

# **Social Activation Policy in the Netherlands**

## **Practices, Problems and Promises**

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**pyrrhula**

SOCIAL RESEARCH NETWORK

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We greatly acknowledge the respondents interviewed in this study for their time and efforts. They are engaged in and committed to novel and innovative forms of social participation and social inclusion that go beyond the beaten tracks of mainstream labour market policy.

We hope that the conclusions generated by this research project have implementation relevance for German labour market policy as well. We are convinced that for many of the groups studied in this project, standard policies are simply inadequate. This is true for the Netherlands and this is true for Germany. If we want to reach and include groups at a large distance from the official labour market we need to be much more creative in our policy design and policy implementation. The key-notion here is to empower disadvantaged groups: to provide them with personal and social skills and competences that enhance their human capital on a highly competitive labour market.

Data collection was completed September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Activation policy developments after this date have not been included.

Tilburg/Rotterdam, September 2011

Henk Vinken

Peter Ester



## Chapter 1 Social Activation Policy in the Netherlands: Inclusion and Participation

### 1.1 The social activation philosophy

Since a number of years 'social activation' is a core theme in Dutch (municipal) social policy making. It is aimed at participation of social welfare recipients who structurally lack competences and skills to participate on their own and who generally are at a large (psychological) distance from the formal labour market (Pennen, 2003; Vlaar & Keesom, 1997). Significant numbers have serious problems in various life domains including debts, addictions (drugs, alcohol, gambling), criminality, language deficiencies, physical and or mental health problems, homeless, etc. (Bosselaar et al., 2010). They do not succeed on their own to make the transition from social benefits dependence to a paid job which reinforces their outsider position on a segmented labour market (Piore 1970, 1975).<sup>1</sup> In a substantial number of cases their social exclusion and non-participation is transmitted intergenerationally, i.e. from one generation to the next one (Payne, 2005).

Without innovative, tailored, and far-reaching social policies these welfare recipients are permanently lost for the formal job market: a reservoir of outsiders, often at the margin of society. Many of them live isolated lives not in touch with mainstream society (Jehoel-Gijsbers, 2004). Their interaction with basic outside networks is often minimal. Their lack of resources and perspective may create a new underclass in Dutch society (Engbersen, 2006). The societal costs of non-interference, of a laissez-faire social policy, are enormous and quite disastrous from both a social *and* labour market point of view. The societal price to be paid for a large segment of non-participating individuals is – according to the Dutch social model – unacceptable. Non-interference would signify the sanctioning of two parallel cultures: of participants and non-participants, of insiders and outsiders, of winners and losers.

Besides this social argument to look for innovative, creative and focused policies and programs for these marginalized groups, there is a clear labour market incentive as well. The ageing of the Dutch labour force and the massive labour market exit of the babyboom generation will lead to new labour scarcity (Commissie Bakker, 2009). In the next five years 500,000 Dutch employers will retire. In the year 2040 one out of four Dutch will be over 65 years of age. (Van Duin & Janssen, 2010) If we want to sustain quality of life in an ageing society we need non-orthodox policy instruments to enhance labour market participation. One of these instruments is to significantly enlarge non-job-to-job transitions. Activation of social security recipients is a corner stone of this policy.<sup>2</sup> But – and this should be underlined – recipients need to have basic skills to survive in a highly competitive labour market. Due to the gradual but drastic upgrading of the underside of the labour market, also jobs at this level require elementary competences and credentials (Borghans & Grip, 2000; Dupuy, 2006; Dupuy, 2007). Training such basic and elementary skills is a defining part of social activation policy in the Netherlands.

The Dutch social activation model is therefore a combination of social welfare policy *and* labour market policy: based on the paradigm of inclusion and participation.<sup>3</sup> Conceptually, welfare and

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<sup>1</sup> See also Steijn (1999).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (1990). *Een werkend perspectief*. Den Haag.

<sup>3</sup> In this broad sense the Dutch social activation scheme is intellectually indebted to the Transitional Labour Market Model (TLM) as advanced by Günter Schmid of the German Science Center (Schmid, 2000; Schmid & Gazier, 2002). See also: Ester et al. (2008); Van den Heuvel et al. (2001).

labour policy are not seen as intrinsically opposed – or even antagonistic – models but as schemes that both reinforce societal partaking. But depending on the political or economic situation either the welfare or the labour market emphasis may dominate (Pennan, 2003).<sup>4</sup> But in both cases the emphasis is on activation, on participation. The core philosophy is that one participates in society, preferably by working but otherwise by training or voluntary work. Participation is the rule, if possible in a paid job or otherwise in unpaid work and social activation programs. Non-participation, in short, is not an option.

## 1.2 The social activation model

The Dutch social activation model is seen as one way to foster the human dignity of welfare recipients, not just through income transfers, but particularly through offering opportunities for active participation in society. The focus is on inclusion rather than on accepting exclusion, on participation rather than on allowing inactiveness. The main purpose of the Dutch social activation model is to empower welfare benefit recipients to make the transition to social participation (Dekker & Van der Aa (2000). The idea is to use the social security system as a trampoline – rather than a mere safety net – from social security benefits to participation and paid labour. In this sense it breaks with traditional welfare policies that mainly focus at securing the financial position of benefit recipients.

People on welfare differ in their distance to the labour market. Four phases are being distinguished by social security agencies. Phase 1 clients have little difficulty in finding a job and therefore need little assistance. Phase 2 clients are at some and Phase 3 clients at a larger distance from the labour market. These two groups have the greatest potential for reintegration programs. Phase 4 clients are the most problematic groups to reintegrate: they are far removed from the labour market and are prime subjects for activation programs.<sup>5</sup> Their ‘transitional capital’, i.e. to make the transition from welfare dependence towards a paid job, is extremely limited.

Social activation can be seen as a first attempt to guide and support unemployed people – especially long term (Phase 4) unemployed – on their way back to the labor market and to paid employment. It can also be looked at from another – broader - perspective, where paid employment is not the ultimate goal, at least not at short notice, but serves as a tool to stimulate people to participate in society in other ways as well. In both perspectives *participation* is the key-word. The social activation experiments in the Netherlands have been initiated by two major considerations: on the one hand, many welfare recipients appeared to be so far removed from the labor market that transition to employment was considered unrealistic for them, at least in the short run. On the other hand, it was felt that these benefit recipients needed to participate more fully in society than only through income transfers and employment-related services. Other activities such as participation in voluntary work or training courses were seen as valuable ways to promote social integration.

Social activation helps people without work commitments, paid or otherwise, and no other social contacts, including people with health, or psychological problems, people with debts, single mothers with low support, immigrants with poor language skills, alcoholics and drug addicts, and those who are unqualified or illiterate with the aim of developing their social skills and a work routine

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<sup>4</sup> See also Leene & Blauw (2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Lammers (2001).

(Ghesquière, P. (1993). It is designed as a bridge between life on benefits, on which most of the target group rely, and the world of work (Van der Pennen, 2003). It also helps combat social exclusion and isolation by enabling people on welfare to perform socially useful activities that would not otherwise be possible. It provides them with new skills and competences that enhance their labour market value and self-respect. Activation schemes include a wide range of activities such as voluntary work, work trial placements, training courses and language courses, time management, sports and cultural activities (Dekker & Van der Aa, 2000). These activities reintroduce structure into a person's life, generate daily routines, bring social contacts, and help to restore self-confidence. Social activation aims at changing people's self-perception and contributes to re-installing a basic sense of biographical self-direction. A sense of mastering one's lifestyle and immediate life course. This fundamental process of psychological re-definition in our view is a core feature of social activation goals.

The Dutch social activation model is an integral approach in which local actors work together. Or better: have to work together. There is a clear need of municipal social services for the help of other local bodies such as welfare, social work and reintegration agencies, health care institutions, training centres and other agencies. This multi-agent co-ordinated approach requires a local partnership structure between public and private, profit and non-profit stakeholders. It requires, in short, both a shared active philosophy on social inclusion and labour market transitions and an integral and co-operative implementation strategy. This combination is the nucleus of Dutch social activation policy.

### 1.3 The example of Rotterdam: Full Engagement

The Full Engagement policy of the city of Rotterdam is a telling and intelligent example of social activation. Rotterdam has a quite skewed demographic profile: a relatively and absolutely large segment of lower educated, non-skilled unemployed people concentrated in specific neighbourhoods of this metropolitan seaport city.<sup>6</sup> Migrant minorities are overrepresented in this category. The Full Engagement policy means that every recipient (or 'client' in their words) of a municipal benefit is actively involved in reaching economic independence and in exiting from welfare dependence (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2010). Engagement can either be work, training or contributing to the city by volunteering. Engagement itself is not voluntary but an obligation of every municipal benefit recipient. Participation is for a minimum of 20 hours per week.

The client's performance may consist of a variety of activities that adds to his or her participation: training, language courses, voluntary work, work-learning trajectories and work experience, naturalization courses, etc. The city of Rotterdam facilitates participation by e.g. debt assistance, child care. Each client gets an individual diagnosis of his or her potentials and a personal client manager. Full Engagement policy is executed at the neighbourhood level. This focus enables optimal cooperation with neighbourhood officials, (care) insurers, schools, housing corporations, companies, and volunteer organizations. The neighbourhood focus enables to direct Full Engagement as close as possible to the client. The progress of Full Engagement is monitored and periodically its development and results are reported.

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<sup>6</sup> About 7% of the Rotterdam labour force is unemployed; over 30,000 people have a WWB social benefit allowance; mean duration of benefit receipt is 8.3 yrs (which is 3.2 yrs above the national mean). More than half of the clients (and two-thirds of young clients) have no qualifications. The proportion of single parents is about 25% (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2010).

