

## **Activating the unemployed: directions and divisions in Europe**

One of the remaining disputed issues of welfare state research is the question of convergence or divergence for the field of unemployment policy. It has been contended that the idea of fighting unemployment on the supply-side has led to symbolic convergence, from which different strategies are formulated. Such assumption requires a broader approach of conceptualising change towards activation. Analytical concepts still lack a somewhat more differentiated perspective on so called “activation” in terms of differing degrees and directions of change.

This paper analyses developments in three European countries: Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom. A multi-dimensional conception of activation based on individual action construction, on the one hand, and provision of active support, on the other, allows for distinguishing different models of unemployment policy in regard to activation. Changes are traced for programmes of unemployment insurance and social assistance over the last 15 years, comparing policies for insiders with policies for outsiders of the labour market at different points of time. An attempt is made to analyse these developments in the light of their different contexts referring especially to programme-specific parameters and socio-cultural backgrounds arguing that symbolic convergence towards activation is contrasted by different ways of ascribing responsibility for the management of activation. The comparison of two ideal-typical schemes of activation (UK, DK) with recent reforms in Germany questions previous assumptions in the literature about different types of activation policy.

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