large groups of workers (cf. Peters, 2008). More recently, this development has been captured in Guy Standing's (2011a, 2011b) work on precariousness. He argues that a growing number of people, in both blue- and white-collar occupations, experience greater insecurity with the increased use of self-employment and other non-standard employment forms.

Returning to Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare regime approach, dualisation has been used to criticise the idea that Scandinavian welfare regimes are universal. An early example is given by Marklund and Svallfors (1987). They showed that Sweden – Esping-Andersen's paradigmatic example of a universal welfare state – continued to rely on social assistance for the non-negligible residual poverty (see also Broström, 2015; Salonen, 1993). Subsequent scholars, such as Greve (2018), have pointed to the continuing dualisation within Scandinavian welfare states, where established workers can rely on national social insurance while part-time workers, migrants and young people typically rely on social assistance due to insufficient work experience.

Dualisation is not only present in financial support. It also concerns active labour market policies. As much of activation and workfare has been implemented within the lowest tier of financial support, namely social assistance, claimants of these types of support tend to receive more puni-

tive labour market services than people who rely on unemployment benefits (Alanko & Outinen, 2016; Nybom, 2011; Ulmestig, 2007).

Geographic perspectives on labour market policies

The increased emphasis on local government has generated research interest in the geographic scale of the welfare state. This stream of research partly overlaps with research on the governance of activation policies (e.g., Kazepov, 2010), but it also includes scholarly contributions in the intersection between human geography, political economy, and political sociology. Many of these contributions refer to Jessop's (1993, 1999, 2002) discussion of the transformation of welfare states. He distinguishes between two ideal types. The first is the *Keynesian Welfare National State*, in which the national scale is the main level of intervention. The goal is to achieve full employment through demand-side (i.e. Keynesian) interventions and general social welfare. The second is labelled the *Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regime* and conceptualises the state as an actor that needs to enhance economic restructuring in the global competition over economic growth. From such a competitive global perspective, "too extensive" financial support becomes an obstacle for economic growth, which requires workfare-oriented supply-side policies instead. Jessop argues that many states in the Global North shared many characteristics with the Keynesian Welfare National State after WWII and until the oil crises in the 1970s. After that, Jessop argues, these states have increasingly transformed into Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regimes, as financial support was reduced in terms of coverage and paired with conditionality to enhance labour market (re-)entrance.

Peck (2002) uses Jessop's conceptualisation to interpret the rescaling to sub-national political-administrative levels. The rollback of national institutions, for instance through reduced benefits levels, increases the pressure on local actors to take part in enhancing the competitiveness on the global market through active labour market policies.

By adding the scale dimension, Nunn (2020) situates the management of local labour market policies within the enhancement of neoliberalism that comes from the rescaling of active labour market policies from national to local levels. Nunn argues that the turn towards a Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regime increases the pressure on local managers and street-level bureaucrats to enhance economic competitiveness. A common managerial response to this pressure is to use performance measures to monitor and evaluate street-level bureaucrats. Nunn (ibid.)

further argues that these measures promote a work-first approach, which is problematic as it might create social harm by neglecting the needs of unemployed people.

Social work and labour market policies

Because sub-national activation has been developed and implemented in social services in many states, there is scholarly interest in studying the relation between activation and social work. This has been examined from several perspectives ranging from the macro-political scale to the interaction between social workers and unemployed people. It is important to stress that much research on labour market policies produced by social work scholars does not explicitly focus on social work or social workers (e.g., Johansson & Panican, 2016). This subsection reports a subset of research within social work, a subset that discusses how the social work profession relates to labour market policies.

Many contributions problematise the ideological and political conflicts between social work and the restructuring of welfare states. Bauman (2000) and Lorenz (2001) made early and influential contributions that responded to the workfare-oriented reforms of the 1990s. Bauman argued that social workers should take a clearer ethical stand, emphasising people's needs rather than their obligations. In a similar vein, Lorenz stressed the need for social workers to orient themselves towards social citizenship and social rights. Much of the more recent literature has returned to these issues. For instance, Nothdurfter (2016) argues that the turn towards conditionality in the realm of social assistance challenges the role of social workers, as they are made responsible for limiting social rights, and this conflicts with the ethical standards of social work (cf. Kjørstad, 2005). Raitakari, Juhila and Räsänen (2020), as well as Vilhena (2020), discuss these issues in terms of “responsibilisation”, pointing to a tendency to shift responsibilities from the state to individuals. There is also a body of research that situates the discussion of social work and active labour market policies within neoliberalism. Marthinsen (2019) argues that the workfare orientation is at odds with social work, as it promotes individualisation of responsibilities and erosion of social solidarity.

The street-level-bureaucracy perspective underpins much of the social work literature on the labour market. Scholars working within this perspective point to the role of social workers in implementing activation and workfare-oriented policies. A common theme is the pragmatic strategies used by social workers to handle the tension between the demanding and

restricting modes. Hansen and Natland (2017) argue that this tension is an unavoidable feature of social work, not only regarding questions about employment but also in many other policy areas. Similarly, Dall (2020) points to the role of social workers as mediators between the contradictions in active labour market policies on client-level. Lundemark Andersen (2019) discusses the role of empowerment within active labour market policies. She acknowledges that empowerment has two sides. On the one hand, it can strengthen clients and enable them to become more autonomous through paid labour. On the other hand, it can easily increase individualisation, as unemployed people are left to solve their problems by themselves, which may be difficult or even impossible for people in vulnerable situations. The author argues that while empowerment does not overcome the inherent conflicts within active labour market policies, it can be used by social workers as a tool for critical reflection on ways to better handle these conflicts.

5. Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the dissertation. The framework is presented thematically through four pillars, *Structure*, *Content*, *Space*, and *Time*, which is followed by a discussion of the interconnections between the pillars.

Structure

The theoretical strands covered within the pillar of structure address the structure of labour market policies. Structure refers to the political and organisational conditions that enable and limit labour market policies. The section begins by introducing the concept of *governance*. Sub-sequent, street-level bureaucracy and professionalism are used to acknowledge the role of discretion for employees within public agencies.

The term governance is used in the dissertation to highlight the interactive dimensions of labour market policies. It is common to distinguish between governance and government, and this distinction requires a brief historical explanation. At the end of the 20th century, political scientists were increasingly critical of the dominating approach to analysing policy, which mainly focused on the role of national parliaments. Proponents of the governance perspective argued that policy is not simply a process whereby politicians make regulations that are then implemented by the public administration. Rather, policy evolves in interaction between both public and non-public actors. The former include political boards and agencies at different political-administrative levels within states, but also representatives of supranational actors such as the EU and the OECD. Non-public actors include private companies, unions, and non-profit organisations on sub-national, national, and supranational levels (Pierre & Peters, 2000). From this perspective, governance enables a polycentric understanding of policy processes that does not take the nation state as the given level of analysis (Hooghe & Marks, 2003).

Today, the concept of governance is established within policy analysis, albeit with different meanings. This dissertation follows Pierre and Peters' (2000) conceptualisation of governance as an analysis with a dual focus on processes and formal institutions. Public policies emerge through interactions between politicians, public agencies, and non-public actors. These interactions are affected by laws as well as by the organisation of both political bodies and public administration on sub-national, national, and supranational level.

A central concept within governance literature is multi-level governance. States are vertically divided into non-overlapping territories, in the case of Sweden into regions and municipalities. Different tasks are associated with different vertical levels, associations that have historical causes. They are not one-to-one associations, with each issue neatly covered on a single level. Instead there can be overlaps, as issues are associated with several levels. One example is the division of responsibilities for financial support between national agencies and municipalities in Sweden. As described in chapters three and eight, the municipalities' responsibility for social assistance stems from the past reliance on parishes to deliver poor relief, which was paired with national social insurance schemes during the 20th century. Multi-level governance addresses issues of coordination in cases of complex problems where resources and/or responsibilities are scattered across several vertical levels. Such situations are often viewed in terms of multi-level governance strategies such as policy networks, formal agreements and/or collaboration. In the European context, multi-level governance also takes account of the role of supranational perspectives by including the European Union as an influential actor (Bache, Bartle & Flinders, 2016).

Interaction in policy processes, and not least multi-level governance, can be examined through three modes of governance: hierarchies, markets, and networks (Hupe & Hill, 2007; Hill & Hupe, 2015; Pierre & Peters, 2000; Thompson, Frances, Levačič & Mitchell, 1999). These modes are generic, as they can be used to analyse coordination between individuals as well as between organisations. In the empirical portions of the dissertation, coordination between local public organizations is of primary interest. However, there are reasons to adopt a conceptually broader approach to coordination in the dissertation. The increased reliance on private providers, for instance through the reformed Public Employment Service, calls for an acknowledgement of market coordination. As described in the first paper and below, the three modes rely on different compliance relations. The ties between interacting actors differ depending on the formal institutional context. In situations characterised by the bureaucratic mode, interactions are likely to rely on coercive power, network coordination or persuasion, and market-based interactions on exchange (cf. Boulding, 1989; Etzioni, 1961). In real life, these modes are often intertwined, as interaction include elements of several modes. For instance, market interactions in contemporary capitalism take place against the background of formal institutions, including laws as well as national and supranational organisa-

tions working to secure “competition in free markets”. This also applies to more mundane cases, such as the relation between me and the cashier at my local grocery store. Our interaction is not solely coordinated through the market mode, also but through a legal framework for such things as sales tax, money, and consumer protection. Anyone who has bought a car knows that the relationship between customer and salesperson involves elements of persuasion in accordance with the network mode, as salespersons try to establish a sense of personal interaction. These examples show that the coordination of human interaction is more complex than it may appear at first sight.

Bureaucracies are the most obvious example of contexts that rely on hierarchical coordination, which is related to the Weberian top-down understanding of intra-organisational interactions based on legal authority (Weber, 1978/1921). In such contexts, units within an organisation are organised vertically (figuratively speaking) in the sense that “higher” units enable and limit the actions that are available to “lower” units through formal rules. For instance, a central political board restricts the actions of (subordinate) local boards within municipalities. The compliance relation associated with the hierarchical mode of coordination is coercion, as individual or organisational actors rely on formal regulations, such as laws, to impose their will on actors with less formal power.

As an ideal-type, the market mode concerns coordination among actors who trade goods or services in accordance with the compliance relation of exchange (Hill & Hupe, 2015). Within welfare service provision, however, pure market coordination is highly unusual. One might even argue that it is theoretically impossible given the coercive nature of the state. For this reason, it is more informative to view market coordination as an attempt, on the basis of coercive (i.e. hierarchical) power, to enable feedback mechanisms to operate in the choice of service providers. One example is the Australian provision of labour market programmes. Unemployed persons choose between different private providers, who in turn have agreements with the national agency Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) (O’Sullivan et al., 2019). The Australian example illustrates the combination of hierarchical and market-based coordination, as the exchange between unemployed people and service providers is grounded in the hierarchical coordination between service providers and the CES.

In governance literature, networks play a central role, and some contributors even conflate networks and governance (Rhodes, 1997, 2007). Again, this dissertation follows Hupe and Hill (2007; Hill & Hupe, 2015)

in understanding networks as a mode of coordination within the larger field of governance. Networks are understood as voluntary coordination to pursue the interest of the involved actors. The compliance relation is persuasion. It is common to emphasise actors' reliance on dialogue and mutual trust to overcome differences and solve conflicts, when discussing governance through network coordination (cf. Hill & Hupe, 2015; Parsons, 1995). As discussed more thoroughly in paper I, it is important to distinguish between this ideal-typical understanding of networks and real-life coordination between organisations, which also includes elements of hierarchy and the market.

The shift from government towards governance in policy analysis has increased the awareness of the role of public administration in policy processes, and not least the role played by employees within these organisations. Two perspectives that illuminate this issue will be discussed here: street-level bureaucracy and the logic of professionalism. These two perspectives focus on discretion, i.e. the scope for independent action possessed by people working in public services. However, there are important, but often overlooked, nuances in their approach to discretion. This difference, in approach to discretion, which will be described more extensively after the two perspectives have been presented, concerns the legitimacy of the discretion.

The street-level bureaucracy perspective, which is also presented in paper II, acknowledges that the final stage of welfare policies is carried out in interaction between a person employed at an agency, labelled a street-level bureaucrat, and a client. As such, the analysis of welfare policy should not halt at the study of policy documents, but should be supplemented with the study of how street-level bureaucrats turn these documents into action. The importance of this perspective comes from the observation that the problems of real-world clients often do not conform to predefined categories of public administration. Furthermore, rules within street-level bureaucracies are meant to be interpreted to match the individual circumstances of clients. In these types of situations, the outcome is affected by choices made by street-level bureaucrats, as they must mediate between the guidelines of the organisation and the client's circumstances (Lipsky, 1980/2010).

Another characteristic of street-level bureaucracy is the need to handle goal conflicts. Politicians, as well as managers within public administration, are not always willing, or able, to prioritize between desirable but conflicting goals (Lipsky 1980/2010; Zacka, 2017). Within labour market

policies, one such goal conflict concerns access to basic financial support on the one hand, and maintained work incentives on the other hand. Should people who have neglected to take action to become self-sufficient receive social assistance (in accordance with the idea of social rights, cf. Marshall [1950]) or not (in accordance with the goal of maintaining work incentives)? As politicians tend to promote several conflicting goals in these situations, they often leave it up to managers and street-level bureaucrats to mediate between goals.

Another situational factor is that street-level bureaucrats tend to create strategies to cope with the combination of the mentioned complexities (conflicting rules and goals, as well as the expectation to consider individual circumstances), and the (often poor) conditions for operating under the burden of such complexities. Lipsky (1980/2010) and subsequent scholars show that street-level bureaucrats deal with these imbalances between complexity and working conditions by creating their own unofficial and unsanctioned routines. Brodtkin (1997) exemplifies this with job-search requirements in the realm of financial support. Occasionally, street-level bureaucrats require all clients to submit an arbitrary number of job applications without considering the individual abilities of clients or what positions they have applied for. Such a routine reduces job-search requirements to a mere symbolic practice, which deviates from the intention behind the policy.

Proceeding to professionalism, this is a wide field of sociological research that includes questions of knowledge, management, and organisation (e.g., Larson, 1977/2013; Svensson & Evetts, 2010). Two perspectives on professionalism are covered in the dissertation. The first concerns the process of expanding the body of knowledge to new territories to secure professional influence (Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977/2013) and is discussed in the second pillar, *Content*. The second perspective, which relates to structure, treats professionalism as a logic of organisations. Freidson (2001) conceptualises professionalism in relation to bureaucracy and the market. These are three logics that stipulate different approaches to management and accountability. The bureaucratic logic emphasises top-down hierarchies, where politicians and/or management create rules and routines that should be observed by subordinates. By this logic, accountability comes from standardisation and rule obedience on lower levels in organisations. The market logic concerns mechanisms that secure competition in markets, with accountability vested in the influence of customers' aggregated choices. Freidson (ibid.) argues that some sectors or tasks are

so complex that they are commonly assumed to require a certain body of knowledge for practitioners to be able to make deliberated choices. In these situations, professionals can be given formal discretion based on their knowledge. This means that the source of accountability is professional knowledge. The most obvious examples are law and medicine, where the influence of managers as well as lay people (“customers” in accordance with the market logic) is limited with regard to solicitors and doctors respectively. Again, the reason for limiting the influence of non-professionals stems from the complexity that characterises these sectors. This limited influence is paired with expectations that professional groups will adopt ethical principles and other mechanisms to avoid misuse of the discretion associated with their professional autonomy.

As with the modes of governance, Freidson’s logics are ideal-typical in the sense that the organisation of work often depends on more than one logic. Reliance on multiple logics occasionally generates conflicts over how to balance them. One such conflict, which has been acknowledged by Evetts (2013), concerns organisational compliance (in accordance with the bureaucratic logic) versus enabling of professional discretion (in accordance with the professional logic). Evetts (*ibid.*) argues that this conflict stems from two fundamentally different approaches to organising work, where the professional logic is grounded on autonomy for professional groups, while the bureaucratic logic stresses standardisation through managerialism.