Full Engagement works both ways: it helps the client to participate and it is profitable for the city. "Every Rotterdammer deserves a chance to participate and develop his talents. Rotterdam, vice versa, deserves that every Rotterdammer contributes to the city." (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2010: 6). This activation adagium reflects a more transparent and outspoken balance between rights and obligations, a New Deal so to speak. It stresses the importance of symmetrical relations between the city and its welfare recipients. The Full Engagement philosophy is based on a no-nonsense policy paradigm that mirrors Rotterdam's public image in the Netherlands. Participation according to the city policy makers leads to talent development, enhances self-respect and increases independence. It stimulates the local economy, lowers public benefits expenditures, and creates cleaner and safer neighbourhoods. Participation has positive effects on public health and poverty fight. And, finally, participation increases the labour market pool which is essential in an ageing society. Full Engagement, thus, is framed as a classic win-win game. By 2014 Full Engagement - so the city's policy plan outlines - needs to be fully operational in all Rotterdam neighbourhoods.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1.4 The Law on Work and Benefits & the Institute for the Implementation of Employed Persons Insurances Schemes (UWV)

In the Netherlands (financial) support for people who are unable to provide the necessary costs of their livelihood is regulated in the Law on Work and Benefits (2003).<sup>8</sup> The focus is on the municipality which receives a budget for income support and job placement assistance. The golden rule in the law is that a job goes before a benefit.<sup>9</sup> Everyone who receives a benefit is obliged to look for a job or to follow a reintegration trajectory. The municipality is responsible for the implementation of the law. The role of the UWV, the national Dutch Institute for the Implementation of Employed Persons Insurances Schemes, is leading in the execution and administration of social security and employment policies. UWV (in Dutch: [Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen](#)) is an autonomous administrative authority (ZBO) and is commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) to implement employee insurances and provide labour market and data services. The Dutch employee insurances are provided for via laws such as the WW (Unemployment Insurance Act), the WIA (Work and Income according to Labour Capacity Act, which contains the IVA (Full Invalidation Benefit Regulations) and WGA (Return to Work (Partially Disabled) Regulations), the Wajong (Disablement Assistance Act for Handicapped Young Persons), the WAO (Invalidity Insurance Act), the WAZ (Self-employed Persons Disablement Benefits Act), the WAZO (Work and Care Act) and the Sickness Benefits Act.<sup>10</sup> The core activities of UWV are fourfold:

- employment – helping the client remain employed or find employment, in close cooperation with the municipalities;

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<sup>7</sup> The Rotterdam Full Employment policy aims (between 2011 and 2014) at 10,000 people making the transition from welfare to a paid job and another 10,000 people moving up the participation ladder (Rotterdam, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/bijstand>.

<sup>9</sup> In Dutch: "Werk boven uitkering".

<sup>10</sup> See: <http://www.uwv.nl>. In addition UWV has 27 offices where clients can turn for other matters. Administrative activities also take place at seventeen of these offices. UWV has divided the country into eleven administrative districts.

- social medical affairs – evaluating illness and labour incapacity according to clear criteria (reintegration);
- benefits – ensuring that benefits are provided if work is not possible, or not immediately possible;
- data management – ensuring that the client needs to provide the government with data on employment and benefits only once.

UWV is represented throughout the Netherlands. Job seekers can go to 127 locations of the Public Employment Service (job placement and reintegration). Increasingly these are so-called *Werkpleinen* (employment squares), where the Municipal Social Service is represented as well. Services are offered under a single roof with a single point of contact for the client. In such a *Werkplein* a number of companies operate. Reintegration companies and temporary employment agencies are also often represented. At present the role and budget (about 2 billion Euro) of the UWV are subject of serious political debate and substantial budget cuts are to be expected. This will evidently impact their employment and reintegration activities.

At present the role and budget (about 2 billion Euro) of the UWV are subject of serious political debate and substantial budget cuts are to be expected. This will evidently impact their employment and reintegration activities. This current debate is part of a radical reorientation of Dutch social security policy with far-reaching consequences for social benefits clients. The main goal is to drastically economize by cutting social security expenses. A next objective is to harmonize existing laws on social benefits into one overarching transparent law for the “underside” of the labour market: the new *Work and Income According to Labour Capacity Act* (WVNA).<sup>11</sup> This law will be effective as from 2013 and aims at a quicker transition from benefits dependence to the labour market and should effect to a structural saving of 1.8 billion Euro. Some of the most radical modifications include lower benefits for young handicapped persons (Wajong) combined with lower intake. Those who are still able to work, will be forced to do so.<sup>12</sup> Employment, so is the idea, transcends income. Benefits will be restricted to young people who are structurally and totally unable to work. Access to working (sheltered employment) in a social work context (*Sociale Werkvoorziening*) will also be restricted. It will, furthermore, become more difficult to receive social security benefits (*Bijstand*), benefits will be reduced, and recipients will be obliged to render services in return (e.g. volunteer work). Municipalities are the leading actors in executing this new law; the massive budget cuts have seriously affected the negotiations between the state and municipalities.<sup>13</sup> The united Dutch municipalities prompted their board (VNG) on June 8, 2011 to renegotiate the WSV decentralization and budget cuts.

Municipalities in essence not only have more substantial room to develop their policies within the scope of the Law on Work and Income but also more financial maneuverability. But the law also comes with greater responsibilities, e.g. to not go for quick wins by focussing policies on benefit recipients with relatively favourable exit chances. The law defines social activation as “the

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<sup>11</sup> See Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Arbeidsmarktbeleid*, Brief van de Staatsecretaris van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, Vergaderjaar 2010-2011, 29 544, nr. 297.

<sup>12</sup> This group is estimated at about 60 percent.

<sup>13</sup> Particular its representative the *Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten* (VNG), the Association of Dutch Municipalities. See: <http://www.vng.nl/eCache/DEF/1/08/559.html>.

performing of unpaid socially meaningful activities aimed at job employment or, if job employment is not yet possible, aimed at independent social participation". The definition clearly reflects the linkage between social policy and labour market policy.

In the last decade the law and its funding possibilities have evoked an abundance of local initiatives of active social and labour market initiatives targeted at empowering social assistance recipients. Literature (e.g. a study by the Netherlands' Inspection for Work and Income IWI, 2006) shows that the content of activities offered to social activation clients ranges from 'purely' social to 'purely' labour market-oriented, but most of them were mixed (and the tendency has been to use mixed approaches more and more). The activities can be classified into six categories:

- a. voluntary work in associations (in some cases, clients were encouraged to pursue the voluntary work which they already performed informally);
- b. other socially useful activities or cultural activities;
- c. work trial placements: here, for obvious reasons, the duration of the placements has been restricted and the nature of the work performed had to be different from the jobs carried out by clients in subsidized employment schemes. The activities may take place in social enterprises and include some domestic services, recycling etc.);
- d. continued training: courses could be vocational (e.g. ICT-courses) or focused on personal development (for example time management or cycling for immigrant women) or on social skills;
- e. care (offered to the clients themselves): debt management, drug rehabilitation, mental health care etc.;
- f. other tailor-made activities such as competence assessment.

In most local projects, more than one type of activity is on offer, and clients indeed tend to combine different activities. In the majority of cases, voluntary work is one of the elements of a social activation trajectory. As the target group appears to become gradually more disadvantaged, care gains importance in the package. Other frequent activities include complimentary education and training. The average participant spends 11-12 hours per week on social activation, although there is great variation (from 1 hour to quasi-full time activity).

Initial studies (Netherlands' Inspection for Work and Income IWI, 2006) showed that social activation generated positive results particularly in terms of acquiring basic personal skills and in realizing social participation. Welfare-to-work transitions were rare but one has to realize that significant numbers of clients typically lacked quite elementary social competences. It is a long way from structural and long-term welfare dependence – both in a financial, psychological and cultural meaning - to a solid paid job.<sup>14</sup> There are substantial and persistent hurdles to make smooth transitions from the world of welfare to the world of work.

Two lessons seemed vital at that early stage: the first lesson was that institutions, and the people working in them, needed to adopt a different approach that prioritizes helping people to participate and find work. This is the core of 'activation'. The second lesson involved treating people as individuals, with possibilities and opportunities, rather than numbers on files (Dekker & Van der Aa, 2000). In any case, social activation presupposes the active and coordinated input from all local stakeholders concerned (Groot et al., 2008). In this study we want – with these two lessons in mind - to paint a more recent and comprehensive picture of social activation in the Netherlands.

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<sup>14</sup> See Brouwer et al. (2006) for a cost-benefit analysis of municipal social activation projects.

## 1.5 Social participation ladder

A recent and highly interesting specification and application of social activation policies is the so-called social participation ladder approach. Municipal participation policy is an attempt to take away existing divisions between local re-integration policy, naturalization policy, and education policy.<sup>15</sup> The de-compartmentalization of local activation policies aims at a more structural and integral participation policy. The underlying idea is that by pooling the three separate budgets in *one* overall participation budget, a more effective activation approach is realized.<sup>16</sup> The main goal is to accomplish that citizens reach a level of economic independence that enables them to fully participate in society. The concentration of activation policies into one participation budget means more simplicity of local rules and administrative streamlining.<sup>17</sup> Participation policy has three main objectives, to assist people to transit to either (paid) work, education/training or societal participation.

Regioplan, a Dutch social research institute, developed the so-called 'participation ladder' that measures the degree of local citizen participation (Van Horssen & Mallee, 2009; Van Gent et al., 2008). The ladder is a one-dimensional quasi-hierarchical outcome representation of local activation levels with labour participation at the top of the hierarchy. Paid employment is the highest priority. If this priority is not feasible, other forms of participation come into the picture such as volunteer work. Based on earlier studies of the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) the ladder specifies different forms of formal and non-formal participation related to both paid and unpaid work. (cf. Jehoel-Gijsbers, 2004; Kwekkeboom & van Weert, 2008):

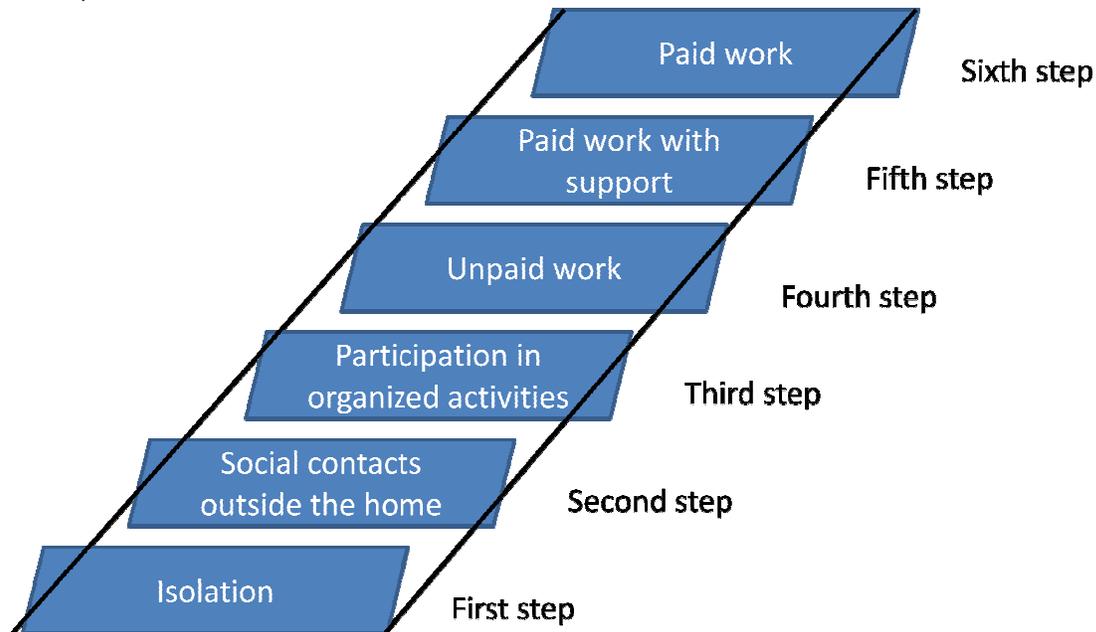
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<sup>15</sup> See <http://wms-pl.netfacet.nl//data/website/content/EXPERTPARTICI.HR.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> See: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/inburgering/participatiebudget>; also see: <http://www.participatieladder.nl/pages/content.php>. The Law on the Participation Budget became effective in 2009. The law was an initiative of three Dutch departments: the Department of Social Affairs and Employment, the Department of Education, Culture and Science, and the Department of Housing, Communities, and Integration.

<sup>17</sup> See for examples of Dutch cities' policy programs on social participation e.g. Eindhoven (<http://www.vng.nl/smartsite.dws?id=90163>), Utrecht ([http://www.vng.nl/Praktijkvoorbeelden/SZI/2010/Utrecht\\_Notitie\\_Participatiebudget\\_2010.pdf](http://www.vng.nl/Praktijkvoorbeelden/SZI/2010/Utrecht_Notitie_Participatiebudget_2010.pdf)), Leiden ([http://www.vng.nl/Praktijkvoorbeelden/SZI/2010/Leiden\\_discussienota%20participatie\\_2010.pdf](http://www.vng.nl/Praktijkvoorbeelden/SZI/2010/Leiden_discussienota%20participatie_2010.pdf)), and Zwolle (<http://www.vng.nl/smartsite.dws?ch=,tkm&id=90152>).

## Participation ladder



The six levels are combinations of participatory activities that traditionally belonged to the three policy domains of re-integration, naturalization, and education. Paid work refers to people with an employment contract, who are not receiving benefits and are not part of a local activation program. Paid work with support applies to people with an employment contract combined with some kind of supplementary benefit, external coaching and/or a schooling trajectory. Unpaid work relates to people without a paid job but active in e.g. volunteering, work first projects or naturalization projects. Participation in organized activities refers to non-working people active in sports activities, membership of associations, taking courses without a work component. Social contacts outside the home applies to non-working people with some non-functional and non-organized contacts outside their household. Isolation, finally, indicates people with minimal social and functional contacts.

The ladder makes it possible to measure local participation and to indicate trends in local activation, also according to subgroups. As the ladder relates to outcome indicators and assigned budgets, it facilitates the measurement of the effectiveness and efficiency of local participation programs.<sup>18</sup> This participation ladder measurement instrument has been tested and validated in various Dutch municipalities and results are positive.<sup>19</sup> (cf. van Horssen & Mallee, 2010) Municipalities' favourable attitudes are based on the relative simplicity of the participation ladder, the little time that is involved in positioning clients on the ladder, the (also trend-wise) insights it provides, and the possibility of policy output evaluation. The participation measurement instrument provides a common framework – and thus a common language – for policy makers responsible for different local activation domains. Estimating the growth potential of clients needs further elaboration. A highly promising prospective application is to relate participation scores to digital maps of

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.participatieladder.nl/pages/content.php>.

<sup>19</sup> The participation ladder was fielded and tested in Alkmaar, Almelo, Amsterdam, Deventer, Eindhoven and Zwolle.

municipalities which will give a more detailed geographical picture of activation involvement. Producing the maps over time provides a much needed insight in the local dynamics of participation.

### 1.6 Clients with multiple problems

A special challenge for local social activation policy are persons (and households) with complex multiple problems. Research has shown that – depending on the definition - about 40-70% of people on welfare have a combination of problems in various life domains (Bosselaar et al., 2010; Inspectie Werk en Inkomen, 2010). The problems these welfare recipients accumulate include economic problems (debts, unemployment), cultural problems (lacking language skills, no professional start qualifications, teenage mothers), normative problems (delinquency, child abuse, domestic violence) and psychosocial problems (mental and psychiatric problems, addiction, physical health problems). (CBS, 2008) It is extremely difficult for this category of welfare recipients with multiple problems to find and to keep work. One of the crucial issues here is that these clients depend on different social assistance and social work institutions which often have their own approaches, methods, and agendas (Ghesquière, 1993).

A concentration of (often complicated) multiple problems is particularly observable among lower educated welfare clients. The dynamics of multiple problems indicate a pattern: the underlying issues (lack of education, cultural constraints, health problems) result in not finding and keeping paid employment. Not having work leads to debts and social exclusion. Social exclusion brings psychosocial and behavioural problems which in due time are the primary hindrance to make the transition to paid work (Bosselaar et al., 2010). The combination of multiple problems produces a lack of self-coping and self-direction which block elementary forms of participation. It may also create a sense of distrust towards aid and assistance institutions.

### 1.7 The Dutch study in a German context: main research questions

IAB is interested in the social activation philosophy and especially in the ways the activation model has been developed and implemented in the Netherlands. The key research issues relate to the following questions. What are the main experiences of Dutch social activation policy and programs? What are best practices? Which lessons can be learned? This project in which Dutch activation policies are detailed aims to help IAB to see if an exchange of ideas and best practices can be translated to the German (social security) context.

Notwithstanding a substantial number of innovative initiatives it remains difficult to integrate long-term recipients of social security provisions both socially and at the labour market. In many cases the distance to the formal labour market is a bridge too far, both culturally and psychologically. Changing outsiders into insiders on a segmented labour market is no easy option. A purely job oriented integration policy has its limitations, so it is found in several studies. Seeing what not-only-job oriented activation policies might bring, is one of the rationales of this project. The project description (*Leistungsbeschreibung*) states that it is of interest to seek insights in the type, target, organization, structure, development, and effects of the social activation initiatives, especially from the perspective of those engaged in organizing these initiatives at the local level.

At the same time as this Dutch study was done, an IAB study into similar issues was fielded in Germany. A close link between the two projects was organized so that the two studies could benefit

from each other. The research teams met on a regular basis and exchanged results. Joint interviews were done in bordering regions with social activation programs. In a later stage the two studies will culminate in a high level bilateral expert meeting in which the main findings are debated from a combined Dutch-German comparative perspective.

#### 1.8 Contents of the report

This report is structured as follows. Chapter Two will describe the methodology applied in this study with a strong emphasis on qualitative face-to-face expert interviews. The main results will be reported in Chapter Three. Chapter Four formulates the central conclusions and will attempt to specify policy recommendations that might hold for the German context and situation as well.

## Chapter 2 Methodology

In this project qualitative methods have a key position. We wish to explicitly address a few of the considerations relevant for these methods here. We will sketch the way we sampled the interviewees for our project, how the interviewing process went, and how we have analyzed our data. Reporting on these issues is an integral part of quality control of the project.

### 2.1 Sampling

In a strict sense 'theoretical sampling' as is popular in many qualitative approaches (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Wester, 1995) is an inductive approach. In such an approach the key issue is to achieve a high rate of variation of cases on the basis of contrast characteristics and to see (in the phase of analyses) whether or not this variation relates to individual or structural correlates. We, by contrast, have selected expert respondents (in our case, key people, e.g., case managers, policy makers, and decision makers involved in social activation projects) on the basis of some basic characteristics typical for social activation practice in the Netherlands. These characteristics were based in the policy and research literature on social activation. It is clear that 1) urbanization and region were relevant key issues: experts from the biggest 4 cities in the Netherlands have been selected versus experts from smaller towns. We also have included experts from various border regions in order to comply with the IAB need to participate in some of the interviews and/or make cross-border comparisons. Furthermore 2) distance (mainly in a social and psychological sense) from the labor market is relevant. Ideally, people who are familiar with groups that vary in labor market distance, that vary in terms of mediation difficulty (compare the criteria of 'Arbeitsmarktverfügbarkeit', 'Rehabilitationsbedarf', etc. in the IAB-study by Hirsland & Lobato, 2009), have been selected. Practically and as a starter we have contacted institutions that are involved in social activation policy making and execution at the national and large-municipal levels.

We took on a half deductive-inductive perspective meaning that within the above mentioned criteria we have aimed for variation and a meaningful reconstruction process between interviewer and interviewee in the tradition of qualitative, social-reconstructivist studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Furthermore we used a 'snowball' method. Starting the interviews in the larger cities we then asked the interviewees there for their 'inspiration cities', i.e. municipalities and perhaps already potential interviewees within these communes that they think are setting an example in social activation, are forerunners and doing their utmost to bring people back to active participation in society, and/or are doing something others do not do (e.g. have creative projects or typical projects, e.g. projects that involve neighborhood participation in Enschede). We again asked this at the next cities (e.g. Enschede interviewees mentioned Apeldoorn to go to). In the Appendix one can find the list of interviewees with the exact interview dates and details on municipalities. A total of 17 interviews have been held in 11 municipalities across the Netherlands, including the 4 largest cities of the Netherlands (the so-called G4) where we held a total of 7 interviews. All the respondents that were contacted eagerly participated in the study. The first interview was held in December 2010, the last in June 2011. During this period crucial developments happened in the social activation realm (see below).