What unites street-level bureaucracy and the professional logic is discretion. In both cases, politicians and managers are assumed to have limited influence compared to street-level bureaucrats and professionals respectively. It must also be noted that many professional groups are also street-level bureaucrats (*cf.* Evans, 2016). However, we must distinguish the two different types of discretion discussed here. The discretion of street-level bureaucrats stems from the “complex tasks for which elaboration of rules, guidelines, or institutions cannot circumscribe the alternatives” (Lipsky, 1980/2010, p. 15). This type of discretion is often unintended and undesired, but is unavoidable because of the complex matters dealt with in street-level bureaucracies. In this respect, the discretion of street-level bureaucrats mainly stems from the failures of applying a bureaucratic logic to welfare agency settings. Professional discretion, on the other hand, is intentional, as it is meant to provide professionals with the conditions they need to act in accordance with their special knowledge and experience. Put differently, what distinguishes the perspectives discussed here has to do

with legitimacy; the discretion of professionals is legitimised by laws or other regulations. Or, as expressed by Hupe and Hill:

In defining professions, a distinction is made between, on the one hand, the characteristics of a specific kind of occupation and, on the other hand, the way in which society approaches the persons exercising that occupation. (Hupe & Hill, 2007, p. 282)

As many professionals are street-level bureaucrats, the boundary between legitimate and non-legitimate use of discretion is fuzzy. This fuzziness calls for a consideration of what type of discretion discussed, especially as they do not necessarily correlate. Social workers are a professional group¹ where this fuzziness is apparent. Evans and Harris (2004) show how attempts to limit the professional discretion in social services not necessary decreases but rather modify the unintended, or informal, discretion of social workers.

Before continuing to *Content*, it is important to situate both types of discretion within the initial discussion of governance. Street-level bureaucrats, be it professional or non-professional, are part of a “nested sequence of decisions – about structure, financing and about the management of outputs” (Hupe & Hill, 2007). The governance of society affects the room for both intended and unintended discretion for employees in welfare agencies. For instance, Brodtkin (2012) argues that neither marketisation of services, nor managerial reforms, has removed discretion of street-level bureaucrats but rather changed its nature. From the distinction between intended versus unintended discretion, we can rephrase Brodtkin’s claim. Both marketisation of services, and managerial reforms, are likely to restrict the intended (professional) discretion while, despite its efforts, will never fully remove the room for unintended discretion (a la street-level bureaucracy).

Content

The second pillar of the theoretical framework concerns the public response to unemployment. The starting point is that labour market policies are grounded in theories of how to reduce and/or prevent unemployment.

¹ Etzioni (1969) claimed that social workers are semi-professionals in comparison with “true” professionals (such as physicians and lawyers). But approaching professionalism as a logic, we can reject this distinction, as professionalism becomes a question of degree (by looking at it in relation to the logics of bureaucracy and the market respectively).

The term “theories” does not strictly refer to scientific theories. Politicians and employees in public administration who develop and/or implement labour market policies, can have all kinds of theories or ideas about issues such as the motivation of unemployed people, the functioning of the labour market, or what qualities employers value in job-seekers. These theories stem from various sources such as education, media, fiction, or personal experience. They are not always explicit, and might not even be subjected to any deeper reflection when programmes are developed or delivered. Understood in this way, theories resemble *social representations*, which are introduced in paper II. Briefly put, social representations mediate our understanding of the world. Representations are produced and reproduced in day-to-day interaction (Moscovici, 1961/2008; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). In paper II, both organisational and professional affiliation are considered sources of representations. People working in the same organisation can generate a shared understanding of their work. Similarly, people sharing professional affiliation are likely to share representations because of their similar educational background and working life. Returning to the dissertation, the representation of unemployment is of interest. Again, political interventions rely on a theory, or representation, of what unemployment is and how it should be approached.

Labour market policies combine both descriptive and ideological assumptions. Examples of descriptive assumptions were mentioned in the previous paragraph. For instance, the introduction of conditionality through job-search requirements rests on the (descriptive) assumption that recipients of financial support lack the motivation to apply for work, and that stricter requirements increase the likelihood of recipients applying for work. Similarly, programmes aimed at enhancing education among unemployed persons are based on the (descriptive) assumption that there is a mismatch between the employers’ demands and the skills of the unemployed. Turning to the ideological dimension, proponents of conditionality accept the ideological assumption that financial assistance *ought* not to come without requirements. The second example, concerning upskilling programmes, is less controversial than the issue of conditionality. Even so, proponents of upskilling programmes accept the ideological assumption that the state *ought* to intervene by collecting taxes and funding educational institutions. Taken together, labour market policies are constructed upon assumptions about what the world is like and what constitutes a just society.

The pillar concerns the relationship between knowledge, policy instruments, and policy processes. As with the previous pillar, the policy process is not considered a simple matter of design (by politicians and planners) and implementation (by managers and street-level bureaucrats). Instead, organisations and street-level bureaucrats alike can cause deviations from written policies. To theoretically grasp such a situation, I consider three analytical levels: policy, organisation, and profession. These three levels can be interpreted in terms of the medical concepts of diagnosis, inference, and prescription. This medical analogy was popularised by Abbott (1988) in his work on professional knowledge. I argue that the analogy can also be applied to the analysis of written policies and work produced in Human Service Organisations (Hasenfeld, 1983). Politicians, human service organisations and professionals are all *expected* to present a legitimate and reasonable inference that connects a diagnosis with a prescription. In the realm of labour market policies, this involves an explanation of someone's unemployment as well as an intervention for alleviating it.

“Expected” was italicised above to emphasise that prescription does not always follow from inference and diagnosis. Sometimes the prescription is the starting point, with actors having to find new problems that can be targeted with an existing “cure”. Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) discuss such situations in organisational settings and argue that choices (or options) often precede problems. Organisations are in many cases not rational vehicles of collective problem solving, but rather deal with new problems by reusing existing techniques. The authors argue that such situations are more likely to occur in organisations that operate under conflicting preferences and with uncertain technologies. This understanding of problem solving is relevant for three levels discussed in this section. Kingdon (2011) shows that policy processes on the political level occasionally resemble the option-directed mode of problem solving described by Cohen et al. (ibid.), as old solutions are reused to handle new problems. Hasenfeld (1983) explicitly drew from the work of Cohen et al. (ibid.) in developing the concept of Human Service Organisations. He argues that such organisations operate under conditions of insecurity and a changing environment, which they sometimes try to deal with by reusing organisational technologies (described below). In a study of professions, Abbott (1998) shows how professional groups increase their jurisdiction by extending their explanatory models to new areas. The point is that, on all three levels discussed here, solutions occasionally precede problems.

While acknowledging the choice-before-problem approach described above, I must mention that it comes with a caveat. This concerns the risk of making an overly sharp distinction between rational and non-rational decision-making, and assuming that addressing new problems with old solutions is non-rational. Taking a short detour into cognitive sciences and social psychology, we can say that both individuals and groups are more dynamic in their ability to shift between making (seemingly) rational and irrational decisions (Kahneman, 2011; Tindale & Winget, 2019). It is further not always possible to determine which came first: the problem or the solution. There is a risk that one might overemphasise the process that precedes decision making. It is possible to approach the issue of diagnosis, inference, and prescription more pragmatically by looking at the expected outcomes of a prescription, rather than the process that guided actors in their inference. In the end, it is not the intentions but the consequences that matter in political interventions.

Before describing each of the three levels separately, it is necessary to explain the distinction made here between policy, organisation, and profession. The division is motivated by the first and fourth pillars of this chapter. Recalling the previous pillar, it is not necessarily the case that the three levels harmonise, as policy processes are not top-down but rather polycentric. Welfare agencies as well as professionals may intentionally cause policy deviations (for an example, see Rasmussen [2018]). The mechanisms behind these types of processes are further discussed in the fourth pillar.

Looking at the policy level, this concerns the mutual relationship between policy instruments and ideas. The analysis of policy instruments follows Hood and Margetts's (2007) metaphor of a toolkit. Policy instruments, sometimes referred to as policy tools, are techniques or means chosen by politicians or planners within public administration (cf. Howlett, 1991). Hood and Margetts distinguish between detecting tools, that aim to collect information, and effecting tools that are used to influence an outcome. The dissertation focuses on the last-mentioned type of tools, as labour market policies are interventions intended to change the relationship between individuals and the market. Further, Hood and Margetts describes four types of resources: (i) nodality (being in the centre of information exchange), (ii) authority (the power to both enable and limit the actions of individual and collective actors), (iii) treasure (the ability to both collect and spend large amounts of money), and (iv) organisation

(through public administration). Governments use one or several of these resources to intervene in different aspects of social life.

Peters and van Nispen (1998) emphasise the ideological nature of policy instruments. The choice of instrument comes with symbolic values. They exemplify this with the shift from universal to means-tested financial support. This is not merely an administrative or economic redirection, but can also be seen as a shift in the ideological understanding of state and society from emphasising social rights and redistribution to requiring individual responsibility (cf. Rothstein, 1992). This understanding of policy instruments brings us to the role of ideas as understood within discursive institutionalism.

Metha (2011) shows that ideas occur on several levels in policy processes. At the broadest level, there are fundamental and more persistent ideas such as neoliberalism. Looking more closely, day-to-day politics is a struggle over different problem definitions, which stem from the fundamental ideas. Problem definitions, in turn, limit the options that are available when making actual policies. This downward-flow approach to ideas (persistent ideas → problem definition → policy) is not, however, the whole picture. There are also possibilities for upward flows, where consistent policy failures might lead to questioning of the dominating problem definition, which in turn might destabilise the more persistent idea.

As mentioned, policy instruments and ideas are mutually dependent. Politicians and planners within public administration rely on ideas to justify their choice of policy instruments. A historical example is the Social Democratic Party's use of the idea of making the country "a home for all its people" (Sw. *folkhem*) in the late 1920s, which helped the party to widen its political project from class struggle to nation building, and in turn enabled the use of more pragmatic policy tools in relation to owners of capital (Türegün, 2017).

We now turn to the public agencies that operate within the framework of labour market policies. These actors can be understood as Human Service Organisations. Hasenfeld (1983) uses this concept to describe generic features of welfare organisations. What characterises these organisations is that the "raw materials" are human beings rather than objects. Human Service Organisations work through so-called organisational techniques, which are defined as "a set of institutionalized procedures aimed at changing the physical, psychological, social, or cultural attributes of people in order to transform them from a given status to a new prescribed status" (Hasenfeld, 1983: 110). These techniques can be categorised as people

processing, people changing, and people sustaining. People-processing technologies concern the process of categorising people, often with the aim of linking clients with resources. People-changing technologies are interventions aimed at generating change among clients. People-sustaining technologies are used to prevent deterioration of social functioning among clients (Sandfort, 2010; Hasenfeld, 1983). All three techniques are relevant to labour market policies, albeit to different degrees. An example of people processing is the assessment of financial support, where the technique aims to categorise claimants as eligible or non-eligible. The most obvious example of people-changing technologies is active labour market programmes. It is important to stress that change can concern both formal aspects, such as vocational training where participants receive a diploma, and informal aspects, such as altered motivation through workfare. The point is that people-changing technologies within labour market policies consist of a wide range of interventions. The use of people-sustaining technologies seems to be less frequent in labour market policies than the other two types of techniques. But there are examples where work is seen as a technique to prevent deterioration of functions, such as when offering sheltered employment to people whose likelihood of finding ordinary employment is small. In such a situation, providing work might be used to create a sense of “normality”.

Looking at professionalism, its relation to content concerns the relationship between professional knowledge and jurisdiction, as discussed by Abbott (1988). As previously described, he uses the medical analogy of diagnosis, inference, and prescription. Professional groups give different diagnoses to problems based on a specific professional body of knowledge. Using a legal metaphor, *jurisdiction*, Abbott (ibid.) argues that professional groups engage in contests over jurisdiction, or the right to assign problem definitions to both old and new problems. A professional group’s jurisdiction increases when its body of knowledge becomes an accepted explanation of a problem. Abbott (ibid.) exemplifies this by the reframing of personal problems as psychological problems in the early 20th century. This reframing can be understood in relation to the development of the psychiatric profession, which presented a body of knowledge concerned with intra-psychological explanations of personal problem. Because psychiatry was successful in establishing this body of knowledge, previous explanations lost influence. For instance, the religious explanation of personal problems espoused by the clergy became marginalised. Brante (2010) discusses how recent developments within biomedicine have ena-

bled neuropsychiatric knowledge to dominate the *jurisdiction* of personal problems, at the expense of both sociological and psycho-analytical theories. What this example illustrates is that professions offer different diagnoses of why situations occur.

Space

The spatial perspective of the dissertation considers three concepts: territory, scale, and place. Beginning with the former, Taylor (1994) writes that territory concerns the legal division of space into non-intersecting political-administrative units. As such, it also divides people and resources, as the formal institutionalisation of territories distinguishes between who and what are inside or outside a specific territory. The borders of nation states are the most obvious example of territorial divisions, not least in a historical perspective. Through war and negotiations, states seek to expand their territory to secure resources of various kinds. But one can also approach the question of territory on a sub-national level. Following Jessop's (1999) observation of increased emphasis on global competition and the decreased powers of the nation-state in the realm of labour market policies, sub-national differences have become more important in determining people's access to labour market services. In this sense, political interventions do not only reflect people's understandings of space, but also reshape them. Paraphrasing Clarke (2019), social policy both takes and makes place.

There are several territorial divisions. My office is a part of different territories: the municipality of Örebro, Örebro Region, the country of Sweden, and the European Union. This vertical approach to territories calls for an understanding of scale. In political geography, scale relates to levels of responsibility and intervention. As mentioned in the first pillar, public issues are associated with different levels on the political-administrative scale. The associations between issues and levels are dynamic, as they can be changed. This is referred to as rescaling, because previous levels of responsibility and/or interventions are either replaced or supplemented with new ones (Jessop, Brenner & Jones, 2008; Howitt, 1998; Jonas, 1994).

The formal analysis of space, based on the concepts of territory and scale, can be supplemented with the concept of place. Places are institutionalised over time through human interaction. "Institutionalised" must not be mistaken here for the legal institutionalisation of territories. The concept of place concerns how a subsection of space becomes understood

as a place over time (Jessop et al., 2008). This is a dialectic process that occurs between human beings and the physical environment with which they interact. The latter can enhance or hinder the institutionalisation of places. A remote island is an example of the former, where the geographic location is likely to enhance the human understanding of the island as a specific place. Artefacts, such as buildings and documents of various kinds, can also establish or de-establish the sense of a place. Statues and historical museums are artefacts that can enhance the institutionalisation of places. Returning to the example of the remote island, transportation infrastructure, such as a bridge or ferry, connects the island to other places which over time might enhance mobility and weaken the sense of place of the island.

The three concepts can be combined to further enhance the analysis of space (cf. Jessop et al., 2008). One aspect is the dialectical relationship between the sense of place and territorialisation. For instance, the historical re-territorialisation processes of municipalities, described in chapter three, are likely to have affected people's experience of pre-existing places. The relocation of public services to central parts of the new municipality meant that prior places of service provision lost their significance over time. On the other hand, strong affinities with existing places can also drive resistance to re-territorialisation (Ahlberger & Åberg, 2014). The process of rescaling can also enhance an understanding of place. In a historical perspective, the creation of nation states, through agreements such as the Treaty of Westphalia, is probably the most significant form of rescaling, as it establishes the idea of nations as specific places where people share a national identity beyond their family, clan, and local community (Falk, 2002).

Time

The last pillar concerns issues of stability and change in labour market policies. It is well known that labour markets change over time. Long-term changes come with altered modes of production caused by processes such as global competition and the introduction of new technologies. More sudden changes follow from financial crises and pandemics. These two processes, labour market policies and labour markets, are connected. On the one hand, politicians and organisations within the public administration of labour market policies react to changes in labour markets. On the other hand, labour markets change because of labour market policies.

However, labour market policies are also affected by a range of factors outside of the labour market which also must be taken into consideration.

The temporal dimension, described in this pillar, is grounded on scholarly inquiries into the continuity and change of institutions. It includes an understanding of formal institutions in politics and within organisations, but also of informal institutions on public, political, and organisational levels. As such, the pillar synthesises literature from different strands of research to formulate theoretical tools to analyse the temporal aspects of labour market policies. This synthesis relates to previous attempts to build bridges between different theories of institutional continuity and change (Peters 2019; Scott, 2014; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Schmidt, 2008; Hall & Taylor, 1996).

Defined broadly, institutions are patterns of interaction that structure society. As such they limit and enable collective and individual action. These patterns are stable, but not immune to change (Peters, 2019; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Institutions can be divided into formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions are regulated elements, including public organisations as well as explicit rules, such as laws in the political realm and formal rules within organisations. Informal institutions are cultural expectations that stem from sources such as ideas and norms.

The distinction between formal and informal institutions opens up institutional analysis to the possibility of loose couplings between the two types of institutions. This aspect of institutions has been thoroughly discussed in the analysis of organisations. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that the actual work carried out in many organisations deviates from the formalised procedures. Put differently, the informal and formal institutions are loosely coupled. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) extend this observation to policy processes, arguing that changes in this realm are not always caused by changes of formal institutions (such as reforms) but rather by changes in informal institutions. We will return to such processes; the point so far is just that written policies and their enactment need not necessarily harmonise.

Human interactions, such as policy processes, take place against the backdrop of existing institutions. Social structures are continuously produced and reproduced through individual and organisational actors' compliance with and resistance to these institutions. This understanding of institutions has both theoretical and meta-theoretical consequences for the dissertation. The latter will be discussed in the following chapter. In terms of theoretical consequences, the issue of time becomes central. As institu-

tions are stable, they tend to be reinforced, thereby creating path-dependent processes. This phenomenon was first elucidated within economics and the study of private companies (Arthur, 1994); however, social scientists in other disciplines have demonstrated its usefulness for understanding political processes (Pierson, 2004). Changing to a new path means reinvesting money, time, learning, and coordination; while staying on a path gives increasing returns. Regarding formal institutions, replacing old ones comes with great costs in terms of reorganising an organisation or even a whole state. When it comes to informal institutions, the impact of history is manifested in cultural resistance to change. Organisations as well as individuals may appear to have adapted to changes in formal structure, for instance the introduction of new administrative routines, yet still work in accordance with previous institutions. Summing up so far, the idea underlying path dependency is that the stability of both formal and informal institutions stems from the cost of replacing them. In terms of time, path dependency rests on the assumption that early choices restrict the options available when making later choices (Mahoney, 2000).

While both formal and informal institutions are generally resistant to change, in accordance with the argument of path dependency, this does not mean that institutions are immune to change. Existing institutions can be destabilised, a process which can have either endogenous or exogenous causes, i.e. the pressure to change can come from inside or outside a system (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Streeck & Thelén, 2005). States can experience endogenous pressure through public dissatisfaction with policies or dysfunctional public administration. Exogenous pressure can come from standards set by supranational organisations as well as increased international competition. These are examples of causes for changes in national regulations. On the organisational level, exogenous pressure might come from legal changes, while examples of endogenous pressure are poor working environment as well as changes in managerial practice.

The distinction between endogenous and exogenous can be supplemented with another dimension, namely the type of pressure, regarding which I distinguish between performance and legitimacy. Beginning with performance, pressure for institutional change can be caused by inefficiency. The repeated use of devaluation policies by Swedish governments after the oil crises in the 1970s (see chapter three) was questioned due to its inability to generate long-term stability (Bergh, 2014). While performance is an important source of institutional change, legitimacy is also important, as is emphasised in scholarly work on institutions within both sociology (Scott,

2014) and political science (March & Olsen, 1989). Both streams of research emphasise actors' and organisations' struggle for legitimacy in pursuing their goals. If the legitimacy of an institution is questioned, actors may have to consider changing it, even though the questioned institutions are still as productive as they were before.

Combining the two dimensions endogenous/exogenous and performance/legitimacy, we get four types of pressure for institutional change, as illustrated in figure one:

		Type of pressure	
		Legitimacy	Performance
Source of pressure	Exogenous	<u>International reputation</u> <i>Public moral outrage</i>	<u>Global competition</u> <i>Changes in labour markets</i>
	Endogenous	<u>Limited public support</u> <i>Limited support from employees</i>	<u>Demands for increased salaries</u> <i>Insufficient staffing</i>

Figure 1. Typology of origins to institutional change

The underlined texts are examples of causes of change on the national level, while the italicised text concerns the organisational level. It must be stressed that one type of cause can generate a chain of additional pressures to change. For instance, poor working environment can reduce the efficacy of a public agency (endogenous performance), which means that clients receive lower quality services. This can lead to public protests (exogenous legitimacy) that eventually can result in political interventions such as regulation of the work environment (exogenous performance).

Mahoney and Thelen (2010) discuss how institutional change can occur despite the relative stability of institutions. They suggest four types of institutional change, which are presented in table two. This conceptualisation is used to analyse formal institutions; however, as will become appar-

ent, it is also relevant to understanding informal institutions. Displacement means that new institutions replace existing ones. Such processes are likely to take place not least in situations of dramatically enhanced pressure, such as the changes in monetary policies in Sweden during the 1991 financial crisis (see chapter three). Layering involves making an addition or amendment to existing institutions and thereby changing their way of functioning. One example, discussed in chapters three and eight, is the layering of national social insurance schemes “on top” of poor relief during the 20th century. Even though poor relief exists even today, relabelled as social assistance, its logic has changed because of the national layer of financial support. Drift occurs when institutions remain intact but exogenous changes alter their impact. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue that drift might take place due to political inability, but also as a political strategy. One example of policy drift is the Social Democratic interpretation of the work-ethos. Financial support, in cases of unemployment, has continued to rely on insurance while possibility of pursuing full employment has drastically changed within the post-industrial economy that has emerged from the 1980s and onwards, as discussed in chapter eight. Finally, conversion takes place when institutions are reinterpreted. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue that policies are converted when actors fill existing formal institutions with new content (ibid.). It is here that we return to informal institutions and loose couplings. Change through conversion is often not visible when solely analysing formal institutions. Instead, change takes place as actors deviate from formal institutions.

	Displacement	Layering	Drift	Conversion
Removal of old rules	Yes	No	No	No
Neglect of old rules	-	No	Yes	No
Changed impact/enactment of old rules	-	No	Yes	Yes
Introduction of new rules	Yes	Yes	No	No

Table 2. *Types of institutional change. From Mahoney & Thelen (2010, p. 16)*

Structure, content, space, and time – an emerging synthesis

So far, the pillars have been described separately. The analysis of labour market policies can be enhanced by combining the pillars. Political efforts to reduce unemployment are organised in some way (*Structure*), rely on (sometimes tacit) assumptions about how to approach unemployment (*Content*), and are embodied in a place that is predefined by current terri-

torial divisions and political scales (*Space*). These features (*Structure, Content, and Space*) of the efforts have a pre-history with formal and informal institutions that enable and limit the scope for action (*Time*). The remainder of the chapter discusses some of the potential theoretical synergies that come from combining the pillars.

Taken together, space and time offer a context for understanding why labour market policies fail or succeed. As places differ in terms of labour markets and population, one type of policy is likely to give different results in different locations of implementation. The path dependency of public organisations means that policies might not be revised or adapted to the new context, which relates to the pillar of content. It is a matter of matching the approach to unemployment that is inherent in a policy (*Content*) to the time and place of implementation. We can look at policies intended to create disincentives for receiving financial support by increasing job search requirements. Such policies are likely to be less effective during periods of low demand, such as financial crises, than in periods when the economy is growing, as the sudden rise in unemployment is more likely to be generated by fewer employment opportunities than by changed collective preferences regarding paid labour.

The possibility to match content and context is moderated by factors relating to structure – sometimes in tandem with space and time. Continuing with the example of job search requirements, there might be insufficient coordination between involved agencies. One organisation might administer payments while another is responsible for active labour market policies. Introducing job search requirements in such a setting can be difficult. There may be legal obstacles to inter-agency coordination due to confidentiality requirements, or heavy caseloads may cause agencies to deviate from the stipulated assessment procedure in order to avoid delayed payments. There can be space-related issues that affect the preconditions for coordination between agencies. Smaller municipalities are more likely to have fewer street-level bureaucrats, which might increase the reliance on personal relationships between agencies – a reliance that can both enable and prevent coordination according to the quality of these relationships. In larger municipalities, agencies might need to rely on standardised procedures to collaborate as they have higher numbers of staff. Looking at the institutional aspects associated with the time pillar, there might be cultural resistance among street-level bureaucrats to introducing sanctions if such a practice deviates from their professional ethical code. Such resistance can result in policy drift, where job search requirements are reduced to lip

service, as the policy approach relies on street-level bureaucrats to function.

6. Metatheory, data, and methods

This chapter consists of three parts. The first introduces the meta-theoretical assumptions that underpin the dissertation. The second concerns research design, including collection and analysis of data, as well as quality assessment. The chapter is ended with a discussion of research ethics.

Meta-theoretical assumptions

The dissertation is situated within a broad approach to conducting social scientific inquiry referred to as realism. This approach can be distinguished from empiricism as well as from (more far-reaching forms of) social constructionism. In relation to empiricism, realism questions the possibility of non-theory-laden scientific inquiry. It also acknowledges the need to include unobservable aspects of reality in social science. In relation to social constructionism, realism rejects the conflation between what the world is like (ontology) and the possibility for human enquiry to gain knowledge about the world (epistemology). While realism acknowledges ontological reality, as a scientific approach it accepts epistemological relativity. There are different interpretations that diverge in how they elaborate on these core assumptions of realism (e.g., Little, 2016; Maxwell, 2012; Shapiro, 2005; Sayer, 2000; Layder, 2006). Given the limited space, the dissertation will not be positioned in detail in relation to these interpretations. Instead, I will discuss my analytical approach in relation to meta-theoretical discussions within social sciences.

A realist approach assumes that there is no one correct perspective on reality. This assumption follows from the emphasis on separating ontology and epistemology. Human inquiry is theory-laden, i.e. guided by representations of what the world is like. However, this assumption does not mean that all representations are equally good. As Blumer points out:

... the empirical world can ‘talk back’ to our pictures of it or assertions about it-talk back in the sense of challenging and resisting, or not bending to, our images or conceptions of it. This resistance gives the empirical world an obdurate character that is the mark of reality... Fundamentally, empirical science is an enterprise that seeks to develop images and conceptions that can successfully handle and accommodate the resistance offered by the

empirical world under study. (Blumer, 1986/1969, pp. 22-23)

I take Blumer to mean that even though there are different interpretations of social processes (i.e. reality), they are not all equally accurate. As a concrete example, we can look at the question of labour-market attachment among people born outside of Sweden, which is lower than among people born in Sweden. In brief, there are two proposed causes of this situation: (i) a mismatch between the human capital of these individuals and the skills demanded by employers, and (ii) racism among employers (Hammarstedt, 2019). This type of question can be assessed against empirical evidence. For instance, the influence of racism can be assessed experimentally through fictive job applications that systematically distinguish between applicants with migrant and non-migrant backgrounds. Similarly, we can estimate the change in financial support spending after introducing mandatory activation by comparing areas where such measures have been introduced with areas where they have not been introduced (Persson & Vikman, 2010).

While acknowledging the ability to assess theories, realistic approaches to social sciences also emphasise the need for contextual awareness. There are limits in generalisability, which follow from the critique of the empiricist reliance on Humean causality, that is, constant conjunctions between cause and effect. There are regularities in social processes; however, they depend on complex interactions between people, institutions, and the physical environment (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010; Sayer, 2000). Generalisations must be based on careful consideration of contextual differences in space and time. For instance, an active labour market policy delivered in a city during an economic boom is likely to generate different outcomes than if it is delivered in a rural setting during an economic decline. This is not primarily a methodological question of introducing additional variables, but concerns a more in-depth and theory-laden consideration of when and how regularities arise (cf. Pawson & Tilley, 1997). It is important to stress that realism does not oppose the deductive inference commonly associated with statistical testing of hypotheses. Rather, it opposes the elevated position that deductive inference through large-N quantitative analysis holds among empiricists, by arguing that such methods are only one type of tool in a larger kit of methods. In paper III, the analytical approach clearly resembles the deductive one, as it is based on test-

ing hypotheses. I will return to this issue when discussing the use of mixed methods.

The attentive reader will have noticed that I used “assess” rather than “test” when discussing generalisations and contextual differences. Not all questions investigated by social scientists are as clearly testable, in quantitative terms, as the example of migrants’ labour-market attachment. For instance, consider the theoretical elaboration in paper I. Analyses based on ideal types, such as modes of governance, often require more in-depth qualitative approaches. Nevertheless, recalling Blumer, we can assess to what extent ideal types, or other theoretical frameworks, helps us to explain reality.

A complicating factor is what Giddens (1984) refers to as double hermeneutics. He argues that social science concepts and lay language mutually influence each other. Social scientists cannot isolate themselves from social interaction; they do not approach social action as a specimen to be observed from the outside. Rather, they use “second-order concepts” as analytical grids to understand human interaction. These concepts, or grids, are not however part of a distinct vocabulary exclusively accessible by scholars. Scholars rely on the same linguistic resources that are available for lay people. And, considering the mutual influence, second-order concepts can become part of lay language over time, further enhancing the blurred lines between social science and its study objects. Theorising must accordingly be sensitive to individual experiences, contextual circumstances, and the institutions studied.

The topic of this dissertation, political efforts to reduce unemployment, is somewhat of a go-to example for demonstrating the existence of multiple representations of reality (cf. Bacchi, 2009; Pohl & Walther, 2007; Weir, 1992). As discussed as part of the pillar called *Content* in the theoretical framework, active labour market policies are grounded on (sometimes implicit) assumptions about what causes and decreases unemployment. Considering the many possible descriptions of reality, and the double hermeneutics, social scientists studying active labour market policies should reflect on how they conceptualise unemployment. My own approach has been to adopt an agnostic stance on this issue. I did not have any ready-made answer to unemployment when I began the project, nor do I have a clear answer as I arrive at the end of it. My intention has been to describe representations that occur in the collected data, as well as in previous literature, and to discuss them in chapter eight. Because the ques-

tions discussed here tap into issues of ideology, I will return to this matter when discussing ethical considerations.

When it comes inference, it is common in realism to rely on abductive inference. I follow Timmermans and Tavory's understanding of abduction, which considers theorising an "ongoing pragmatic process of 'puzzling out' and problem solving that draws on existing ways of understanding what the phenomenon 'is a case of'" (2012, p. 167). Social scientists do not face reality from the point of view of a *tabula rasa* (cf. inductive inference, *ibid.*) but are inevitably guided by existing theories. On the other hand, social scientists can utilise their theoretical imagination to combine or add theoretical elements not initially considered. This ability to use theoretical imagination can serve as an argument against the empiricist reliance on solely testing hypotheses inferred a priori from an explicit theoretical framework (cf. deductive inference, *ibid.*).

My reliance on abductive reasoning is most clearly apparent in paper I and in the final discussion in the summary (chapter eight). As stated in paper I, I came to conceptualise the studied programme as a case of collaboration concerned with modes of governance when reanalysing the data after reporting the initial evaluation. The theoretical basis for the initial evaluation is programme theory (cf. Funnell & Rogers, 2011) and focuses on what makes people more likely to find employment. The analysis in the evaluation has influenced the theoretical elaboration of content (pillar two) in chapter five. It was not used for paper I, however. Instead, the theoretical framework for paper I was developed in parallel with the writing of the first pillar, on structure, in the fifth chapter. This process illustrates the possibility of a dialectical process between theory and data advocated by proponents of abductive reasoning.

Abductive reasoning was also important when writing paper II. The survey used for collecting data comprises a broad range of issues. Questions were formulated based on different perspectives, such as street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010/1980), prior conceptualisations of collaboration (Germundsson, Hillborg & Danermark, 2011; Axelsson & Bihari Axelsson, 2006), and social representations (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Another source of inspiration for the questions came from the collection and early analysis of qualitative data. Some of the questions were not clearly founded on previous theory or the fieldwork, but were suggested during discussions between myself and my co-authors. These discussions were informal and grew out of our differing work-life experiences (I will return to my work-life experience at the end of the chapter) as well as prior re-

search. This mixed approach to coming up with questions can be viewed in the light of Swedberg's (2016) appeal for social scientists to use their imagination when generating new hypotheses, which is also based on the tradition of abductive reasoning.

Multi-level analysis of human action

The dissertation adopts a multi-level approach to social scientific inquiry, one that is opposed to reductively analysing social processes solely in terms of individual actions. Such reduction is often referred to as methodological individualism – a label that sometimes confuses ontology and methodology. Following the realist approach, I will not discuss the ontological foundation. My opposition to methodological individualism concerns the methodological limitation of only looking at individual action (Epstein, 2015; Lukes, 1969). While rejecting the sole reliance on individual action, I also oppose over-emphasising structural or functional explanations where individual agency is downplayed, or even ignored, and priority is given to norms or some other social entity (Wrong, 1961). Rather than engaging in an over-simplified discussion about whether individuals can affect the outcome of situations, we can ask: In what kinds of situations are individuals likely to affect the outcomes? Such a reflection, given the realism orientation presented above, should take into account how theoretical concepts view the autonomy of actors. As observations are theory-laden, the choice of theoretical concepts affects scholars' possibility to detect human agency.