## 2.2 Data gathering, the interviewing process

In the studies we have previously performed we mostly have invited our respondents to tell us about their life history and major events in their life course. Storytelling is an approach through which respondents make sense of their personal history, a history that unfolds itself within the wider societal context of the formation and life course of their generation. In our case we aim to stress the importance of awareness of the interviewer's role. We have learned the importance to show a keen interest in the stories told by the respondent, not to debate or discuss, but to ask in order to get the story behind the story. This requires competencies that are as important as knowledge of qualitative research literature: one needs the right combination of empathy, sensitivity, and subtleness. The same competencies are required for our expert interviews (see Liebold & Trinczek, 2002).

In our study we will not be able to use a strict biographical-narrative approach (Bohnsack, 2003; Diepstraten, 2006; Hirsland & Lobato, 2009; Rosenthal, 1993, 2005; Schütze, 1984). In such an approach the respondents have the opportunity to tell their own story without much 'burden' of the interviewer. A story telling situation occurs that is open to unexpected sidesteps and courses that have not been planned by the interviewer. In our approach we will start from a framework of concepts and perspectives, e.g. on types of social activation, that we wish to illustrate, clarify, and deepen by doing the interviews. We furthermore wish to compare the reconstructed perspectives of the different interviewees. This means that we have made use of a topic list in which we organize the different elements of social activation into a set of points-to-be-discussed in the interviews. The topic list was not used in a rigid way, but we took care that every topic on the list was covered in the interview. We do realize that the danger is that topics not on the list and other not-foreseen topics raised by the interviewees have attained too little attention. It was clear that the interview took its flow and that most topics were discussed without much prompting. Topics on the list that are not covered naturally in the interview have been raised at the end in order to not disturb the natural flow of the interview.

In the sequence of the interview process we have been aware that we need to address interviewer situation characteristics. Not every interviewee will present a story in the same way, chronologically ordered or not, depicting all involved in their work or not, balancing theory and practice or not, enthusiastically or not, etc. Also important, as the above implies, is the awareness of one's own role and how one poses questions and prompts thoughts and statements: one can be too suggestive, e.g., or one even can 'go native' (Wester, 1995). We have therefore made several steps. Each interview (in Dutch) is recorded on digital audio tape and presented to IAB. During the interviews we made shorthand notes, including notes on the interviewing process, and after the interviews we have made a short summary of the findings of the interview. This summary is presented to the respondents for further checking and supplementing if they find that necessary. The augmented and annotated summary is also presented to IAB.

A special issue needs to be added to our sampling and interviewing considerations. The topic of social activation was seriously politicized during our project and in the front pages of all media during the whole period of interviewing. Severe budget cuts were introduced (see also previous chapter) and several political conflicts around the topic occurred. The future of many social activation projects became uncertain and many activities-as-usual came under fire. We felt it necessary to climb up the ladder a few times and not restrict our interviews to project or case managers only. In some cases we shared the table with key politicians at the municipal level and in

many cases these politicians were accompanied by senior policy makers. They could explain the future direction of the projects and give a realistic picture of what social activation in the Netherlands entails now and especially in the near future. Not only did we feel it necessary to have a wider view, but also many of the invited municipalities themselves pushed their highest ranking people to the fore as potential interviewees. Extra efforts were undertaken to talk to people with insights in practical matters of projects in these cities (and this is why sometimes more than one interview was held). When nearing the end of the interviewing cycle we sought for some balance in the political perspectives that we were offered. After having heard from a socialist, a christian-democrat, and a social-democrat local politician we also wished to hear the views from a liberal-conservative politician even if this meant doing more interviews than asked for. This way we ensured a balanced view on social activation and its future in the Netherlands.

We actually left the interviewing setup to the organizers in the municipalities. After contacting the departments and/or municipal councils we asked to talk to people who could both present a vision and perspective on social activation and who were familiar with the topic in more practical ways. We suggested to have subsequent interviews or if they wished group interviews. The resulting mix is interesting: in some cities, such as Utrecht, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, we interviewed several experts one after the other. In another city we met a larger group of people including a politician. The group accompanied us to a second interview with another person and they all actively involved in this second interview. In yet another city, we first met an outspoken local politician who referred us to her two key civil servants for a second interview round. In again another city, all the key player at the highest policy level and at the practical project level were together for a group interview. It is telling that all the respondents, in a group or not, were highly interested in participating in the interviews and in talking about the key aspects of social activation in general and of local-level social activation projects, here and now and in the future. All of them shared a certain pride in talking about this topic, their city, their approach, and their results.

### 2.3 Analyses, the key issue of respondent feedback

In the phase of analyses core qualitative competencies have come to the fore. The different interviews were analyzed first in a vertical and then in a horizontal way. In both ways we have again followed classic grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, and especially Maso, 1994), yet again not completely (as we are not seeking emerging concepts or aiming for the construction of a theoretical model combining the newly discovered concepts with existing ones). The analyses, must 1) lead to an empirically grounded interpretation of the concepts of social activation in the Netherlands and 2) to the tracking of variations within, relationship between and relevance of these concepts. The actual analysis followed the data gathering in an iterative way. In and after each interview bits of conceptual clarifications, interpretations and classifications emerged that in following interviews played their part, and so on and so forth in the next interviews. In a vertical analysis each interview is analyzed one by one. The sensitizing questions of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969) serve the purpose of seeing what themes are at hand in each interview fragment: which key characteristics of social activation are highlighted, what are the conditions for positive experiences with different types of activation, what is defined as a positive effect to begin with, etc. The concepts were not pre-given but develop along the way. They did not require an extensive theoretical exploration before per se, but could be deduced from the

stories that the respondents told us. As a consistency and quality check we both have interpreted the interviews (both have read the summaries of the interviews and comment on them). In the horizontal analyses the interviews and respondents have been compared on the basis, among others, of the concepts developed in the vertical analyses. If we need to mention a tradition of qualitative studies that is relevant in this approach, we would think of Geertz' ethnographical and interpretive anthropology approach that prioritizes making 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973). In this approach it is aimed to make constructs, concepts, and notions empirically plausible.

The feedback asked from the respondent is a key element of our qualitative approach. We have made a summary of each interview and presented this to the respondents asking them for additional remarks or changes. If necessary we have posed some extra questions or asked for some clarifications. This way we have received an endorsed interview summary that serves its purpose in the analyses. Furthermore, it is important in order to gain some quality control that – different from quantitative studies – cannot be based on repeating the analyses. The report of the interview serves as a kind of audit of the interview with which an independent expert can verify the quality of the process. It also refers to the concept of credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Wester, 1995, Maso, 1994): reflection on the interview process at the end of the interview and repeated contact is a form of member-check and member-debriefing that not only makes the interview less dependent on the single interview moment but also allows the experts interviewed to state whether or not they recognize the results and conclusions. In the end this type of communicative validation makes the results more reliable.

Mid September 2011 all respondents were given the opportunity to review their interview transcript summaries. Most interviewees responded within the time frame of two weeks. All respondents agreed that the transcript summaries reflected the interview in an appropriate way. Some made a few comments in the text files or in their email communications with the interviewer. Sometimes the detailed comments referred to more exact position description and biographical developments of the interviewees. In another case the comments aimed to provide more insight in specific attitudes, e.g. the exact meaning of the more strict attitude towards clients in these times of budget cuts. One other interviewee was a little surprised to see that some quotes were literally presented in some sections of the summary. Yet another respondent provided more details on a specific project and its results described in the summary. There was also some concern especially among a few policy makers that some political statements could be misunderstood. Sometimes questions were posed in the draft transcript and interviewees were invited to respond to the questions. They did so in length. Finally, one small-town interviewee told us the transcripts were not only very accurately but could also, when translated back into Dutch, serve as promotional flyer for their method of working.

After the respondents evaluated the interview summaries and their remarks were included in newer versions, the summaries were all anonymized in order to comply with the German Datenschutz. They were then offered to the IAB as research data. This means that personal names were changed and titles of functions and organizations were generalized. The city names were kept.

## Chapter 3 Results

### 3.1 Interview impressions

All interviewees are eager to express their opinions and experiences on the topic of social activation. The interviews usually start with some hesitation and with a little discomfort: the topic is large and both interviewee and interviewer do not seem to know what to expect of the interview on such a encompassing topic. After having seen the 'questionnaire' beforehand, all parties involved conclude that it is impossible to answer all of the issues raised in the questionnaire. It was agreed upon that the interviews would start with their personal drives and would go into project details only after having covered their notions and perspectives of social activation now and in the coming period. What made these interviews special is that the political discussion in the media, in most town halls in the Netherlands and among many activation organizations on this very topic was very, very hot. During the interviewing period many decisions were debated and the consequences were becoming clearer and clearer: all cities will face serious budget cuts in the budget for social activation and all cities, large or small, will have to discuss the basic question on what to do and also what no longer to do in terms of social activation. This is the context in which all interviews took place. People active in politics, the men and women working as policy makers, but also people close to the shop floor such as case managers and/or those working in companies that render social activation services, all of them were highly engaged in the debate, and, as we will see, not all of them were only negative on the consequences.

### 3.2 Personal drives

Most interviewees have a personal motivation and commitment to the line of work they do. They have literally expressed their concern for the 'weak' in society or with those who are having trouble finding their way in society in general and the labour market more specifically. The general drive or the overall passion for working on social activation of people in the lower segments of the labour market seems to relate to a general pedagogical rationale: taking care of people to help them take care of themselves. "I see people locked in the social security system and I can help them find a way out, helping them to feel a full member of society... to lend a helping hand for people to achieve their level". Someone else: "What drives me is taking people seriously and giving them tools to grow".