The institutional perspective described in the pillar Time in the theoretical framework acknowledges that human action takes place against the backdrop of informal institutions, i.e. shared ideas or frames. As elaborated by Schmidt (2008), this assumption does not mean that individuals comply with a uniform set of institutions. Society consists of multiple conflicting institutions. These conflicts enable human agency, as actors can use ideas strategically (cf. Carstensen, 2011). Returning to the topic of the dissertation, one example of such a conflict is that between the idea of a human right to receive financial support and the idea that recipients must do something in return to be eligible for it. As active labour market policies draw on elements from both institutional logics (cf. Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012), politicians, as well as managers and street-level bureaucrats, can use them strategically in interactions with other actors. When observing meetings, I recognised this type of strategic use of institutions. For instance, conflicts seemed to arise between the idea of keeping

people occupied (Sw. sysselsatta), to avoid “passive” recipients of social assistance, and the idea of lock-in effects, i.e. that programme participation delays labour market entry, as participants focus on taking part in the programme rather than finding employment. Based on this conflict, members of the steering committee and the project team took different positions on questions concerning the programme. The point here is that the existence of multiple conflicting and often ambiguous institutions does not yield clear answers on how to solve difficult questions, which leaves room for individuals to use these ambiguities strategically.

The inclusion of space in the theoretical framework calls for an understanding of how interactions are mediated by the local institutional setting. Thornton et al. (2012) point to the influence of meso levels, such as organisations, when analysing micro-interactions. As municipalities differ in their interpretation of national legislation, and therefore also in how they frame active labour market policies (Jacobsson et al., 2017; Bergmark et al., 2017), it is likely that these interpretations result in different formal institutional settings on municipal level. One example, discussed in paper I, concerns how the Social Assistance Office and the Labour Market Office are included in the same administrative branch (Sw. förvaltning) as adult education and Swedish for immigrants. In chapter eight, the formal-bureaucratic aspects of this organisation are discussed. But it is also likely to make the idea of connecting financial support and active labour market policies with education more obvious than in municipalities where social assistance is categorized as a matter of social services more generally (together with casework focused on matters such as addiction and child welfare). While local institutional configurations must be acknowledged, it is important not to forget that there is still room for institutional conflict. Social workers might rely on institutional logics that stem from other sources, such as the law or professional representations.

Other theoretical concepts used in the dissertation are in line with the middle position between methodological individualism and structuralism, or rather the rejection of relying on only one of these approaches to understanding human action. Both social representations and street-level bureaucracy consider how human action and institutions are entangled. Social representations take place against the backdrop of both formal and informal institutions. In a similar vein as Schmidt's (2008) and Carstensen's (2011) discussions about conflicting institutions, Jovchelovitch (2007) uses the concept of cognitive polyphasia to direct our attention to the incongruent representations that guide human interaction (see paper

II). Concerning street-level bureaucrats, several scholars (e.g., Lipsky, 2010/1980; Zacka, 2017; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000, 2003) show that they possess a repertoire of strategies that can be used differently depending on the situation at hand. Street-level bureaucrats in seemingly similar situations can choose different strategies, which illustrates Lipsky's point concerning the difficulty of taking a top-down approach to policy implementation.

Summing up so far, I argue that theoretical perspectives differ in how they guide human action. This dissertation uses perspectives that acknowledge both agency and the influence of meso and macro levels in the analysis of social interaction. The autonomy of politicians, managers and street-level bureaucrats is circumscribed by cultural expectations, which generates stability in public agencies. This stability makes meso levels, such as organisations (as actors), important study objects for social science. However, as expectations can come into conflict, there is a degree of individual agency (Casasnovas & Ventresca, 2019).

Hitherto, we have looked at the role of theory when considering social action. But the methodological approach also affects the possibility of detecting these aspects (Zilber, 2020; Casasnovas & Ventresca, 2019). There is a trade-off between the number of levels or issues investigated and the depth of the investigation. Increasing the number of levels or issues covered is likely to decrease the analytical depth achieved when looking at each separate level or issue. More specifically, had I only used interviews and observations, I would have been able to discover more nuances of collaboration between the local actors. Instead, I have chosen to look at fairly many issues, which is manifested in the breadth of the theoretical framework and the different empirical levels (including the historical review). The downside of this choice is that some issues, such as the role of individuals, are analysed more superficially. The analysis focuses on organisations, mainly municipalities and their sub-organisations, to which I will return. Again, the analytical scope does not mean that I question the influence of individual agency; my point is just that my choice of method and theory affects the possibility of discussing this influence in the dissertation.

One example where methodology limits the scope for detecting human agency is the analysis in paper II. It looks at two variables: organisational affiliation (Social Assistance Officer vs. Public Employment Service Officer) and education (social worker vs. non-social worker). This implies that the surveyed street-level bureaucrats are of four different types:

	Non-social worker	Social worker
Social Assistance Officer		
Public Employment Service Officer		

Figure 2. Conceptual division of respondents in paper II.

The limitation of the described approach is that it seems to imply that all variation can be explained by these four types; i.e. that all individuals of the same type share one single representation of unemployment. But looking at the theoretical elaboration in the paper, it is obvious that this stems from methodological limitations rather than my and my co-author's view of reality. The methodological limitation is a product of the limited length of journal articles and analytical depth of quantitative methods. This is more or less a persistent problem in social scientific inquiries, as there will always be unexplained variation. Further, it calls for situating individual articles in relation to previous research. In this sense, paper II can be seen as one piece of the puzzle of learning about how street-level bureaucrats working with active labour market policies conceptualise unemployment and to what extent such conceptualisations differ because of educational background or professional and occupational affiliation.

To sum up, I approach labour market policies as a multi-level phenomenon that is affected by history, space, and involved actors. Looking at the papers in the dissertation, the order represents a process of gradually "zooming out" in terms of analytical scope. The PhD project started with an in-depth case study (paper I). The study of social representations (paper II) enables a deeper understanding of the cultural institutional setting by studying social representations held by street-level bureaucrats. The comparative study of municipalities (paper III) situates the case study in a

macro perspective. And adding to the papers, the historical review gives an understanding of historical processes that lay bare both the continuity and change in current labour market policies.

Research design

The three papers utilise different data sources. Paper I includes primary data gathered through interviews, observations of meetings, and collecting documents. Paper II also analyses primary data, collected via a cross-sectional survey. Paper III analyses secondary data on municipalities collected by public agencies. The methods of collecting and analysing data are presented in the separate papers and will not be repeated here. Rather, I will discuss the use of mixed methods as I have drawn on all three papers when making the dissertation.

The dialectics of mixed methods

As shown by Ragin (1987), social scientific inquiry is a trade-off between studying one or a few cases closely and comparing many cases more generally. The combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse data, referred to as a mixed-methods approach, is used both to achieve depth and to discern regularities. Maxwell and Mittapalli (2010) argue that, from a realist perspective on social sciences, mixing methods makes it possible to utilise different modes of inquiry to enable a richer understanding of a studied phenomenon. Qualitative methods offer a more in-depth understanding of social processes, while quantitative methods can be used to understand regularities. Recalling the realist approach to causality, regularities do not equate with constant conjunctions, or general laws, but rather are patterns of behaviour that occur in certain contexts. Relying on different modes of inquiry has guided my work with the dissertation, as the different methods offered different insights into political interventions concerned with unemployment.

Paper I is a case study that illustrates the potential tensions between individual and organisational actors involved in developing and implementing local labour market policies. The method enabled a more in-depth understanding of the local context, in which labour market policies take form, in terms of formal institutions. For instance, it demonstrated the tension between reducing social assistance spending and reducing unemployment.

The case study was beneficial as it offered new ideas on how to understand labour market policies. One example is the possibility of overcoming

ing, or at least decreasing, the institutional boundaries between labour market policies and education, when the former are designed and delivered by municipalities (I return to this issue in the final discussion). Had I only used a quantitative approach, I might have missed this aspect of labour market policies. This brings us back to questions concerning double hermeneutics and the institutionalisation of public services. In Sweden, issues regarding labour market policies and education are, with some exceptions, kept separate. As scholar, one easily reproduces this division when researching labour market policies. Using qualitative methods, I was able to notice the possibility to deinstitutionalise this divide.

Paper II is itself a mixed-methods paper, and illustrates the theoretical elaboration proposed in the paper. As single paper, it illustrates the potential benefits of mixing methods, as mentioned by Maxwell and Mittapalli (2010), that come from establishing a dialogue between the different methods and a theoretical framework. In relation to the dissertation, paper II brings an enhanced understanding of the informal institutions within which individual and organisational actors operate. The quantitative method enabled a breadth of surveyed population, while the qualitative method supplemented this with its understanding of the institutional context.

Read as a single article, paper III can be categorized as “variable oriented”, i.e. as testing a dependent variable against one or several independent variables with a focus on co-variation (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). As already discussed, a realistic orientation does not necessarily reject this use of a quantitative method; however, such an orientation is critical of relying solely on this method. In hindsight, I see some limitations with paper III, which can be viewed in the light of this discussion. One limitation concerns the dependent variable. The paper investigates the relation between characteristics of municipalities (the independent variables) and the reach of municipal active labour market policy (dependent variable). A limitation of this approach, which has also been used in previous studies (e.g., Vikmand & Westerberg, 2017; Lundin, 2007), is that it does not consider alternative municipal responses to the challenges (some would say problems) that arise from Sweden’s fragmented labour market policies. For instance, some municipalities might attempt to enhance collaboration with the Public Employment Office rather than developing municipal activation programmes. Another limitation of the regression approach in paper III is that it seeks to develop a single model to predict municipalities with greater reach of policy. One could consider more complex interac-

tions between features of municipalities. For instance, there may be clusters of municipalities that cannot be detected through regression analysis. I consider the mentioned limitations of paper III as an argument for the realist suggestion of relying on additional methods to study complex social phenomenon. The limitations do not mean that the findings of paper III are without relevance, but rather that they must be considered in relation to the rest of the dissertation and previous literature. For instance, the influence of a municipality's area and population density found in the paper can be viewed in relation to the historical discussion of municipal reforms reviewed in chapter three.

Taken together, the use of mixed methods has enabled me to examine labour market policies in terms of both depth and regularities. The choice of mixing methods can be considered in the light of the multi-level approach discussed in the previous section. By combining different methods for data collection, and different analytical levels, my intention has been to move beyond the specific organisation that I studied initially (paper I) by situating it in historical, institutional, and geographical perspectives.

Quality of the study

In this section, I discuss the quality of the study. From a realist approach to social science, quality can be considered in terms of both assessing the procedure and considering to what extent the knowledge produced can be generalized to other contexts. The latter relates to the above-mentioned critique of Humean causality, which underpins empiricism, as well as the limitation of solely relying on variable-oriented methods. Social interaction occurs in a specific place at a certain time. This complexity limits the possibility of making confident empirical generalisations within social sciences (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010). Phrased differently, realist approaches often question the empiricist reliance on external validity as a measure of scientific quality. An alternative approach is analytical generalisation, which situates empirical findings in theory. By careful assessment, scholars can consider to what extent findings are applicable to other contexts or situations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

In relation to the dissertation, the realist scepticism towards external validity relates to the well-documented inter-municipal differences in active labour market policies (Jacobsson et al., 2017; Bergmark et al., 2017). These differences mean that findings in one municipality do not necessarily apply to other municipalities. One example, to which I return in chapter eight, is the sorting of tasks into administrative branches. Looking at the

case study, the sorting of social assistance administration, active labour market policies, and adult education, into the same branch enabled co-ordination of resources between these tasks. In municipalities where these three tasks are divided into different branches, the possibilities for co-ordination are likely to be different. Additionally, municipalities differ in size, labour market, and demographics all of which, as discussed in paper III, generate different conditions for delivering programmes. Taken together, these differences illustrate the limitation of assessing external validity. Looking at paper I, it presents one response to a situation which the studied municipality shares with other municipalities: bearing the financial responsibility for social assistance spending, facing a changing labour market in terms of both supply and demand, as well having to adapt to national frameworks. Similarly, it does not describe all cases of collaboration, but rather presents a theoretical elaboration on how one might approach other cases of collaboration, specifically through the modes of governance.

My intention with the case study procedure was to rely on multiple sources of qualitative data. The justification of this strategy lies in the increasing possibility to understand different perspectives and possible conflicts that may occur in the programme. Because I interviewed most of the central actors, as well as observed meetings, I was able to consider the programme from different perspectives. A limitation is the absence of interviews with politicians serving on the board, considering their formal and informal influence on the programme. I distributed a short survey to all members of the board, which in hindsight was too blunt of an instrument, because it left me without an opportunity to ask follow-up questions. Conducting interviews might have further enhanced my understanding of the programme.

The quantitative analysis in paper II concerns twelve municipalities. Returning to the local variation of municipal labour market policies, surveying other municipalities might have yielded different results. This selection calls for careful interpretation of the findings. There is also a methodological limitation with the paper, which concerns the small number of respondents per municipality. As some municipalities only had one or two Social Assistance Officers, there are methodological limitations concerning the possibility to analyse representations by comparing the municipalities in which various Social Assistance Officers worked. If I were designing a new study, I would consider including municipalities that employ larger numbers of Social Assistance Officers to enable a multi-level approach

with the ability to control for which municipality respondents work in. Such an approach would fit better with the theoretical elaboration in the paper, considering its emphasis on representations within organisations.

A limitation of the analytical approach used for the quantitative analysis of social representations in paper II concerns the influence of my co-authors and I when coding the respondents' associations. We were not able to validate our coding with the respondents. Our strategy for increasing the validity was to continuously discuss the recoding of associations while analysing the data. Furthermore, the coding was done while making interviews with street-level bureaucrats, managers, and programme participants, which helped us situate the associations within the respondents' practice.

I have already discussed limitations of paper III in terms of the dependent variable as well as the analytic strategy. The paper also contains a discussion about the selection of dependent variables. Rather than repeating these discussions, I conclude by once again acknowledging the need to consider paper III as a map for further investigations rather than a final answer to what causes the differences between municipalities.

Ethical considerations

This last part of the chapter discusses ethical considerations regarding the research for the dissertation. It is my assessment that the data reported in the dissertation, including its papers, is fairly uncontroversial compared to social work research in general. Hence, I will devote less space to discussing the ethical aspects of collecting data, and more to positioning the project and myself in relation to research ethics.

The project, including the evaluation, involved conducting interviews with programme participants. These interviews dealt in part with personal information, not least concerning personal background and family situation (the latter motivated by the municipal interest in reducing childhood poverty). Before the project began, ethical approval was granted by the Regional Ethical board in Uppsala (2016/423 EPN). All interviewees, both programme participants and employees in the municipalities and at the Public Employment Service, were informed about the project. I informed them that participation in the interviews was voluntary, and they could end their participation at any time.

Concerning the observation of meetings, I initially presented the project, including the method, to both the steering committee and the project team. No participants expressed any discomfort about having me there. It

was my impression that most participants looked forward to learning more through the evaluation. In this sense, the evaluation seemed to legitimise my presence at the meetings.

The survey data, analysed in paper II, was collected through a web-based questionnaire using software available at Örebro University (Survey & Report, delivered by Artologik) which guaranteed that the survey was collected as safely as possible in terms of data protection. All respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary.

Positioning the project and myself

Academic freedom is generally highly regarded within academia as well as among politicians (Wäscher & Deplazes-Zemp, 2020; Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research, 2020). From this perspective, scholars ought to be autonomous in choosing research questions, methods, and so on. Such autonomy places high demands on the institutional framework both around and inside academic institutions, for instance in terms of funding and management systems. The reality of research often deviates from the ideal picture. Scholars are restricted in several ways for a number of reasons, one of which is the ambition to make research relevant to society. This ambition is manifested in the assumption that research ought to produce answers to questions of how to improve society (Wäscher & Deplazes-Zemp, 2020). Few are opposed to “improvements” as such. The question, though, is how do we assess what counts as an improvement? This issue can be seen in the light of what the Swedish philosopher Lars Gustafsson (1989) referred to as, the “privilege of formulating the problem” (Sw. Problemformuleringsprivilegiet). He exemplifies this with a crowded restaurant:

The host faces us, and regretfully explains

Sorry, there are too many guests tonight.

But what if we then responded that the problem is not the number of guests, but that

There is a shortage of chairs in the restaurant.

– The guest and the host agree about the existence of a problem. Objectively, something is not coming together; the desire of the guest does not match the abilities of the host.

What is incompatible is not the awareness of a problem – but rather the co-existing interpretations of what is problematic about the problem. (Translation of Gustafsson, L. 1989, pp. 40–41. Italics in original)

Each framing of the problem also carries a solution – either reduce the number of guest or increase the number of chairs.

To some extent, the case of political interventions to reduce unemployment resembles the example of the crowded restaurant. Is the problem that active labour market policies are too ineffective to mend the gap between supply and demand? Or is it that financial assistance creates disincentives to work? Or, perhaps the problem concerns more systemic issues inherit in capitalism and the reliance on paid labour. These are just three of many possible ways to define the problem of unemployment. What distinguishes the restaurant example from labour market policies is the substantially greater complexity of the latter. This complexity is manifested in the many gaps in our knowledge about present policies and the future of the labour market. To begin with, we still have limited knowledge about the effects of labour market policies (Panican & Ulmestig, 2017a; SCB, 2018). Some argue that universal basic income, an unconditional financial support, ought to replace the current activation paradigm (Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017; Standing, 2011b). But we do not know what the long-term consequences of this will be in terms of legitimacy and moral hazard. Looking even further into the future, we do not know how increasing automatisisation, through artificial intelligence, will affect the labour market. These are just three of many areas where we lack substantive knowledge. Another aspect is that the different ways of defining the problem (and thereby the solution) rely on different ideological assumptions regarding issues such as the balance between individual and collective responsibility, the balance between national sovereignty and international solidarity, and freedom of the market, to name just a few.

Taken together, the analysis of labour market policies is unavoidably positioned in relation to a range of issues connected with formal institutions, ideological considerations, and uncertainties. Regarding my project, one aspect that must be taken into consideration is that my research position was co-funded by a municipality. The agreement between the municipality and the university was conditional, as I had to make an evaluation of the programme studied in paper I. I will soon describe the relation between the municipality and myself. But staying with the question of analysing labour market policies, the funding agreement restricted me, as I needed to devote a substantial amount of my time to collecting and ana-

lysing data for the evaluation. Even though this did not stop me from widening the scope of the dissertation, it would have been too time consuming not to use the collected data from the evaluation.

The municipality's interest in funding my PhD came from its wish to evaluate the programme (again studied in paper I). Municipal managers had expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the programme, in terms of the extent to which participants found employment after completing the programme. The evaluation was expected to assess the effectiveness as well as give more general recommendations on how to improve the programme. The assessment was expected to describe the programme's effectiveness in quantitative terms. However, during the initial period of planning the evaluation I realised that staff at the Social Assistance Office and the Labour Market Office (both municipal organisations) were monitoring former participants. After expressing my concern about the risk of a third party (me) doing the same thing, my contact person at the municipality approved my suggestion that in conducting the evaluation I should focus on the process rather than the outcome. This example illustrates the relatively autonomy I was given during the evaluation. In hindsight, changing the direction of the evaluation also changed the direction of the dissertation. Had I focused on evaluating the outcome, the dissertation would probably be narrower in scope. With the processual focus, I was able to use data from the evaluation as a case study, which served as a starting point for the dissertation.

The evaluation was reported separately to managers and street-level bureaucrats in the municipal organisations and the Public Employment Service, as well as to the municipal political board responsible for the programme. It is important to stress that the co-funding municipality has not been involved in my work subsequent to presenting the evaluation report. Hence, they have not been able to affect the aim of the dissertation or other questions concerning the dissertation. In this sense, the report to the municipality was kept separate from the dissertation, including the papers.

Before leaving the issue of the municipal funding, it is important to consider the advantages that came with it in terms of the project's legitimacy. Despite tight schedules, both street-level bureaucrats and managers agreed to meet me for interviews. I also felt welcome to observe meetings, and all participants seemed to accept my presence. Most of the people I met, through interviews and/or observations, expressed interest in seeing the results of the evaluation. It is my impression that both the generous access

I received and the great interest they showed in my work were made possible by the evaluation.

I end this chapter by positioning myself in relation to the PhD project. Before undertaking the PhD project, I worked in the municipality that commissioned the evaluation, first as a Social Assistance Officer and in the last year before becoming a PhD student, with investigating how the municipality should work with long-term unemployed people. In terms of research ethics, one can argue that my work experience generates dependence and biases that interfere with the idea of autonomous research discussed above. Beginning with the easiest part, independence vs. dependence, I again wish to stress the relative autonomy of my work with the dissertation. The staff at my prior workplace were very interested in the evaluation, but have paid no attention to my research or made any attempts to affect the content of my work.

The question of possible bias deriving from my previous work experience is more complex. Returning to the realist approach, there are no unbiased approaches within social sciences. Hence, the question of bias must not be mistaken for a question of assessing the extent to which the dissertation deviates from an assumed objectivity. Rather, I acknowledge that my preconceptions and experiences affect how I approached the questions studied in the dissertation. Based on my work experience, especially when investigating questions more strategically, I am used to viewing unemployment as a target for public intervention through Human Service Organisations. This also reflects my educational background in social work, which often focused on how social workers should handle social problems. This does not, however, mean that I consider unemployment to be an issue that can be “solved”. Unemployment is multi-faceted and must be seen against the backdrop of both formal and informal institutions some of which seem to be resistant to change while others are in constant flux. On a more concrete level, labour market policies are entangled with other policy areas such as housing, migration, and health care. Taken together, I think one should be careful not to overestimate the ability of states to cut the Gordian knot of unemployment. On the other hand, such scepticism should not be mistaken for indifference to the outcomes of public efforts to reduce unemployment. I take this ambiguity to mean that even though I view unemployment from a policy perspective, in doing so I take into account the limitations of this perspective.

7. Summary of the papers

Paper I

The paper, *Modes of governance in interorganisational collaboration*, aims to advance the understanding of interorganisational collaboration by analysing it in terms of three modes of governance: hierarchies, markets, and networks. The paper is written in the context of the perennial discussion, in scholarly inquiry as well as in policy processes, about how to define collaboration as well as to distinguish it from related concepts such as cooperation and networks. The idea of three modes of governance offers an alternative to the taxonomic ambitions by investigating the diverse coordination mechanisms that underpin collaborative efforts and occasionally counteract mutual dialogue.

The modes of governance represent three ideal-types of coordination of human interaction. Hierarchies concern interaction based on coercive power exerted through formal rules. The market mode relates to coordination achieved through exchange via pricing mechanisms. The mode of networks is associated with dialogue and mutual trust. Collaboration is sometimes assumed to rely solely on the network mechanism. This assumption is problematic, as it does not consider the power imbalances between actors that are stressed in previous research. One source of power imbalances is formal authority, which relates to the hierarchical mode. If actors exercise their capacity to exert formal power, the room for dialogue and trust is likely to shrink. The market mode is especially relevant for the analysis of cross-sector collaboration, i.e. between public and non-public actors. For the latter type of actor, the level of interest in participating in collaboration with public agencies is likely to be affected by alternative demands for their services. This means that collaboration includes an element of exchange, in accordance with the market mode, but the influence of this mode varies depending on context.

The theoretical elaboration is applied to a case study of a subsidised employment programme delivered in a collaboration between two municipal agencies and a local office of the Public Employment Service in a Swedish municipality. The programme is governed by a steering committee consisting of managers from all three organisations, and a project team, including both first-line managers and street-level bureaucrats from the organisations. The findings illustrate that what at first may seem to be a dialogue-based collaborative programme is actually characterised by une-

qual formal powers as well as goal conflicts. The power imbalances stem from the legal framework, which gives the municipality extensive discretion in how to use the resources, including the national funding administered by the Public Employment Service. As the municipality has chosen to exercise this capacity, i.e. to exert its power over the financial resources, the opportunity for mutual dialogue to overcome the goal conflicts is limited. The goal conflicts concern the tension between decreasing unemployment rates and decreasing social assistance recipience. Since the subsidies are national, the municipality saves money because the programme reduces social assistance spending (which is funded by the municipality). Furthermore, because many participants qualify for unemployment benefits (which are co-funded by the national government and the unions) after programme participation, the municipality has additional financial incentives to increase the number of participants. These incentives can be viewed in the light of the municipal politicians' ambition to reduce childhood poverty. The programme has become a central tool to fulfil this ambition, as is illustrated by the fact that applicants with children are the main target group, and the programme has expanded during a period of economic growth. The prioritisation of households with children has been criticised by representatives of the other actors, who argue that this social aim counteracts the goal of reducing unemployment rates.

Paper II

The paper, titled *Social Representations in Street-Level Bureaucracies – Production and Reproduction of Knowledge Within Public Administration*, aims to suggest a theoretical synthesis that combines street-level bureaucracy and social representations. It consists of three sections, the first of which introduces the two theoretical perspectives, street-level bureaucracy and social representation. Street-level bureaucracy examines the fundamental role that public officials play as policymakers, as they interpret written policies as well as navigate among goal conflicts related to the individual circumstances of clients. Social representation is a social-psychological theory concerned with processes of collective sense-making. People are assumed to develop knowledge through their affiliation with different social groups. This shared knowledge, referred to as social representations, is produced and reproduced in day-to-day interactions between members of these groups. The occupational realm is an important source of group membership, as people interact with their organisational and/or professional peers, thereby developing shared representations of reality.

The theoretical synthesis presented in the second section argues that social representations theory can be used to illuminate the role of knowledge within street-level bureaucracy – a topic that has attracted relatively little research interest in this field. According to the synthesis, street-level bureaucrats develop shared representations of their clients and their situation. Since street-level bureaucracies are characterised by goal conflicts and uncertainties, these representations are likely to be ambiguous. This ambiguity relates to cognitive polyphasia, a concept within social representations theory that acknowledges the possibility of conflicting representations within a group or person. From this perspective, street-level bureaucracies can differ in their degree of epistemic cohesion. Two sources of social representations are suggested: organisational affiliation and professional affiliation. Beginning with organisational affiliation, it is argued that because of their daily interaction, street-level bureaucrats develop a local culture, which can produce and reproduce representations. The influence of professional affiliation is grounded in the assumption that professional training and subsequent praxis generate representations for members of the professional group.

The theoretical synthesis is demonstrated in the third section by applying it to both qualitative data, from interviews and observations of meetings, and quantitative data, gathered by surveying two groups of street-level bureaucrats: social assistance officers and public employment officers. The empirical analysis aims to investigate social representations of unemployment among these two groups. In accordance with the theoretical synthesis, the analysis also considers professional affiliation by distinguishing between social workers and non-social workers in the two types of organisations. The choice of empirical field is motivated by the increasing overlap between the two studied organisations, which often forces unemployed social assistance claimants to have contact with both social assistance officers and public employment officers, and requires the officers to collaborate. If social representations diverge too extensively between officers in these two types of organisations, their ability to collaborate is likely to be compromised, and the client is likely to face conflicting assumptions about his or her situation from the different officers.

The empirical analysis shows that the social representations of unemployment are ambiguous. Most associations concern negative aspects of unemployment, such as poor economy and social exclusion, but positive associations related to a new start also are found. These positive associations occur more frequently among public employment officers, which is

assumed to reflect the fact that this group met more diverse job seekers less dominated by long-term unemployment than the job seekers encountered by social assistance officers. There are no clear signs of cognitive polyphasia, i.e. conflicting representations, within organisations in the sense that some members have positive associations while others have negative associations. Instead, most respondents seem to associate both positive and negative ideas with unemployment.

The influence of professional affiliation was fairly strong among social assistance officers, but not among public employment officers. A possible explanation of this finding may lie in differences in organisational culture, with the Public Employment Office seeming to have a stronger organisational culture, which might decrease the influence of social representations grounded on professional affiliation.

Paper III

The title of the third paper is *Labour market policies on a sub-national level*. The paper aims to develop the knowledge of sub-national differences in labour market policies by looking at Swedish municipalities. Two programmes funded by the national government, but delivered by the municipalities, are analysed. The first programme, education entry grants (EEG), offers long-term unemployed persons the possibility to study without having to rely on student loans. The second programme, extra positions, is a subsidised employment scheme that municipalities can use to employ long-term unemployed persons.

Four questions are asked in the paper, the first being “Do municipalities develop in a similar way as their neighbouring municipalities?” Two potential explanations of such a pattern are suggested. The first, which is referred to as the regional explanation, assumes that similarities between neighbouring municipalities can be explained by shared characteristics such as geographic distances to employers. The second explanation is grounded in the scholarly discussion concerning whether municipalities learn from neighbours, which is referred to as neighbourhood learning. Spatial data, with municipalities represented as polygons, was used to answer this question.

The second question is “What is the relation between reach of labour market policies and geographic characteristics (area, population size and density)?” The question is motivated by the expected differences between rural and urban municipalities in terms of prerequisites for delivering labour market policies, where more urbanised municipalities (i.e. smaller

area, larger population size, and hence greater density) are expected to have greater reach of policy. Area, population, and density are used as independent variables to answer the question.

The third question, “What is the relation between the development of labour market policies and local political orientation?”, concerns the impact of political rule in a municipality. The variable used to answer the question is a classification of political rule between (i) socialist, (ii) conservative (which only includes at least one of the following parties: the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, the Moderate Party or the Christian Democrats), (iii) coalition (containing at least one socialist and one conservative party), and (iv) other (which includes the Swedish Democrats).

The fourth question is “Are labour market policies a matter of compensation, or of spatial reinforcement?” The question is based on two conflicting hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that municipalities that are less well off have greater reach of policy to compensate for their (worse) situation. The other hypothesis is that municipalities that are better off use their relative excess to have greater reach of policy. Three variables are used. The first is the average number of unemployed persons per 1,000 inhabitants. The second variable is economic equalisation (see chapter two for an explanation). The third variable is the percentage of social assistance recipients between 20 and 64 years of age. The fourth variable is the percentage of low-skilled inhabitants between 20 and 64 years.

The questions are answered through quantitative analysis. The first question utilises Moran’s I, which measures spatial autocorrelation, i.e. the extent to which neighbours (i.e. municipalities) have similar values. The other questions are answered through negative binomial regression. The best-performing model, measured through Psuedo-R² and Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), for each programme is also adjusted for spatial autocorrelation by computing Moran’s eigenvectors for the residuals.

Looking at the findings, the Moran’s I, used to answer the first question, is statistically significant, but with a small positive value for both programmes, which indicates a modest spatial autocorrelation; neighbouring municipalities have similar reach of policy, but neighbourhood does not fully explain the variation. The analysis relating to the second question shows that higher population size and higher density are statistically significant predictors of education entry grants. Area is a statistically significant predictor of extra position only before controlling for spatial autocorrelation. The third question indicates that municipalities ruled by socialist governments have greater reach of education entry grants than mu-

municipalities where the Swedish Democrats are included in the local government. Looking at extra positions, socialist-governed municipalities have greater reach than municipalities ruled by conservative parties. After correcting for size, the influence of political rule is only significant for extra positions. The findings related to the last questions indicate that unemployment rate is a significant predictor of education entry grants while the proportion of low-skilled inhabitants and receipt of economic equalisation is significant for extra positions. For both programmes, the significant variables associated with the last question are the most influential, which indicates that economic situation is the most relevant explanation of sub-national differences in comparison with the other hypotheses tested in the paper. However, the two programmes do not represent the full variation of municipal active labour market policies, which means that the findings must be interpreted with caution.

8. Discussion

This chapter reinterprets the findings of the three papers, together with the historical review and theoretical framework presented in the summary, guided by the research questions stated in the introductory chapter:

1. How have changes in national labour market policies affected the involvement of municipalities in Sweden?
2. How is the multi-level governance of labour market policies embodied on municipal level?
3. How is the role of social work and social workers affected by their involvement in labour market measures?

The discussion is divided into four themes. The first theme, which relates to the first research question, discusses the division of responsibility for providing labour market service, and the dialectic relationship between active and passive labour market policies. The second theme, which also relates to the first research question, adopts a geographical perspective on the relation between national and municipal labour market policies. The third theme, which connects to the second research question, discusses governance of labour market policies. The fourth theme, which relates to the third research question, discusses the role of social work and social workers in labour market policies.

Divided responsibilities and the dialectics of labour market policies

This theme connects the division of responsibility for labour market services between national and municipal levels, and the dialectic relationship between active measures and financial support. This connection can be seen in the light of the role of active labour market policies. Before proceeding with this line of argument, I will discuss three historical processes separately: (i) the multi-level governance of financial support, (ii) the shifting role of active labour market policies, and (iii) the dialectic relationship between financial support and active labour market policies.