But there seems to be more. Most respondents express their passion for working on difficult problems, on hard-to-change situations, on complex issues that for most others are too much to handle, and with people who have not just one, but usually a multitude of problems. Similarly, the interviewees eagerly express their pride in working in complex organizations, in policy situations that are under pressure, in highly politicized contexts that are in constant change and the future of which is uncertain. There almost seems to be an affective bond with this challenging complexity: they are the ones who enjoy and who are needed to play their part in changing the situation to the better. As one interviewee noted, he will counterbalance the current policy situation in which "regulations are made based on budget and not on individuals". He will bridge the two, budgets and individuals, based on the notion to give every person an opportunity for development. A first impression is that the size of the city does matter. In smaller cities the pedagogical rationale seems strongest. In the

larger cities (150.000 and up) it is the affective profit from complexity. What keeps someone in one of the larger cities interested in the topic, for example, was the recent change resulting from the budget cuts, including the challenge to think about what we want to do and what not (or no longer) and how to organize this. Another interviewee stated that complex problems can be found in a bigger city only and that that was attractive in itself. The people working on social activation in the bigger cities more than in the smaller ones also seem to have carefully carved out their careers in search for complexity and thus higher levels of work challenge. They also have a more general policy and administrative background in terms of education and work experience. In the smaller cities many interviewees have had their initial training and previous jobs in different forms of social work.

### 3.3 Projects and what to learn from them

Under the umbrella of 'social activation' lots and lots of projects and trajectories have been in place. In this report we will shortly dwell on a few example projects. In all interviews the projects and trajectories in the respective cities and towns were discussed. A special focus was put on projects or trajectories that went well according to the interviewees. Without exception the interviewees responded enthusiastically detailing all there was to know about their city's projects. Asked what in these projects or in their trajectories in general could go better, most of the interviewees were also very quick and sharp in their replies. Most of the times it was that what went well that should go better. In the small towns of Delfzijl and Waalwijk, in a midsized cities such as Heerlen or Enschede or in one of the big-4 cities Rotterdam or Utrecht, in all these places and in many others projects are running that all share the social activation etiquette.

In a midsized city, e.g., a project called 'Baanbrekend Werk' (BBW) is a focal point on which much of the municipal social activation energy is directed.<sup>20</sup> The clients are too far from the labour market but already out of isolation (they are on step 2 or 3 on the participation ladder). The goal of BBW is to bring these people as close to a regular job as possible. Youths and people who work in sheltered work provisions (so-called WSW-companies) are given special attention. There are four program lines: 1 surveillance and support, 2 management and maintenance, 3 individual care and welfare, and 4 services. All participants can join an exercise and/or food program and get an introductory training with the following fixed elements: customer friendliness, communication, and first aid. Late 2010 14 projects were running with 209 candidates. The dropout rate was low with 10,5%. The outflow is 35 candidates (10 to a higher level and 25 out of the social security system). Many projects are part of BBW with ultimo 2010 daily involvement of 146 clients: employees of bike parks in central Heerlen, concierges in large social organizations, employees in skate hall, city informants, employees in parks maintenance, employees to fix playgrounds, support care givers in family care or neighborhood assistance. For 2011 the focus is on a participation rate of 200 and a further sprawl to other neighborhoods of city informants and neighborhood assistants. The number of people working in public space for the department of control and maintenance may rise and new projects such as grocery services and traffic control are developed. A case manager: "We work hard to prevent the

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<sup>20</sup> \*'Baanbrekend' is best translated with groundbreaking. Yet 'baan' in 'baanbrekend' also means job. In that sense 'baanbrekend' also means something like 'breakthrough in jobs'. The addition 'werk' or 'work' in 'baanbrekend werk' stands for organization or a collection of actions.

creation of a 'granite subsidized work pool', simply because people want more. Once they work in BBW, they want more, they experience they can do more, they even start dreaming of a real job."

In a countryside town they have one large project in which several regional and communal parties collaborate. The project is called 'De Inzet'. 'Inzet' can mean effort' as well as dedication, devotion and passion. Interviewees indicate that they see people grow, they see lots of creativity being released, they see the things created in the project. Part of the project starts off with a coffee morning for which clients in deep isolations are picked up from their homes. After a while people collect each other and after yet another period the former clients become 'ambassadors' of the project inspiring and even coaching other to join in. Slowly and gradually they build a social network which can support them in the future. At the start insecurity is enormous and so are emotions of people who are upset about the confronting realization that they are not used to express what they want in life. Lacking a wide choice of volunteer work in the town, they have started a so called 'fruit project' within the larger project. Fruit trees are abundant in the countryside and fruit is usually left unattended c.q. left to rot. In the project they can take the fruit for free, make produce from it, and then sell it. Useful for all: people can get rid of their fruit (people can register to become part of the project) and our people can enjoy fruit and learn from producing and selling it. There are 'food banks' for poor people redistributing food from super markets. The problem is greens and fruits. The fruit project is supplementary on the food packages. They are trying to connect the fruit project to the revitalization of public gardening ('volkstuinten').

The story of the start of 'De Inzet' is telling. Local partners got together, form a working group and just started: "Go ahead and show it ('ga maar aan de slag'). We started small: this did not work and let's try that, trial and error, every time they saw a problem we tried to overcome that (people e.g. were not ready for voluntary work although supply was there; but not ready for a course either, now what). You need creativity, flexibility and guts and space to experiment. Now we are in the phase of trying to establish more structure, e.g. in target group descriptions, reporting on results etc." The project runs for 2 years for each client. After the 2 years we still see the same people in voluntary work, now without us coaching. People making the extra step beyond voluntary to work are registered and is now 15%. Yet. 'Let's first do social activation and then we see what happens' is the main policy approach. People were afraid what would happen after 2 years and they themselves have organized a Volunteer Meeting Place. After 1,5 year people get nervous. They know where they are from. Fear to drop back. In coaching you then build self-esteem, show them they can continue not per se on their own but in the volunteer group, meeting place, connecting them with a mentor at the volunteer place. It fights hospitalization of the client from the very beginning. They stay afraid of dropping-back. This fear is part of the process. Some do a lot but when end of the project nears they become afraid that they will have to deal with paid work. We leave them in volunteer work in their interest, especially if they have no indication to work or have a proven weakness that prevents burdening them with work.

In one big-4 city the Life Coach project is an important instrument. The Life Coach is there for 30-35 clients. The coach tries to build trustworthy ties in the first six weeks and makes a follow-up plan in that period, a plan on how to proceed ('trajectplan'): what to achieve, what to do, what time it takes considering the problems of the client. First the coach works on the basic conditions of the client and the social context is mapped out. Perhaps there is a child and there is need for child care support. Perhaps there is need for debt clearance, buddies to take care of petty stuff, maybe even overcoming fear of open space on which they need to work. Also sport and movement are popular

tools for the coach to see if the client can come in time, cooperate, and function in a group, etc. The next steps are to see what clients want: if they want to be a photographer and have a dark room in which they just sit without a plan, making a plan is the priority and that is what is taken up. "The Life Coach works in structural and incidental phases now for 1,5 years and perhaps for 4 year in future. The first issue is to defend it in politics and to extend period to 2 years and after that another 2 for coaching on the job", a policy maker hopefully expresses. Later in the conversation it became clear that it not self-evident that the Life Coach-projects continue. They will most likely be integrated in a larger plan with the other big-4-cities of the Netherlands and the local public health care organizations (the GGDs).

Two quite successful projects, according to the interviewees, in a smaller town in the South of the Netherlands are related to Sports and Movement ('Sport en Bewegen') and to so-called Service Centers. In the sports project three things are correlated: literally moving people, health and lifestyle, and group dynamics. "We did this for people of whom client managers said that they would never be fit to work. That we took as a criterion to include people in the trajectory. We did it for 2 years with 12 times 8 people in a row. We have even been able to get some people to work. The internal effect was positive too: client managers realized they were too negative. I am really from the old school, but group dynamics, if you know how to benefit from putting people together that really works as a multiplier. You see them pulling each other up. I heard that the keys were that people saw each other each day, that it was the doing itself, going beyond just talk, and there was in fact little coaching on it and a big appeal on group loyalty and supporting each other. Another project with these elements we had too was called the Service Centers ('dienstencentra')... The people who participated did profit. In a zipcode area with most benefit clients in town we invited the clients and selected 12 who wanted to participate voluntarily. We trained them as survey interviewers and they went back to their own neighbourhood to interview about 75-100 others in the benefit or with a similar profile on how to improve the neighbourhood and themselves, framed positively, what can you do, what do you need and what can you give me. The principle was exchange trade ('ruilhandel'): someone offering something to someone else and vice versa, a skill, a trade, an odd job. 'I can do nothing, really nothing. Well, I did a haircutters training many many year ago, or a painter's education'. They started to organize computer lessons, multicultural cooking, stuff for foreign women, vegetable gardens for children. From these a few remained after a while within the neighbourhood centers ('buurthuizen'). They initiated and organized all. After a while almost all of them are flown out of the benefit to work. These people were first really written off by us", a decision maker argues in a rapid and enthusiastic voice.