The introduction of national social insurance schemes at the turn of the last century was a fundamental change in Sweden. Previously, the municipalities and the parishes before them had been responsible for supporting poor people for centuries. Apart from improving the economic situation for many people who previously had to rely on poor relief, the national

social insurance also reduced the municipalities' financial burden of poor relief spending. During the course of the 20th century, the bulk of the funding was nationalised. From this perspective, the reforms not only concerned citizens' economic security, but also a rescaling of responsibilities for financial support (cf. Jessop et al., 2008). Much of the rescaling efforts were motivated by the municipalities' unequal poor relief spending burdens in the early 20th century. The nationalisation also resulted in new public institutions on national level that had to administer assessments of eligibility and payments to individuals (Olofsson, 2003). Thus, the early reforms, not least concerning pensions, spurred the development of policy tools (cf. Hood & Margetts, 2007) which continued to expand during the century.

Although the national scale became dominant after WWII, the municipal responsibility for poor relief (subsequently relabelled as social welfare and social assistance) was kept intact. To understand this sustained responsibility, we must return to the social democratic interpretation of the work ethos, i.e. the making of financial support conditional on labour market participation (cf. Junestav, 2004). With the Rehn-Meidner model's emphasis on full employment, social assistance spending would be kept minimal, as unemployed people would normally be eligible for national insurance schemes. The evolution of national policies can be seen as a case of layering, i.e. achieving institutional change through the addition of new features rather than a replacement of existing institutions. The (national) social insurance schemes were an additional layer added to the municipal poor relief institutions (cf. Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Social assistance recipients decreased rapidly after WWII because of the high employment rates – but also because of the expansion of national social insurance schemes (Broström, 2015; Korpi, 1975). Still, there was always a group of people who had to rely on social welfare. In this respect, Sweden never fully resembled Esping-Andersen's (1990) universal welfare state, as the people were not all covered by a single set of financial support systems. Instead, the layering of national insurance schemes “on top” of poor relief, resulted in a dual welfare state (cf. Emmenegger et al., 2012; Marklund & Svallfors, 1987) as access to the “universal coverage” was made conditional upon previous employment.

The consequences of the duality between national and municipal financial support became obvious during the 1970s, when the political debate increasingly gave attention to “special groups” of the unemployed, such as

young people and migrants. Youth unemployment exemplifies a feature of the social democratic work ethos – it presupposes previous employment. If youth unemployment increases, more young people finishing school find themselves in unemployment, which means that they do not qualify for unemployment benefits and must rely on social assistance or support from their parents. This discussion led to the development of KAS, which deviated from the idea of unemployment insurance, as eligibility did not depend on previous employment (SOU 1971:42). Asylum seekers share similar predicaments. Given that they do not find employment after arriving in Sweden, they must rely on social assistance once they complete the national establishment programme. The changes in migration policy from labour migration to asylum migration during the last two decades of the 20th century manifested this mechanism, as the number of social assistance recipients with migrant background increased (cf. Broström, 2015).

As described in the historical review, critical voices opposed the preservation of the municipal responsibility for poor relief (and later social welfare) during the Record Years. The proposals to shift additional costs from municipalities to the state that emerged from the social welfare reforms in 1956 and 1982 were, however, rejected by the government on both occasions. Since the neglect of the SOFT reform in the late 1970s, the question of nationalising social assistance has not gained momentum. Instead, the reliance on social assistance provided by the national government has increase with the cuts in national social insurance schemes after the financial crisis of 1991 and later, as well as with the increasing long-term unemployment in the country (Salonen, 1997; Angelin, 2009).

Turning to the role of Swedish active labour market policies, several changes have taken place in how unemployment is approached. These different approaches can be viewed in the light of the changing labour market, as well as shifts in how unemployment is conceptualized. The municipal employment services of the early 20th century developed during a period characterised by a shortage of manpower, caused by, among other things, emigration and industrialisation. In ideational terms, the period is characterised by the liberal idea of free market exchange. As stated in an early parliament bill concerning employment services: “In a big city there are many opportunities every day for an unemployed person to be offered temporary employment – if only he is in the right place at the right time” (Translation of Wavrinsky, 1901, p. 3). Hence, the diagnosis was a lack of information exchange between employees and employers. The political prescription was employment services, which were modest in terms of

intervention level. From a human service organisation perspective (cf. Hasenfeld, 1983), the employment services relied on fairly simple people-processing techniques, compared with the more all-encompassing interventions to follow with future reforms.

The modest level of ambition that characterised the early unemployment services disappeared with the establishment of the AK at the outbreak of WWI. During the depression that followed the war, the AK was given extensive discretion to curb mass employment (Rothstein, 1982). The depression can be seen as an exogenous shock that drastically changed the performance of the emerging municipal employment services. This process supplemented the municipal employment services with extensive workfare on a national scale. Returning to Abbott's (1988) medical metaphor, the AK's diagnosis required a more extensive prescription, as mass unemployment was situated in the international decline and changes in monetary policies, rather than the mismatch between employers and job seekers.

The emphasis on the national scale that was established during WWI became vital for the Social Democratic party, as they requested more dynamic active labour market policies. With their gradual defunding of the AK and development of a second governmental agency (cf. Rothstein, 1982), the party began making institutional reforms necessary for realizing their more dynamic approach. After WWII, the Labour Market Agency (AMS) became a central tool in the restructuring of the economy, together with central collective bargaining and strict fiscal policies in accordance with the Rehn-Meidner model (Rothstein, 1986; Erixon, 2010). In terms of diagnosis, inference, and prescription, the model was grounded in a clear prescription for how to improve the economy, which included the use of active labour market policies as a means to enhance mobility geographically as well as between sectors. This development broadened the range of organisational techniques of the Labour Market Agency to include a greater degree of people-changing interventions such as vocational education and relocation grants (Delander et al., 1991; cf. Hasenfeld, 1983).

As described in the historical review, the period between the 1970s oil crises until the early 1990s is characterised by industrial decline, macroeconomic interventions, and an expansion of the public sector. The conditions for delivering active labour market policies began to change. The role of the Labour Market Agency gradually shifted from redirecting job seekers into expanding sectors to overcoming the mismatch between job

seekers and the qualifications demanded by employers. This mismatch can be viewed against the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy (cf. Bell, 1999/1974), where the proportion of less qualified jobs within industry decreased and qualified jobs in the service sector increased (Magnusson, 2000). In the realm of active labour market policy, this development is demonstrated in the emerging attention given to “special groups”, mainly young people and migrants, but also people with disabilities, which continues to guide contemporary active labour market policies.

We will now proceed to the dialectical relationship between active labour market policies and financial support, examining it in relation to the division of responsibilities between national and municipal level. There are several historical examples where the introduction of active measures must be viewed in the light of differing responsibilities for financial support. Similarly, configurations in the governance of financial support have been followed by reconsiderations of active measures. What these different historical examples illustrate is the role of incentives. This role is manifested on two levels: in the relation (i) between the national government and the municipalities, and (ii) between the welfare state and claimants of financial support. The first level can be exemplified by looking at two historical cases.

The first employment services, established during the first decade of the 20th century, were developed by the municipalities. This development is ascribed to the municipal incentives to curb poor relief spending caused by the seasonal unemployment accompanying increased reliance on paid labour. In 1906, the national funding for the employment services was modest, and it had only been established after pressure in the parliament from municipal representatives (cf. Delander et al., 1991). With the 1934 introduction of national funding of unemployment benefits, the tables were turned. Now, the government required municipalities to deliver employment services, because of a fear that municipal disincentives would follow from the shifting of costs for unemployed people from the municipal scale to the government level and the unions (i.e. a shift from social assistance to unemployment benefits).

The second case concerns the development of municipal active labour market policies from the 1980s until the present day. The role played by incentives in the relation between national and municipal responsibilities became relatively small during the Record Years, which is reasonable considering the high employment rates and expansion of national social insurance, which together resulted in low social welfare rates. But from the

1980s onwards, many municipalities began to reconsider their marginal role in active labour market policies. This reconsideration can be viewed against the background of increasing social assistance rates – not least after the crisis in 1991 and the subsequent restrictions placed on national social insurance schemes.

The period around the 1991 crisis is also illustrative when looking at incentives in the light of the relationship between the welfare state and claimants of financial support. As described in the historical review, many municipalities implemented SOFT measures to simplify the process of applying for social assistance in the 1980s. This development directed social assistance administration towards a people processing technique (cf. Hasenfeld, 1983; Sandfort, 2010). At first, this reduced the municipalities' administrative burden, as the application process was simplified. However, the less restrictive approach to social assistance recipients seems paradoxically to have spurred the use of activation measures to prevent passivity (Rönnlund, 1992). As shown in the historical review, this was not the first time that the introduction of financial support eventually led to increased restrictions. A similar process occurred in connection with the two poor-law reforms in the 19th century. The second reform was motivated by a fear that the first reform generated work disincentives because of its less restrictive procedures (Olofsson, 1996).

Taken together, the three historical processes illuminate the current role of municipalities in active labour market policies. A cynical interpretation is that much of the municipal interest in active labour market policy since the 1980s and onwards is driven by a wish to reduce social assistance spending (cf. Ulmestig, 2007; Lundin & Skedinger, 2006). This cynical view was demonstrated in the subsidised employment programme studied in the first paper. The paper acknowledges the distinction between the goals of reducing social assistance rates and reducing unemployment rates. The expansion of the programme generated a conflict between the two goals. Increasing the number of participants caused the social assistance rates to decline, while unemployment rates did not increase in the long-term. This development can be viewed against the backdrop of the multi-level responsibility for financial support, because by offering social assistance recipients subsidised employment, municipalities can make them able to qualify for unemployment benefits.

The difference between reducing social assistance rates and reducing unemployment rates can be understood in terms of the distinction between decreasing input and output. Persson and Vikman (2010) found that the

introduction of mandatory activation mainly reduced input (i.e. fewer people applying for financial support), rather than output (i.e. claimants ceasing to apply for social assistance). Returning to the distinction between enabling and restricting (Eichhorst & Konle Seidl, 2008), it seems obvious that the reduction in input is explained by the latter; awareness of the conditionality of unemployment benefits reduces the attractiveness of applying for social assistance. Looking at output in relation to the enabling versus restrictive approaches, two mechanisms can explain the decreased likelihood of applying for financial support (cf. Dinan, 2019). The first, which relates to the restrictive approach, is that receiving social assistance becomes less pleasant, which generates pressure to stop applying for it (which does not necessarily happen through employment – people might be supported by family or engage in criminal activities). One example of a restrictive mechanism to decrease output is mentioned by Giertz (2004), who points to the introduction of workfare motivated by a wish to curb undeclared work among recipients. The other mechanism, associated with the enabling approach, is to increase the likelihood of recipients finding employment, for instance through upskilling or job counselling.

In much of the early research on municipal activation in Sweden, the authors pointed to the emphasis on restrictive rather than enabling measures (e.g., Hjertner Thorén, 2008; Milton, 2006; Giertz, 2004). The emphasis on decreasing social assistance spending seems to have given impetus to programmes intended to both decrease input and increase output by making social assistance recipients less attractive. These observations have occasionally led to a conflation between the level of programme delivery (the structure) and programme aim (the content). While it has been argued that municipalities deliver programmes aimed at restricting social assistance recipients, based on the assumption that recipients are not motivated to work, national measures implemented by the Public Employment Service have been conceived of as enabling, as a form of human-resource development. This view is most clearly expressed in Nybom's (2011, 2012) ideal-typical theorisation, where the level of delivery and aim are conflated. Historical examples exist that can be used to question this conflation, as they deviate from the assumed correspondence between structure and content. One example is Phase Three, the national programme introduced by the Alliance government in 2006 and described in chapter three. It clearly resembled workfare, with its emphasis on mandatory full-time activities, activities that were questioned by participants as

well as by other actors (cf. Lundälv & Lindqvist, 2013; Jacobsson & Seing, 2013).

The conflation described above is also problematic because of the diversity of municipal programmes, with some municipalities promoting skills and human relations development, others emphasising conditionality, and some using both approaches (Bergmark et al., 2017; Jacobsson et al., 2017). Panican and Ulmestig (2017a) acknowledge that many of the criticised features of early municipal programmes, such as project-based solutions and workfare, are still prevalent in many municipalities. But they also point to the institutionalisation of active measures in several Swedish municipalities, manifested through better-trained staff and more well-adapted facilities. This institutionalisation process seems to have improved the possibility of adapting services to the needs of participants.

Given that the institutionalisation of municipal active measures continues, one might consider what municipalities can add to what is already offered by the Public Employment Service and private providers. One such contribution is basic and upper-secondary education or adults, as these are municipal responsibilities. Insufficient education has been a recurrent explanation of the mismatch in the Swedish labour market, at least since the 1990s, as described in the historical review. There are no tuition fees for adult education in Sweden. Further, there is a relatively generous student loan system, which enables people to study with basic financial protection. Still, low-skilled unemployed persons might hesitate to apply for student loans. This was the motivation for introducing education entry grants (Proposition 2016/17:158), which are analysed in paper III. In brief, these grants enable low-skilled, long-term unemployed persons to study for a limited period without having to apply for student loans.

The discussion concerning education entry grants can be viewed in the light of the institutionalisation of the two policy areas: education and the labour market. With the exception of vocational education, which can be provided by the Public Employment Service, education has generally been distinct from labour market policies. For instance, the two policy areas are governed by different ministries. There have been historical attempts to bridge this division, however, for instance through the Adult Education Initiative at the end of the 1990s, as described in chapter three. Still, the institutional boundaries seem to be resistant to change.

The institutional boundaries between labour and education policy were also present in the municipality where the field work was carried out. Both social assistance and adult education are municipal responsibilities. How-

ever, because the Social Services Act stipulates that students in adult education must apply for student loans, these responsibilities are not necessarily connected on municipal level. Further, the interviewed participants in the programme, studied in paper I, were hesitant to enrol in educational programmes, both because of the relative risk of student loans (in comparison with social assistance, and because they questioned the benefit of devoting several years to further education given their age and/or skill level. A recurring question during the strategic meetings concerned the need to enhance education within the programmes delivered by the municipal labour market office. Because many participants had insufficient skills in Swedish, managers at the Labour Market Offices had requested to have teachers from the Swedish for Immigrants courses (Sw. Svenska för invandrare, hereafter SFI) give classes to participants in labour market programmes. These two units, the Labour Market Office and SFI, were part of the same administrative branch, which means that they were governed by the same manager at the municipality. The manager of the Labour Market Office had previously asked the manager of SFI to place SFI teachers in the activation programmes, but this was rejected. However, the manager found a solution by approaching the senior manager who, in turn, demanded that SFI teachers should be relocated to the project. This example illustrates that the boundaries between labour market policies and education are persistent, but not insuperable.

Summing up this theme, it is argued that the municipal involvement in labour market policies can be understood against the background of three processes: the multi-level governance of financial support, (ii) the shifting role of active labour market policies, and (iii) the dialectic relationship between financial support and active labour market policies. The divided responsibility for financial support generates incentives for municipalities to make social assistance recipients qualified for national insurances. The fear of work disincentives, in accordance with the work ethos, has also been a driving force in the municipalities' development of activation strategies, where early measures in particular seemed to focus on restrictive rather than enabling approaches. There is evidence, however, that more recent programmes in many municipalities focus on enabling approaches, including human resources development. A possible way to strengthen this development is through enhanced collaboration, within municipalities, between activation and education.

The geography of labour market policies

As shown in the historical review, a central aspect of the poor law reforms in the 19th century concerned the responsibility of relocated poor relief claimants. The conflict laid bare the tensions between the patriarchal, place-based orientation of the programmes, and the emerging liberalism, which emphasised free mobility. Many parishes were reluctant to support poor relief claimants arriving from outside of their territory. The reliance on parishes illustrates the influence of territorial divisions (cf. Jessop, et al. 2008). Poor relief recipients were primarily seen as the responsibility of their home parish, not of the county or the nation state. The changing modes of production, both in terms of rationalised farming and the increasing reliance on industry, can be seen as performance-related pressure to change as the existing model of poor relief became dysfunctional. Put differently, the mobility of labour, which was increasingly acknowledged as a precondition for economic growth at the time (cf. Salmonsson & Spross, 2021), created pressure for legal reforms that were adapted to serve this mobility.