In another big-4 city much is focused on restoring the social network of people. It is a trend that clients who recover reasonably well want to bind together in some area, because they do not want to live alone anymore. They seek peers or partners-in-fortune ('lotgenoten') and want to do things together ('samen iets ondernemen'). "This is usually not work-oriented but more focused on meaningful leisure time, more on life itself, life-oriented, something that is in development as well. This fits wonderfully well with self-reliance in client development which is a focus of many client organization working in this domain and with our present policy development phase in which we focus on development in one's own power ('ontwikkeling in eigen kracht'), development and restoring, placement in the neighbourhoods ('in de wijken'), restoring close to home, etc. This goes hand in hand with the merger of lots of fragmented mental health care self-support organizations clubs who form a sort of chain society ('ketensamenleving') and explicitly aim to deal with networks

in the neighbourhoods to prevent people from repeating their misfortune. In practice this is simply another ex-client who visits you to open mail, eat together at an eating place in the neighbourhood, or joining you to a choir, or sporting together. This is focused on leisure time and support. E.g. in friend networks, buddy project ('maatjesprojecten'), etc. "Well, it is a bit of a field full of flower of which some will never blossom, but some do, and that is a new development. That the clients themselves who are interfering in this process is new. Many clients are motivated to prevent others from experiencing the same things and in this motivation there is a lot of power. If we facilitate this (because thinking power is much more developed than acting power/'daadkracht' in this group) we can achieve a lot, a lot more demand-oriented, close to the client." Another interviewee from this city: "We will give people with expert experience ('ervaringsdeskundigen') a role in the group of people who we will not get to work. These people will be there, whatever you do (also in the US half of the people fall back and do not work) and they will need activation, daytime activity or whatever. The latter I want to approach client driven. A day activity center could be positioned according to a beautiful Finnish model in which clients themselves run the center, including the Director. He too is someone with a psychiatric background. They have paid jobs, in part financed via government, but it is a double strike. You have lost these people for the social benefit, they in part do a normal job, and with a relatively small subsidy you can reach all people who visit the day center and need coaching there. They offer services to the city government and that way earn an income. At the center they do client driven activities with all kinds of small earning models or whatever ('allerlei kleine verdienmodelletjes of weet ik wat') and that way they help themselves financially. That is the future."

A midsized city in the East is known for its neighbourhood approach. A decision maker: "I am on the barricade to convince others from right to left that we need to spend public money on people who remain in step 2 and 3 of the ladder but who at the same time do very useful things in social respect. E.g., I have 4 soon 5 what we call 'Talent Spinning Mills', social activation centers. We have had a study done to celebrate what is going well and what is to improve. In these centers there are 49 people with a social benefit who in the neighborhood have to organize activities, to bundle forces, to survey interests on what people want and how they can progress. By doing this, they are developing themselves, can I do this, can I do surveys, can I get behind the front door, organize people and activities (sewing, computer, language), etc., these are all talents you are developing in yourself. The first of the 49 are going into normally paid jobs. In each of the centers there is just one paid functionary coordinating it. About 276 go to the activities in these centres (participants). The 4 centers costs me 150.000 Euro a piece a year (rent, functionaries, materials). But 600.000 Euro for 49 benefit users, 4 functionaries, 276 participants who are active, go from home, have contacts, this amounts to 2000 Euro a person, that is really worth it."

### 3.4 Notions and perspectives

In this section we will present the key notions and perspectives that have been related to social activation in most interviews. The below mentioned notions are vital in understanding how people frame the social activation domain, either on a more abstract decision-making level or on the work floor as a work coach or client manager. Some of the notions will return in the next section as a future challenge, such as the issue of social costs.

### *Biographical logic*

The participation ladder is a common concept in all the municipalities and among all the interviewees. As explained in the first chapter the ladder builds on a certain 'biographical logic', first people are lifted from isolation, taught basic daily skills, then they learn to fit in again, do something back for their environment and finally, hopefully, work comes in sight. The instruments of social activation more or less mimic this life course as well as almost hierarchical approach: first in life basic things are learned coached by motherly or fatherly coaches, then activities aimed at personal hygiene and bodily activity (via sports e.g.) are put into place, then like in the school years people are brought into a group and learn what it means to be a social being, and much, much further on the line people – almost similar to the discourse on what it entails to be 'adult' – have to be self-reliant and self-responsible, preferable by taking up a job with which they can pay for their own livelihood. Even if this biographical logic in social activation is not strictly followed in every municipality, it is definitely the shared philosophy underlying social activation in most cases. In a smaller town, coaches went as far as taking the hand of people in the earlier stages of social activation: "We went to look them up, go for it, toward it ('eropaf'), we bring them to the project and saw to it that we brought them back home. Later we try to arrange that clients pick each other up". Yet, also in one of the biggest cities as far as youth oriented projects go the fatherly/motherly roles of job coaches are explicitly mentioned. Gradually people are let loose and standing on their own feet. Most projects are set in line with the aim to achieve that final stage. The much used term 'trajectory' itself is telling in this respect: people are on a trajectory towards full self-reliance, away from state and benefit dependency. Moreover, people are not seen as individuals who become adult and stand on their feet, alone. That would be a too individualistic view of the biographical logic. Much work is spent on restoring the social network, on building up the support network, on placing people in opportunity rich environments. The biographical logic in that sense is sociological par excellence. Much is gained by helping people to take advantage of being with other people in enabling environments, in their networks. "The key factor influencing outflow to work is building networks, even before taking away obstacles", one decision maker of a large city emphasizes. "Common denominator is the focus on restoring people's social network", a policy maker in another big city says with conviction. "The goal is to develop a social network, a network that might be with equals at first, and with new people who can take you to a new level", says an interviewee in a small town.

### *Just around the corner*

Usually the respondents used the concept of the participation ladder and its parts (the steps on the ladder especially) in an almost nonchalant way as if the ladder and its conceptual and practical meaning were known to them for years and years. After a few extra questions we learned that the implementation of the ladder concept in the organizations was usually finalized only in the last year before the interview, that in some cases many clients were not yet 'placed' on the ladder, let alone that the effects of working with ladder or, in other words, monitoring how clients move on the ladder as a result of social activation policies, were known to the interviewees. This was a common issue that we found in many interviews: the change that is projected in popular policy notions and perspectives or in key social activation projects at a given moment was usually 'just around the corner'. If the interviewer would return in a few months, much would have changed, and much would be much clearer. "We are now in the phase of trying to establish more structure, e.g. in target

group descriptions, in reporting on results, etc.”, some interviewees argue about a project that is already running for years. “We are now starting to (to collect) activities in voluntary organizations and bring them to a databank, a ‘participationbank’ in which activities will be scaled on the participation ladder. The responsible organization is now working on integrating this databank with other ones. In the end, the databank might well be used at UWV Werkpleinen”, another interviewee tells us. In a smaller town, the decision maker tells us that long-term unemployment is down 50% in 2007-2011 period. “We are trying to figure out whether or not this is due to our social activation project”. “We are just now checking where our money goes, where the most expensive costs are with the least effect. We know our project is cheapest and most effective.” “We started a process to get more information on someone. We used to know a little, send someone on a trajectory and hoped for the best”, a consultant working at a youth counter explains. Now they realize they need to know more on someone’s schooling, their contacts with caregivers, to seek cooperation with others who professionally in touch with a client. “This is going well, but is still under construction”, the same informant says. The tendency to present results-just-around-the-corner might relate to the openly felt and expressed pressure to anticipate on a future in which (the fewer amounts of) time and money spent on activities will be monitored more strictly.

#### *Growth and/or movement (‘beweging’)*

“It is all about the development of people”, a policy maker says. It is about taking a developmental approach. Tendering for social activation projects and trajectories in some cities specifically means showing that these projects and trajectories have the goal, methodology, and instruments aimed at developing clients, or perhaps better still, to help them develop themselves. We will get back to this when discussing what can be learned from social activation projects (see below at section 3.5). The key issue is that people should be set in to motion and, moreover, be kept into motion. Movement (‘beweging’) was a much heard notion. Preferably this movement is aimed at progressing on the participation ladder or at other concrete additive steps on some trajectory plan. The belief in the notion of engineered progressiveness, so to say, of being able to get people moving up, is not shared by everyone. Many think that there are people who will not be able to progress, whose ceiling is remarkably low and who can only qualify for a certain type of activity (not meaning work) and that is it. What is shared is the notion that people should be in ‘beweging’ somehow. It is not accepted that people claim to be unable to do things. The emphasis is put on what people still can do, whatever little that might be. Efforts are put into getting people towards also doing that little bit. Many trajectories and projects are structured around Sports and Movement (‘Sport en Bewegen’), some believe that this is the must-start focus as it puts back energy and kicks into a client thus building up the necessary action level for the follow-up phases. “Since we started the project”, a small town project executive argues, “there is something going on, there is commotion, not that people go to work, that is absolutely not the case, but they are moving, they go to another city, start a new relationship, all good things.”

#### *Reciprocity (‘wat terug doen’)*

“I always say a benefit is a salary of the state, a very decent salary. It cannot be the case that you do nothing in return for this salary”, a decision maker argues. This argument is widely spread and shared by many other interviewees, some more explicitly phrasing it than others do. It is a model of thinking that was hardly conceivable in times when a benefit was seen as a right without any

obligatory ties attached to it, except the one obligation to respond to the odd job opening on a regular basis. Largely due to the national budget crisis following the financial crisis of 2008-2009 the notion of reciprocity (doing something back/'iets terug doen') has gained firm ground in the Netherlands. Doing something back can mean a lot of things, work but also volunteering, or pouring coffee at the neighbourhood center, cleaning at a sports facility, etc. "There is a group in which you do not invest in terms of regular jobs, but for who you are going to solve their problems and see to that they are going to do something", says a decision maker. Moreover: "For those who do not want ('niet-willers') – we separate them from those who cannot join in ('niet-kunners') – we best let them go for a while and let them sink to the bottom. That is taking self-responsibility seriously" The end of the 'pamper-culture' is announced, a culture in which high numbers of caregivers were ready to take control over the household budget, housing, work, upbringing, etc. This type of care is seen as not only stigmatizing by some interviewees it is also seen as contra-productive if it is wanted that people to focus on what they can do (instead of what they cannot) and to focus thus on being producers giving things back to society. "The basic principle is 'everyone joins in, everyone counts'. That means we expect something back from everyone in a benefit situation. Everyone should do something back for their environment." There is no escape. "The road we are on is that it is impossible for someone to sit at home and do nothing."

#### *Preventing individual and social costs*

A key focus in today's thinking in the domain of benefits and social security at large is to bring not only individual but also social costs into the calculus. Interviewees working in the field of social sheltering ('maatschappelijk opvang') for, among others, the homeless, (ex-)addicts, and psychiatric patients are confident that their work will hardly be affected by the contemporary budget crisis. This work has a very high political urgency, so it is argued. The activities in the last number of years have resulted in far less people roaming the streets and thus in a serious reduction of community costs in terms of public safety, street maintenance, policing, outreach-type of care-giving, etc. Continuing this work or not is not part of the debate. In much of the other fields of work for the welfare dependent it is much more difficult to legitimize continuation. In part that is because it is very difficult to present a calculation of what the social costs are that are saved following from this line of work. Especially so with social activation aimed at getting people to meet others, to develop first basic skills to interact with others and in the end to perhaps volunteer at one or the other neighbourhood centre. Especially so too if this volunteer phase is the maximum that can be attained for certain clients. It is difficult to accept for politicians as well as client managers and policy makers, let alone the general public, that volunteer work is the ceiling, so do some interviewees point out. A challenge ahead (see the above remarks on 'just around the corner'-issues) is to calculate these social costs and show the public and other relevant parties that accepting this ceiling is a socially and above all an economically smart thing to do. A decision maker: "I always say financial poverty is 300 times more easy to solve than social poverty. The studies are there that if you do nothing about exclusion the social costs can rise up to 100.000 euro a year per person." Central in the reasoning is that people in isolation cannot build on an informal network and thus will have to rely on professionals of all kinds, ranging from therapists to neighbourhood police. The same interviewee: "The social costs mount to enormous proportions if you leave someone in isolation at home."

### *Building citizenship and a dynamic city*

The obvious sign given in most interviews is that the policy language is less oriented on a social activation concept which represents a means to escape isolation and spend the day in a personally useful way. More often we find terms such as societal participation ('maatschappelijke participatie') or economic participation. Societal participation mimics 'real' commitment such as volunteering, giving something to (one's local) society as stated above. Economic participation is aimed at work, subsidized if necessary but preferably (for the most part) paid by a normal, private sector employer. Key work in many cities is to involve volunteer organizations, neighbourhood associations, and 'real' employers in these participation processes as we will also depict below. Central in this line of thinking is that clients are no longer seen dependent consumers of benefits. The word 'client' has too much a consumerist connotation for some interviewees. They would like to emphasize the productive role. Doing something back, investing time and energy, bringing in one's network, having contact with others, are all key words in this process. Trajectories in which people were having a subsidized job guarding a sports facility on their own is not what is meant. These trajectories do not lead to the self-reliance and self-support that is required in this new model of thinking. With the initial support of government people should seek and actively participate in social network. In the ideal situation, after some time, the third sector organizations and the public and private sector employers should take over from government. In all respects, the focus should be on developing productive instead of a consumerist role of citizens. Several interviewees point out that surely the focus on work is highly important, but that the broader orientation on building active citizenship is crucial here: aiming the efforts at organizing it in such a way that people can organize themselves, stimulating a mentality that people can themselves take control over their lives, their neighbourhoods and their city at large. This thus does not just develop the people involved but also creates a more dynamic city in which more people play a productive role, says one key interviewee. "Numerous projects that include people working happily outdoors ('lekker in de buitenlucht') can be mentioned that link individual merits with benefits for the city and its organizations. There is a lot of work. Work that is highly valued by the community and people's environment and for which we have no budget and in which people with all kinds of obstacles can join in, at their pace and at their time schedule."

### 3.5 Budget cuts and other challenges

There is worry. Self-responsibility and self-determination, so it is often heard, are OK for the vast majority of people. But maybe 10-15% of people cannot cope and "it is a characteristic of a civilized country to take care of these people". This is in many cases the ideological background of the discussion on the consequences of the budget cuts that national government has announced. In all of the cases communalities will lose 2/3 of the 'participation budget' by 2015. In 2014 half of the budget will be cut which in a city of Rotterdam means the loss of 100 million Euro for participation, including social activation activities. In Heerlen, e.g., similar cuts will leave the city with 10 million in 2014 and only 5 million in 2015. New notions start with the prefix 'self-' are spreading across the policy domains of labour market policy, social work, health care, special needs education, child care, etc., according to one of our concerned respondents. It is a trend in which the client becomes a citizen who has to be prepared and competent to mobilize his own social network (if that is in place): family and friends first and volunteers second. Yet, the same concerned decision maker argues, the

network needs support from professionals and professional organization if all people already know they have to do more things on their own and they do not know this yet. "Parents do not know that they will soon have to deal with a handicapped child at home again", a respondent claimed with some sense of drama.

#### *Seeking new collaborative partners and real employers*

One way of counterbalancing this trend is to collaborate. One of the key elements mentioned to respond to the budget cuts thus relates to organizational or institutional arguments: organizations and institutions that are active in the field of social activation, including municipal ones, must more closely collaborate and see how they can do more, preferably supplementary work for each other and thus how they can survive as organizations. New partners are explicitly taking into this collaborative picture. These new partners are from the commercial world of health care givers and health care insurers. Many city policy and decision makers speculate on a near future (again!) in which government and these commercial parties work together, bare dual responsibilities, and make 'smart deals'. In a forerunner social activation city it was argued that a large nationwide health insurance company would be held accountable. They would benefit from every tax Euro put into social activation: the beneficiaries would be less likely to be unhealthy or be causing trouble in the streets when they participate in social activation activities. They would feel more healthy, more happy, more networked and thus more self-reliant, etc., etc., and less likely to be a 'malus' to the insurance companies. The latter would be able to sit on more premium money with every penny government spends on social activation, but not for long if some decision makers (not only the ones with a more left-wing orientation) could have a say.

Other possibilities of drawing in market partners are in offering extra seed money for risks companies bare for hiring people "with a small stain", as a political decision maker typifies social activation clients. "We have already tried this", a policy maker in another city says, "but discussions with employers on offering these people a normal job (outside schools, care institutions, or other semi-government organizations) is difficult and even extra money did not do much to compensate the risks for employers". "We should nevertheless try to restore the ties between these people and the normal business world. We must activate employers. It cannot be the case that employers shop in Poland or Romania for their workers and not draw people from our files". The decision makers continue: "If we want employers to involve we must be able to comply: they want people to start work in time, they want support and coaching, some help in training budget. Without a budget, however, we can demonstrate our ambitions, but never fulfil them. In that case, employers understandably choose for people from Poland".

Also, private social work providers are integrated in the work on social activation. In The Hague a foundation called Stichting Mooi is involved in an experiment taking responsibility to place people into volunteer jobs without further input from city office workers. The contract is that they place 100 people without further interference of the city. "More importantly is their non-patronizing approach, no longer taking people by the hand, starting with a clear positioning on the participation ladder, a non-escapable approach, with a possibility of sanctions, but also with a close link to the needs in a neighbourhood. The foundation organizes the need clarification process on this level as well. The work people do is also linked to other organizations, such as elderly care homes", says a senior policy maker with much conviction and even hope that this experiment will be a future model.

Not just public players, but “real employers” from the private sector are in focus in the new, more sober social activation era. “Working with a benefit at a real employer. That is the future. For now we do this only for people with a prospect on work. We try hard to these people at employers”, says a large city decision maker. In a smaller city much of the hope is also related to the private sector with which to make “smart deals”. More in general, this city seeks new partnership relationships in which government can withdraw a little and is not per se taking up the steering wheel, but “in which it can be very convenient if someone else is in the directing positions”. “There are so many opportunities to tie up with private initiatives. The government has been in a luxurious position since 20 years now as they were not forced to make an alliance with private parties. There are a lot of employers who want to do business in a socially responsible way. If their economic motor is running well they are eager to realize social goals. Commercial and social goals can go hand in hand, that is not dirty. We have to get rid of that idea”, so a decision maker in a midsized town argues.

#### *Focus on the middle group*

In the mean time, with the prospect of the loss of 2/3 of the budget and with national and local governments disagreeing (late June 2011) on which benefits and organizations will be included in even further budget cuts and transfers, political decision makers in several cities are anticipating and announcing the end of specific social activation projects. “The time that a walk around the local lake for immigrant women as a form of social activation was subsidized is over”, a big city decision maker says with some satisfaction. The focus is put on the ‘middle group’. Many municipalities will remain active (with less money) for a smaller group, i.e. those on step 3 or 4 on the participation ladder. This does not go without hesitation. High ranking political decision makers argue they have real difficulties with this trend, but cannot escape it. “Those we do not need to help and are likely to find work themselves are no longer helped: these are called the ‘not needed’. Those who are probably not helped with our support in the shorter run and might well never find work again, for whom it therefore is not very useful for us to intervene, we also will no longer assist, that is, not from the perspective of the participation budget: these can be called the ‘not useful’”. “We in city X will focus on those with 1,5 to 4 years distance to labour market, i.e. people who would probably need 1,5 to 4 years to return to it”. In some smaller municipalities the ties with local political decision makers seem well developed and the fear that the key projects of social activation will suffer is limited. Decision makers, experts, and policy makers seem to agree on the need to continue broad social activation projects and to collaborate in developing a common vision on social activation and the roles of each party in it. The common idea is that regardless of budget cuts you will have to present some people an alternative, even if this is voluntary work, or else they will fall back, cause social trouble, trouble in their families, for their children and... “use means of health care”. In a mid-sized city the partner organizations are still unable to predict what the near future will bring. They are discussing how to handle a segment of the future labour market in which former workers in subsidized jobs will compete with the already large shares of people who need social activation. People were given jobs to keep them out of the lowest form of social benefit (‘de bijstand’) so they could make themselves useful in the city and would also in terms of authority benefit from being employed as a city worker (e.g. those who are in touch with citizens as supervisors). The same town hall partners are working hard to see how they can prevent new influx even though they will stop contributions from the participation budget to the lowest levels of education (via study loans, internships, etc.) where the new influx is originating from.