As described in the historical review, the rescaling of active labour market policies into a national concern increased the attention given to mobility across municipal boundaries. As shown by Rothstein (1982), there were early attempts to enhance mobility with the AK during WWI, not least by putting conditions on financial support for workers who were in demand in other parts of the country. Under the Rehn-Meidner plan, after WWII, enhancing the mobility of worker was central, because of the aim of transferring workers to more productive sectors. During this period, the potential for rescaling labour market policies became obvious; when working on a national scale, the government, together with the social partners, enhanced mobility of workers through solidaric wage policies (cf. Erixon, 2010). The Labour Market Board became a central tool for realising this aim, not least through relocation grants.

During the 1980s, the privileged status of the Labour Market Board as the sole actor began to wear off. The rescaling of labour market policies, from local to national level, and the emphasis on geographic mobility that characterised the Social Democratic doctrine, were criticised for exacerbating geographical inequalities, not least between urban and rural areas. In the intersection between the concepts of scale and space (cf. Jessop et al., 2008), this criticism both questioned the sole emphasis on the national scale and acknowledged the relevance of sub-national places, including municipalities and even sub-municipal units such as villages. As expressed

by Herlitz (2000), the critique of centralisation spurred the emergence of an “ideology of place”. Thus, the critique of centralisation gave ideational support to the introduction of municipal active labour market policies, not least through the autonomous municipality experiment. Municipalities were assumed to be better suited to deliver policies adapted to local conditions than the Labour Market Board. The development of municipal programmes can be seen as an attempt to enhance policies that were place-specific rather than place-neutral (cf. Barca, McCann & Rodríguez-Pose, 2012).

Alongside acknowledging the role played by criticism of centralism in the emergence of municipal labour market programmes at the end of the 20th century, it is also important to consider the impact of centralism during the preceding Record Years. The possibility for municipalities to develop more elaborate labour market policies can be viewed against the background of the municipal amalgamations between 1952 and 1974. As is shown in chapter three, these reterritorialisation reforms can be traced back to the Social Democratic reliance on municipalities to deliver the growing number of welfare services. Merging municipalities was deemed necessary to secure the financial means required to provide professional services on the local level (Ekström von Essen, 2003; Wångmar, 2003 & 2013). The Social Democratic party intended to separate the municipalities from active labour market policies with the nationalisation of the employment services in 1939 and the launch of the Labour Market Agency after WWII. However, the more complex administration that came with the municipal amalgamations and increased regulations can be seen as an important condition for enabling active labour market programmes during the end of the 20th century. This aspect relates to paper III and population size.

As discussed in paper III, municipalities with larger populations are more likely to have a greater reach of policies. The hypothesis that population size predicts greater reach of policy originates in the assumption that larger municipalities are more likely to have the critical mass of social assistance recipients needed to develop more specialised programmes. The findings tap into questions about the institutionalisation of municipal active labour market policies, with regard to professionalisation as well as individualisation in the sense of adapting services to the needs of clients (Panican & Ulmestig, 2017a; van Berkel et al., 2021; Sadeghi & Terum, 2020; Valkenburg, 2007). In accordance with economies of scale, smaller municipalities are likely to find it more difficult to proceed with such insti-

tutionalisation, because their labour market offices will probably be smaller in terms of both staff and number of clients.

A consequence of the municipal involvement in active labour market policies is the increased possibility for local politicians to affect Swedish labour market policies. The combination of local elections and the relatively extensive autonomy of Swedish municipalities raises questions about the extent to which the political orientation of municipalities can and should affect the content of labour market policies. There are historical examples of this, not least the gradual undermining of the Unemployment Commission in the 1920s. In response to the commission's wage policy and neglect of industrial conflicts, municipalities ruled by Social Democratic governments refused to collaborate with the commission (Rothstein, 1982). This historical example illustrates the possibility of policy conversion (cf. Mahoney & Thelen, 2010) occurring when the central government relies on municipalities to deliver policies.

Paper III tests the variable of local political rule. The findings indicate a small but significant association between political rule and reach of education entry grants, where municipalities with socialist rule are likely to have more extensive reach than municipalities that included the Swedish Democrats. When it comes to extra positions, municipalities with socialist rule had greater reach than municipalities ruled by conservative parties. Lundin (2007) found similar patterns, but only in larger municipalities. Even though other characteristics seem to be of greater importance in predicting reach of local active labour market policies (cf. Vikman & Westberg, 2017; paper III), the significance of political rule raises the question to what extent municipalities ought to politicise labour market policies. One example is the collaboration with the food-delivery company Foodora, launched in 2020 by the city of Stockholm (in legal terms, a municipality), where the city would recruit workers among work-capable social assistance recipients. The collaboration was criticised, for instance by the Left party and a legal scholar, as the company did not have a collective bargaining agreement and because of the poor working conditions (Left Party Stockholm, 2020; Syre, 2020). This example is one of the many ideological aspects of labour market policies that ought to be considered, given the potential influence of municipal politicians.

To conclude, the reliance on municipalities to design and deliver active labour market policies, opens up for greater cross-municipal differences. Such differences can have many causes, among which are unemployment rates, population size and, possibly, political rule. This development raises

questions about the extent to which municipality of residence ought to determine people's access to both financial support and active labour market policies. In a wider perspective, there are also reasons to consider to what extent the reliance on municipalities affects the mobility of people, considering the historical importance of geographical scale for active labour market policies.

Governance from a local perspective

Ever since municipalities resumed their involvement in active labour market policies during the 1980s, a central question has concerned how to coordinate and apportion national and municipal responsibilities; a question that has been given different answers during the period. The early phase of municipal involvement, in the realm of youth employment, as described in chapter three, largely depended on hierarchical coordination, as the reason for involving municipalities was that the national agencies could not find suitable activities (Proposition 1983/84:46). However, the benefits of more network-oriented collaboration were soon acknowledged by policy makers, not least through the experiments with municipal autonomy. Local projects, developed in both test municipalities and other municipalities, were marketised by national agencies as examples of successful collaboration between the municipalities and the national administration (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1990; Isaksson et al., 1993).

The autonomous municipality experiment also included reconfigurations aimed at enhancing hierarchical coordination, as the involved municipalities were given discretion to form local labour market boards together with local representatives of the Labour Market Agency. This model resembles the more extensive coordination that took place with the introduction of Local Employment Service Committees in 1996 (Skedinger & Lundin, 2006). As shown by Skoog (2008), however, this type of hierarchical collaboration was fairly short-lived, as the government gradually recentralised responsibilities from the regional to the national levels of the Labour Market Agency – a process that culminated in the 2008 nationalisation of the agency by the Alliance government, which removed all municipal influence over the national measures (cf. Minas, 2011).

Despite the gradual recentralisation of national measures, collaboration on local level has remained a central goal during the first two decades of the 21st century. The introduction of collaborative associations in 2003 created an organisational and financial platform for institutionalising col-

laboration in the realm of rehabilitation. The Social Democratic government, which replaced the Alliance government in 2014, emphasised local collaboration through The Delegation for the Employment of Young People and Newly Arrived Migrants (Dua). What characterises these efforts, in comparison with the more encompassing decentralisation in the 1990s, is that they rely on more well-defined actors. Rather than giving municipalities influence over the national measures, the Public Employment Service and the municipalities were to collaborate as two distinct actors.

The reliance on collaboration has been criticised more recently. In a public investigation concerning future national labour market policies (SOU 2019:3), the committee argue for clearer boundaries between the national and municipal areas of responsibility. They acknowledge the difficulty of distinguishing between labour market programmes (national) and other types of social interventions (municipal). This difficulty is reflected in the overlap between the Public Employment Service and the municipalities regarding delivery of programmes, according to the committee. Despite acknowledging this difficulty, the authors call for a clearer division of labour between the Public Employment Office and the municipalities. After reviewing different forms of *collaboration* (Sw. samverkan), the authors conclude by suggesting improved *coordination* (Sw. samordning), i.e. more standardised forms of multi-level governance rather than more encompassing dialogue. From a meta-governance perspective (Hupe & Hill, 2007; Hill & Hupe, 2015) the orientation suggested by the committee depends to a greater degree on the hierarchical mode of coordination than on the network mode, as it stresses formalised responsibilities rather than more extensive dialogue.

The ambition to standardise exchange can be seen against the ongoing reformation of the Public Employment Service which was described in the second chapter. The reform is likely to restrict the possibilities for multi-level governance, grounded in the network mode of governance, between the agency and the municipalities. Regarding the government's intentions, they state that the agency will continue to be central to securing long-term collaboration with the municipalities (Ds 2021:27). But the Public Employment Service (2021b), in their statement of opinion, point to their limited scope for action within the new system. With the diminished role of the Public Employment Service, Public Employment Officers lose much of their discretion, as their main task will be to administer, rather than deliver, services. In a similar vein, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR, 2021a) points to a gap between the ambition

of collaboration and the possibility of pursuing it, if the reform is followed through.

Another aspect of the reformation of the Public Employment Office is the reduction in the number of local offices. The observations of meetings, analysed in paper I, concerned collaboration between both managers and street-level bureaucrats. As the number of local offices has fallen sharply since the period of data collection, the preconditions for pursuing local collaboration are likely to have vanished in many municipalities. From this perspective, standardised coordination might be a more realistic goal to pursue, as it does not rely on dialogue. On the other hand, standardisation by definition reduces the possibility of adapting collaboration to local conditions, which, again, was considered an important argument for involving municipalities in active labour market policies.

It is too early to assess whether the apprehensions expressed in the above-mentioned statement of opinion will become reality. But considering the overarching intention to reform the Public Employment Office and increase the involvement of private providers, it seems unavoidable that the municipalities will have to operate within a more complex system partly coordinated through the market mode of governance. With regard to institutional change (cf. Streeck & Thelen, 2005), many municipalities may experience pressure to change due to the exogenous performance (cf. figure one in chapter five) that is likely to follow the reform. The outcome of this pressure is likely to differ between municipalities for (at least) two reasons. The first has to do with the consequences of the reform of the Public Employment Office. The level of interest among non-public actors in delivering services might vary between municipalities, depending on local labour market conditions. In places that are less attractive to non-public actors, municipal agencies are likely to find a greater need for municipal services. The other potential reason is the current delivery of municipal active labour market programmes. In accordance with the logic of path-dependence (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), municipalities with more extensive reach can be expected to have smaller costs for expanding their services than municipalities with less extensive programmes.

To conclude this theme, the governance of labour market policies has shifted during the last 40 years. However, enhancing collaboration, between the Public Employment Service and municipalities, has been a constant ambition among policy makers during this period. The ongoing reformation, of the Public Employment Service, challenges this ambition as the number of local offices are reduced and more standardised forms of

coordination are suggested to replace collaboration. Further, the increased reliance on private providers, working on behalf of the Public Employment Service, is likely to decrease the role of the agency on local level.

Social work, social workers, and labour market policies

Social workers have become a key profession in Swedish labour market policies because of their employment in municipal social services and, to a lesser extent, in national agencies such as the Public Employment Service. But this central position is of relatively recent date and was largely unintended, as becomes apparent when looking at the historical development.

As previously discussed, the nationalisation of the employment services around WWII meant that municipalities were not intended to deliver active labour market policies. Rather, they would focus on non-work-capable people with addiction or other types of social problems. The improved labour market and national social insurance also made work-capable people a marginal issue in the municipalities during the Record Years. As shown by Andersson (2003), social services were considered important vehicles to enhance economic growth, as people would receive support to become work-capable. However, this was not framed as an issue of active labour market policy but of social services.

The staff at the Labour Market Agency were typically not social workers but recruited from the unions. Upper managers at the agency emphasised the advantages of practical work experience, as opposed to theoretical knowledge, for Public Employment Officers (Rothstein, 1986). Until 2009, the qualification for Public Employment Officers was an upper-secondary school diploma (Sw. gymnasieexamen) and three years of work experience. Since 2009, a bachelor's degree is required. Hence, social workers were not a central profession in the Labour Market Agency or the subsequent Public Employment Office.

The intersection between social workers and active labour market policies began to increase during the 1980s, which can be understood in terms of three interrelated processes. The first process is the increase in work-capable social assistance recipients at the time, especially among young people and migrants (cf. Broström, 2015). The second process is the emergence of municipal programmes, as demonstrated not least in the municipal autonomy experiment. The third process is the paradoxical (re-)specialisation that took place in many municipalities with regard to social assistance administration. As described in chapter three, the political debate concerning social services at the time emphasised holism. With the

reformed Social Services Act of 1982, both the committee preparing the legislation and the government emphasised a holistic approach to social services to avoid compartmentalisation of clients (SOU, 1977:40; Proposition 1979/80:1). But the practice of holism was often short-lived. During the 1980s, several municipalities established specialised units to administer social assistance (Bergmark & Lundström, 2007; Stranz, 2007). During the 1990s, all three processes (increasing numbers of work-capable social assistance recipients, local active measures, and specialisation of social assistance administration) were enhanced. As previously discussed, the financial crisis was an important cause of this enhancement (cf. Ulmestig, 2007; Salonen, 1997). There were also national reforms of both active labour market policies (increasing the involvement of municipalities) and social assistance (stressing standardisation) during the 1990s that further consolidated the role of social workers in active labour market policies. Lastly, a recurrent motivation for the introduction and expansion of municipal active labour market policies is the neglect by the Labour Market Board and the subsequent Public Employment Service of job-seeking social assistance recipients (Ulmestig, 2007; Thegerström & Ulmestig, 2021).

The increased involvement of social workers in active labour market policies in Sweden deviates from Abbott's (1988) understanding of professional jurisdiction. He argues that professional jurisdiction is achieved by successfully applying the concepts of diagnosis, inference, and treatment to new problems (see also Brante, 2010). But, as the historical review shows, the involvement of social workers was not intentional in the sense that social workers offered "treatment" in the realm of active labour market policies. Rather, the involvement can be seen as a path-dependent layering process (cf. Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), as it was contingent on the legal institutions and the organisational affiliation. Social workers got involved in active labour market policies because such policies were developed in relation to the Social Services Act and therefore were in the realm of social services.

The coincidental involvement of social workers in active labour market policies sheds new light on the findings in paper II. The paper analyses social workers' social representations of unemployment. From the perspective of professional jurisdiction, the paper can be seen as an investigation of whether social workers have profession-specific representations that might grant them a special role in active labour market policies. The findings indicated differences, in representations, between social assistance officers who were or were not trained social workers respectively. As stat-

ed in the paper, these findings must be carefully interpreted. The structure and content of social workers' representations of unemployment as well as labour market policies requires further investigation. If, however, assuming that social workers have professional representations, that stands out from other street-level bureaucrats, one might ask what these representations adds - what type of knowledge does social workers offer in the realm of labour market policies? This discussion taps into the broader question of knowledge in social work. Bisman criticises the (over-)emphasis on "scientific knowledge and technical expertise (2004, p. 119) as it overshadows the relational and value-oriented nature of social work. This type of objections challenges Abbott's model of diagnosis, inference, and prescription by more clearly opening up the issue of professional knowledge to ideological and moral domains that can enlighten further investigations of social workers operating within labour market policies.

As shown, in chapter four, there are tensions in social work research between, on the one hand, accepting that the practice of social work always involves a conflict between care and control, and on the other hand, the desire for a critical approach to social work (Lorenz, 2016; Hansen and Natland 2017; Dall, 2020; Garrett, 2014 & 2019; Jönsson & Kamali, 2018). In relation to active labour market policies, this tension is most clearly manifested in discussions concerning conditionality. Most contributors seem to agree that conditionality is problematic, as it violates the idea of a human right to basic income. However, the response to conditionality differs depending on the position one adopts in relation to the above-mentioned tension. Hansen and Natland (2017), as well as Dall (2020), infer conditionality from the inherent goal conflicts between control and support within active labour market policies. Hence, social workers delivering such policies will always have to handle these goal conflicts. Garrett (2014 & 2019) exemplifies the more critical position taken by those suggesting that social workers ought to take part in a more fundamental restructuring of the welfare state beyond conditionality and workfare.

Another source of criticism of current active labour market policies, voiced by scholars within social work, is their predominant focus on individualisation. Here we might briefly recall Peters and van Nispen's (1998) discussion of the ideological nature of policy instruments. In the Rehn-Meidner model, active measures targeting individuals, such as unemployment services, were one component alongside others such as structural interventions. The continuous deregulations of the labour market and the

economy more generally from the 1990s and onwards have increased the pressure on individuals to become employable. The additional tasks of social workers in this reorientation, from providing social protection also promote responsabilisation of individuals, have been questioned by several social work scholars. Returning to Abbott's notion of diagnosis and prescription, social work scholars often emphasise the need for structural diagnoses to individual social problems (Reisch, 2017) which seems to be at odds with the emphasis on activating individuals in contemporary labour market policies (cf. Vilhena, 2020; Marthinsen, 2019).

While acknowledging the mismatch between the neoliberal interpretation of the work ethos and the social work-oriented emphasis on social rights, one might also consider the possibilities for social workers to affect local practices. As acknowledged in the research review, active labour market policies are characterised by contradictory institutional elements – and these contradictions might provide a fertile basis for such engagement. Recalling the claim that ideas occasionally flow upwards (Metha, 2011), i.e. that ideas can change bottom-up, by social workers might potentially be influential in enabling gradual institutional change. Social workers who seek a less neoliberal orientation of labour market services can exploit the institutional contradictions through subversion, i.e. by intentionally undermining undesired institutional elements (cf. Olsson, 2016) which over time might result in policy conversion (cf. Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Returning to the two types of discretion, discussed in the theoretical framework, such subversive practice can be seen as a use of the unintended discretion (in accordance with street-level bureaucracy) rather than the legitimate discretion vested in professional autonomy (cf. Lipsky, 1980/2010; Freidson, 2001; Evans & Harris, 2004; Brodtkin, 2012). There might also be room for less radical means such as advocacy and other type of policy practices on local, national and even global level by social workers (Feldman, 2020a).

One might ask to what extent practicing social workers are likely to adhere to the potential role of as agents of institutional change. The heading of this theme refers to both social work and social workers. Careful readers will have noticed that the reviewed criticism, of the relation between social work and contemporary labour market policies, stems from social work scholars. In the sociology of professions (e.g., Larson, 1977/2013; Freidson, 2001), the connection between academic knowledge production and practicing professionals is taken to be a fundamental characteristic of influential professions. This raises the question of how

practising social workers, who operate within labour market policies, conceive of their work as well as to what extent they share the criticism, of labour market policies, formulated by social work scholars. There are qualitative case studies that exemplify subversive strategies of social workers (e.g., Rasmussen, 2018). Although they offer illustrative examples, these studies do not tell us how common such strategies are among social workers. Put differently, previous research has focused on how subversion occurs, not to what extent subversion actually does occur. Brady, Sawyer and Perkins (2019) are sceptical against the picture of social work as a radical profession given that it “works closely with social systems to maintain the status quo” (2019, p. 328). This criticism, of the high expectations of a critical social work, taps into the broader and often overlooked question of the representation of the state within social work. Is the state a means for economic dominance or social control, or is it a vehicle for social change (cf. Feldman, 2020b)? Disentangling these more fundamental issues, together with more thorough empirical investigations can further increase the understanding the role of social work, and social workers, within labour market policies.

In sum, this theme has discussed the tensions that occur as social work and social workers are involved in labour market policies. In the Swedish context, social workers became involved, since the 1980s and onwards, because of legal institutions and organisational affiliation, rather than a demand for their professional knowledge. Several scholars have pointed to the conflict, for social work within labour market policies, between conditionality and the human right to financial support. However, there seems to be disagreement to whether this conflict is an unavoidable feature of social work practice or if social workers ought to promote institutional change. There is a need to further investigate to how practicing social workers position their work in relation to the scholarly criticism.

Epilogue – the future of labour market policies

The dissertation has focused on past and present labour market policies. In line with the insights of historical institutionalists such as Mahoney and Thelen (2010), the Swedish welfare state has not been immune to change. Still, there are path-dependent traits that seem to be persistent despite repeated criticism. Perhaps the most significant of these traits is the work ethos, along with the accompanying dualisation that occurs as the work ethos is institutionalised in the welfare system. One manifestation of this institutionalisation is the reliance on municipalities to provide social assis-

tance to work-capable people with little or no labour market attachment. The continuously high numbers of work-capable social assistance recipients have been used as an argument to reform social assistance with the aim of transcending the persistent poor relief logic that continues to characterise much of social assistance administration (Salonen, 2013; cf. Ulmestig, 2007). During the period when this dissertation was written, however, there has been little political interest in such reforms, as was demonstrated in a governmental committee appointed by the Social Democratic and Green Party government in 2017. The aim was to investigate the possibilities afforded by the idea of “sustainable social services” – however, the government explicitly forbade the investigators from suggesting reforms in the realm of social assistance (SOU, 2020:47). Hence, it seems that the division of responsibilities caused by the multi-level governance of financial support will continue to characterise Swedish labour market policies.

A political vision that has attracted increasing interest during the 21st century is universal basic income (UBI). In a nutshell, this means that all people are provided for by an unconditional right to basic financial security. One argument used by many proponents of this vision is that UBI will remove the issue of the work ethos from financial support (Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017) – or as phrased above: the dialectics between active and passive labour market policies. At first glance, UBI can seem unrealistic, but it has recently been receiving increased attention from policy makers, and there are ongoing pilot programmes in different parts of the world (Hasdell, 2020). Recently, Fagerlind Ståhl and Ståhl (2021) explored the possibility of implementing UBI on local level in Sweden. Whether this will take place remains to be seen. If realised, it will undoubtedly reconfigure the role of active labour market policies in the welfare state.

The dualisation of financial support must be seen against the persistent divide between insiders and outsiders in terms of labour market participation, where the latter often overlap with the “special groups” that have increasingly been acknowledged since the 1970s and onwards: young adults, migrants, and people with disabilities (Bäckman & Nelson, 2018). The question remains how this gap can be, if not closed, then at least reduced. Some argue for the need to enhance upskilling efforts. Others point to the need for further deregulations of the labour market to enable less skilled workers to compete with lower salaries (Bergh, 2014). Such deregulations tap into discussions concerning the Swedish model, which has been challenged with the launch of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as

member states are urged to ensure sufficient minimum wages (European Pillar of Social Rights, 2017). Critics of these two lines of development – towards deregulation of the labour market, and regulation of minimum wages respectively – have argued that the problem of insiders and outsiders does not concern labour market participation as such, but rather income inequalities. Hence, the increasing reliance on low paid jobs and in-work poverty is problematic, according to these critics. Current labour market policies in Sweden seem to take multiple directions at present. There are programmes, such as education entry grants, intended to enhance upskilling. Meanwhile, there are also attempts to stimulate the demand of low-skilled labour, for instance through recent expansions of the RUT tax reduction (described in chapter three) (Proposition 2020/21:1). This dissertation has illustrated that the changes of labour market policies are not unidirectional but take place against the background of path-dependency as well as both endogenous and exogenous pressure. Considering this complexity, it remains to be seen how future labour market policies will evolve.

9. Swedish summary

Arbetslöshet är en återkommande fråga för den kapitalistiska välfärdsstaten, vilket vanligtvis besvaras med arbetsmarknadspolitik. Sådan politik inbegriper insatser vilka sammantaget syftar till att dels minska den ekonomiska utsatthet som arbetslöshet innebär, dels öka arbetsmarknadsdeltagandet. Arbetsmarknadspolitik inbegriper en rad ideologiska överväganden, inte minst frågan om vilka krav som bör ställas på arbetslösa individer i behov av ekonomiskt stöd. Vidare baseras utformning och genomförande av arbetsmarknadspolitik på deskriptiva antaganden om individers beteenden och arbetsmarknadens funktionsförmåga. Mot bakgrund av den oenighet som råder, både vad gäller ideologiska överväganden och deskriptiva antaganden, är arbetsmarknadspolitik ett komplext fält i behov av ytterligare belysning, inte minst till följd av att arbetsmarknaden ständigt förändras vilket förändrar förutsättningarna att politiskt hantera problemet med arbetslöshet.

Arbetsmarknadspolitik, i Sverige så väl som övriga Europa, är återkommande föremål för omstrukturering vad gäller styrning. En central fråga rör vilken politisk-administrativ nivå som ska ansvara för finansiering, planering och genomförande av insatser. I Sverige har denna omstrukturering, historiskt såväl som i nutid, kommit till uttryck genom omförhandlingar av arbetsfördelningen mellan stat och kommun. Under 1900-talet omstrukturerades arbetsmarknadspolitikerna från att inledningsvis vara kommunal, till att från första världskriget delas mellan stat och kommun, samt under efterkrigstidens rekordår vara nationell. Under 1980-talet inleddes en framväxt av kommunala arbetsmarknadsinsatser vid sidan av de statliga, vilket fått till följd att den svenska arbetsmarknadspolitikerna återigen kommit att delas mellan stat och kommun. Både politiker och tjänstemän har gjort ansatser till att öka koordineringen mellan stat och kommun i dessa frågor. Trots dessa ansträngningar kvarstår stora brister i denna koordinering. Ett vanligt angreppssätt är samverkan på lokal nivå mellan kommunala tjänstemän samt lokala representanter för statliga myndigheter, och då inte minst Arbetsförmedlingen. Denna samverkan har dock visat sig svår att genomföra på flera plan vilket ibland resulterat i att nya problem tillkommit snarare än att befintliga lösts.

Den kommunala arbetsmarknadspolitikerna utmärks av stora skillnader mellan kommuner vad gäller omfattning och arbetssätt. Dessa skillnader innebär ett avsteg från efterkrigstidens fokus på en nationellt sammanhål-

len arbetsmarknadspolitik. Olikheterna i utförande kan ställas i relation till skillnader vad gäller ekonomisk struktur och befolkningsammansättning samt faktorer som kommuners politiska styre och geografiska position. Detta väcker frågor om vad som genererar de mellankommunala skillnaderna i arbetsmarknadspolitiken, i vilken utsträckning dessa skillnader förstärker eller kompenserar för de skiftande ekonomiska förutsättningarna, samt hur den nationella arbetsmarknadspolitiken bör utformas i relation till kommunernas insatser.

Då den kommunala arbetsmarknadspolitiken sker med stöd av socialtjänstlagen har socionomer blivit en central profession på detta fält. Det finns en spänning mellan det sociala arbetets grund i mänskliga rättigheter visavi villkorandet av ekonomiskt stöd till arbetslösa via så kallad aktiveering. Vidare väcker den kommunala arbetsmarknadspolitiken frågor om inomprofessionell specialisering samt styrning av socionomprofessionen, bland annat med avseende på hur socionomer förstår uppkomsten av arbetslöshet samt insatser avsedda att motverka densamma, samt hur ett mer renodlat inomprofessionellt fokus på arbetslöshet förhåller sig till det helhetsperspektiv som historiskt setts som centralt för socialtjänst och socionomer.

Avhandlingens syfte är att bidra till förståelsen av subnationella myndigheters roll i arbetsmarknadspolitiken genom att undersöka kommunernas roll i svensk arbetsmarknadspolitik. Vidare behandlar avhandlingen relationen mellan arbetsmarknadspolitik och socialt arbete respektive socionomprofessionen.

Analysen kombinerar en historisk analys, via offentliga publikationer samt sekundärlitteratur, samt empiriskt material med fokus på den samtida arbetsmarknadspolitiken. Empirin består dels av primärmaterial, insamlat via en kvalitativ fallstudie av ett kommunalt arbetsmarknadsprojekt och enkäter besvarade av anställda i ett antal kommuner och på Arbetsförmedlingen, dels av sekundärmaterial i form av offentlig statistik på kommunal nivå inom områden som arbetslöshet, kostnader för ekonomiskt bistånd, samt användning av statligt finansierade arbetsmarknadsinsatser.

Avhandlingens teoretiska ram baseras på fyra pelare, struktur, innehåll, plats, och tid. Den första pelaren fokuserar på styrning av arbetsmarknadspolitik och inbegriper begreppen governance respektive handlingsutrymme. Pelaren som rör innehåll belyser representationer av arbetslöshet och arbetsmarknadspolitik på tre nivåer: policy, organisation, samt profession. Resonemanget baseras på Andrew Abbotts uppdelning mellan

diagnos, slutledning, och preskription. Pelare nummer tre, plats, anlägger ett geografiskt perspektiv på arbetsmarknadspolitik genom att inbegripa begreppen territorium, skala samt plats. Den sista pelaren, tid, behandlar teorier om förändring och stabilitet med avseende på formella såväl som informella institutioner.

Avhandlingen är en sammanläggningsavhandling innehållande tre artiklar. Den första artikeln har titeln ”Modes of Governance in Interorganizational Collaboration”. I denna egenförfattade artikel analyseras material från fallstudien med avseende på interorganisatorisk samverkan. Artikeln baseras på en teoretisk diskussion som förankrar samverkan i mer grundläggande frågor om koordinering. Resultaten påvisar att den studerade samverkanssituationen påverkas av en maktasymmetri där nationella regelverk ger kommunens medarbetare möjlighet att agera tvärt emot vad representanter för Arbetsförmedlingen förordar. Denna maktasymmetri innebär därmed att de kommunala tjänstepersonerna inte behöver förankra sina beslut med samverkanspartnern vilket talar mot synen på samverkan som kollektiv problemlösning. Resultatet väcker frågan huruvida samverkan alltid är det mest lämpliga alternativet för koordinering mellan organisationer.

Den andra artikeln, som är författad tillsammans med Björn Johansson och Anders Bruhn har titeln ”Social Representations in Street-Level Bureaucracies – Production and Reproduction of Knowledge Within Public Administration”. Artikeln inbegriper en teoretisk syntes som påvisar förtjänsterna med att studera så kallade street-level bureaucrats, yrkesverkssamma inom välfärdsstaten som möter medborgare, utifrån den socialpsykologiska teoribildningen om sociala representationer. Den teoretiska syntesen demonstreras via analys av både det kvalitativa och det kvantitativa primärmaterialen med fokus på handläggares representationer av arbetslöshet. Den empiriska analysen påvisar skillnader i dessa representationer på grundval av organisatorisk och professionell tillhörighet. Dessa skillnader är relevanta att beakta i frågor som rör samverkan inom arbetsmarknadspolitiken samt även i överväganden gällande vilken myndighet som ska ansvara för dessa frågor. Detta då handläggarnas representationer bidrar till att forma hur arbetsmarknadspolitiken omsätts i praktiken på klientnivå.

Den tredje artikeln är egenförfattad med titeln ”Labour market policies on a sub-national level”. Artikeln baseras på en analys av sekundärmaterialen i form av öppna data som beskriver svenska kommuner. I artikeln testas ett antal hypoteser, på grundval av tidigare forskning, med syfte att

öka förståelsen för vad som utmärker kommuner med mer omfattande arbetsmarknadspolitik. Mest utmärkande är arbetslöshetstal, där högre arbetslöshet predicerar mer omfattande arbetsmarknadspolitik. Vissa mönster återfinns även vad gäller geografiska och politiska faktorer, dessa är dock av mindre betydelse i jämförelse med arbetslöshetstal vad gäller styrka att predicera arbetsmarknadspolitikens omfattning.

Avhandlingen påvisar att kommunernas engagemang, i den aktiva arbetsmarknadspolitik, tillkommit mot bakgrund av tre processer: (i) flernivåstyrningen av ekonomiskt stöd vid arbetslöshet, (ii) förändringar av den aktiva arbetsmarknadspolitikens funktion, samt (iii) den dialektiska relationen mellan aktiv arbetsmarknadspolitik och ekonomiskt stöd. Det delade ansvaret för ekonomiskt stöd, mellan stat och kommun, skapar incitament för kommunerna att kvalificera försörjningsstödstagare till statliga ersättningar. Ytterligare en viktig förklaring till utvecklingen mot en kommunal arbetsmarknadspolitik är viljan att skapa incitament för att motverka passivt mottagande av försörjningsstöd. Framväxten av en aktiv arbetsmarknadspolitik på kommunal nivå öppnar upp för större skillnader mellan kommuner i och med att de har relativt omfattande autonomi i fråga om omfattning och inriktning. Den pågående reformeringen av Arbetsförmedlingen har inneburit en minskning av lokalkontor, samt syftar till att öka användningen av privata utförare och därmed minska insatser i myndighetens regi. Denna reformering kommer sannolikt påverka kommunernas roll samt flernivåstyrningen i den aktiva arbetsmarknadspolitik, men då reformen är under implementering vid färdigställandet av denna avhandling är det svårt att bedöma hur denna påverkan kommer se ut. Slutligen påvisar avhandlingen att inkluderingen av socionomer, inom den aktiva arbetsmarknadspolitik, har tillkommit som en följd av juridiska och organisatoriska faktorer, snarare än som en efterfrågan på socionomprofessionens kunskapsbas. Många forskare har kritiserat den roll som socialarbetare kommit att få i arbetsmarknadspolitik i och med betoningen på villkorat bistånd via deltagande i arbetsmarknadsinsatser. Frågan huruvida yrkesverksamma socionomer hör samman denna kritik är i behov av ytterligare empiriska undersökningar.

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