### *The danger of withdrawing*

Touching again on the relationship with the outside world (such as schools), some of the respondents note a widening of the gap between city government and UWV after this gap became smaller and smaller in the last years since working together on social activation. One front office (the UWV Werkplein) was established that worked for all type of clients, city clients or UWV clients (see Chapter 1 for more on the differentiation). Yet, with the budget cuts, including separate cuts in the UWV organization, this collaboration is under pressure. “We see old behaviour again with the UWV withdrawing to their computers and moving toward treating clients electronically. For the top of the labour market entering data online, searching jobs on the computer, and e-coaching might work. But for many more difficult clients it is necessary to not take shelter behind your computer, meet employers, to go out, be hands-on and to go for it (‘eropaf’), say two city government experts. “It is easy to create a battle of competencies, of who is allowed to do what, but we want to cooperate and even use seduction, e.g. when they are not allowed to pay certain trajectories for young handicapped if there is not guarantee on a job or a form of training, then we chip in although we do not have to. This creates an atmosphere of joint responsibility and it boosts the feeling of doing a successful job which in turn is a job you like to do. After we have paid the pre-phase as in this example, the UWV is more likely to take over. The will of all partners is there in this atmosphere. As soon as the targets are clear, it doesn’t matter much who does what”, say a group of respondents with much pride. The key issue is whether or not this collaboration will remain in place when the cities and UWVs would withdraw on their positions. Maybe this is unlikely, given that the discourse of collaboration, perhaps a very Dutch discourse, might well stimulate organizations to keep seeking each others help, create networks of support, or at least networks in which collaboration and chain responsibilities (‘ketenverantwoordelijkheid’) themselves are the most discussed topics. What is certain is that collaboration between the city offices and UWVs is a challenge in the present and the near future of further budget cuts and budget transfers.

### *Estimating social costs*

A too cosy and comfortable atmosphere at sheltered workplaces, coffee or walking clubs, recycle shops, and community houses where people pour coffee a few hours a day, can prevent people from going out and work on real integration. Especially trajectories offered in social activation are often seen as expensive and unproductive, as taking too long and as not effective. The warm yet ineffective social activation projects suffer from a large risk, the risk of very low ‘out-flow’, the risk thus of people staying in the projects too long “because of the weak follow-up activities of social activation workers in these living rooms”. “We organized the distance for these people via sheltered work, etc., we left people behind, and now we will have to reconnect them with the normal business world.” Yet, “we have also saved a lot of social costs and we should offer a more clear picture of the social costs we have saved with these so-called leftwing hobbies”, a decision maker from this wing says making thus an unsolicited revelation during an interview. The trade-off between social activation costs and social costs in general is heard often during the interviews. It seems to be a defence mechanism to convince those in favour of the budget cuts to be satisfied with people working at their ceiling level by doing volunteer work and to realize that costs will arise when these people are left behind, left to roam the streets, and to take up their seemingly costly habits. Not one interviewee could really pin down these costs. “It is very difficult to present a calculation of the social costs. We have a clear picture with debt clearance services we provide: by offering these

services we save the yearly costs of 125 evictions with every eviction costing 25.000 Euro excluding the costs for the shelters we have to offer”, says an expert. Another interviewee is deliberately not willing to go into a data discussion. Doing so creates all kinds of issue that might not be helpful to understand real developments. Extra care is called for when talking quantitative data. “We now have people in the ‘granite file’ (the file with people who are extremely hard to move) for good reasons, others do not have some privileges also for good reasons, and again others do have the same privileges but are not in the files due their personal circumstances. The states people are in and the files in which they are or not are very hard to pin down. Now working with the participation ladder might bring a more relevant data structure, once everyone is diagnosed and placed on the ladder and periodically monitored. We can then move away from knowing only how much money we spend on what type of instrument and get information on how people you work for really develop”.

### 3.6 Key factors affecting social activation program success

In the interviews many different projects and trajectories in many very different contexts came to the fore. Below we aim to sum up the key elements that the interviewees indicated as crucial for projects and trajectories to be successful. We will list them here and shortly highlight why these elements are seen as important.

- Defining success  
It seems self-evident but many interviewees emphasized that for many years it was not. At the start of a project or a commissioned trajectory offered by external parties it is crucial to define, preferably with the partners who also have contact with a client, what goal there is to be attained. Is it ultimately outflow to work? Is it restoring the social network? Is it having basic daily personal care skills? Many especially big-city-interviewees suggest to start thinking from the top of the ladder, those who have paid work at real employers or from being self-employed, in this process. Defining success or defining what to achieve means you can set and evaluate goals more effectively.
- Action and not just talk  
The right balance between hands-on activities and coaching conversations is called for in social activation trajectories. In both small town and big city environments interviewees support the idea that clients literally feel again how it is to be part of (local) society. “I always say that we need 32 hour trajectories, every day being busy, and a little tired too because of sports and physical activities, so they don’t return to the streets and would affect results negatively”, says a big city interviewee. In many other cases hands-on projects are praised that range from the above mentioned fruit project to people who do interviews with fellow-benefit receivers and work on the improvement of their neighbourhood.
- Building trust or breaking resistance first  
Building confidence and trust among participants is a vital factor too. People with a large distance to the labour market are hesitant to join projects and trajectories. In numerous examples, interviewees sketch situations in which clients only after a period of time start to share what they are doing with others, in which they share their growth with equals,

pinpointing the way they want to develop. Interviewees show that after an initial period of hesitation and low-profile participation, people start telling others in their environment, including their spouse and children, that they take pride in participating and especially in working even if that is just a few hours.

- **Balancing responsiveness to initiatives, staying small-scale, and involving real employers**  
Some interviewees emphasized the importance of responding to initiatives that participants themselves develop. It is important because it builds on the ambitions and talents of the people themselves. Part of the work of social activation workers is to articulate and mobilize these ambitions and talents and to thus start a process in which people start organizing themselves and take initiatives: a bike repair shop, an ex-homeless innercity tour, a neighbourhood beautification program, city informant teams, etc. Interviewees from the big cities emphasize that these projects and in fact projects in general should remain small-scale. The larger they become, the more problems occurred. The problems relate to finding the right, well-skilled people to work with clients. When people are climbing the participation ladder it is key to involve real employers as we have repeatedly stated above. "A real work setting with real products, real services, at real employers who can survive without subsidy, that makes a real difference." In the era of declined budgets it is vital for social activation projects and trajectories to find a balance between responsiveness to client initiatives, staying small, and involving real employers. Numerous examples have been given of trying to make 'smart deals' with third sector organizations, health insurance companies, and employer networks.
- **Keeping them close to the chest**  
In many interviews it was made clear that a phone call once every two weeks was not very helpful for clients with a large distance to the labour market. Projects and trajectories are necessary in which people were 'held close to the chest', in which they immediately were called if they failed to participate, in which they were collected at home if necessary, in which they were put in a social setting where others would exercise social pressure to participate, and in which there is no escape. The latter is euphemistically called a 'sluitende aanpak' in Dutch, meaning a closed-circuit approach with all organizations who may have to deal with clients (from education to health care, from probation to street corner work, from child care bureaus to the police) are collaborating in a chain-like network organization.
- **Taking a biographical perspective and restoring networks**  
Much is already said on organizing projects and trajectories that follow up on each other in a more or less biographical order. First steps are to exit isolation, finding a place again in between others, doing things with and for others, and finally supporting one's self in many respects, including financially. Offering activities from just one of these phases will probably not match with the needs of all people and will also probably not bring most people much further. Key in the underlying desire to build on self-reliance and self-responsibility is to help people create or recreate their own social network on which they can rely for their own development and with whom they can take further initiatives.

- Preparing social activation workers to be strict and explaining why  
Informing and coaching those who will have to work with social activation clients, on the client management or the policy making levels, about policy changes are crucial. It is especially important to communicate the changes that are needed. Discussing the transformations should not just take place at top levels, but should really be debated at lower levels too, in order to have the workforce know what the new notions, perspectives, and consequences for contemporary social activation are. The workers too will have to believe the change is necessary, that reciprocity is asked from today's clients, that participation without obligations is no longer possible, and that they have to be strict in enforcing the new paradigm that clients do something back to society.

The above key elements of a successful social activation project or trajectory are at best a condition-sine-qua-non. Without these elements it will be complicated to attain results from the projects or trajectories. Still, many more elements might well have to be in place before the results are really meeting expectations. In the next chapter we will mention another few, such as a proper level of cooperation between organizations dealing with social benefits and follow-up action to get people out of these benefits and into a situation in which they are in control of their own life course again.



## Chapter 4 Conclusions and policy implications

This final chapter reflects on the main outcomes of this study, as reported in the preceding chapters, and puts the findings in a wider policy perspective. The study clearly indicated that the Dutch policy context of social activation is highly turbulent, particularly in the present situation of severe budget cuts (the international financial crisis). In this sense the dynamics of the social activation concept mirror both internal policy debate developments and external financial constraints.

Social activation is all about empowerment: providing people at a distance to the official labour market with often very basic social, psychological, and work-related skills. Lacking elementary soft and hard competencies, evidently, is a major individual deficiency in succeeding in a highly competitive labour market. But empowerment also goes beyond a mere labor market perspective: it reinforces participation of groups living at the margins of society. It is important to underline that people with rudimentary social, psychological, and work deficiencies are not a homogeneous group. They typically share a dependency on welfare benefits but the problems they face are quite diverse: lack of education, absence of a work history, debts, addictions (drugs, alcohol), criminality, physical and mental health problems, homeless, etc. Finding and keeping a job becomes even more difficult for people with multiple problems. This fundamental observation implies that social activation programs need to be targeted to specific groups with specific deficiencies. It may vary from time management programs, debts reorganizing and budgeting, life coaching, sports, voluntary work, language courses, schooling trajectories, etc.

Re-integration of clients with multiple problems through labour market participation is a major policy challenge.<sup>21</sup> Also in view of competing paradigms: care first or work first? Evidence-based success stories are lacking, which is partly due to the heterogeneity of the groups. What is true, however, is that the various subgroups with multiple problems need tailor-made policies which in many cases should focus on the improvement of mental conditions and housing. The policies should be organized closely to the clients' everyday life. The multiple problems nature needs co-ordinated efforts from often quite diverse local agencies, which is an issue in itself (Prins, 2006). For many people with multiple problems a (quick) transition to work is often unrealistic and needs to be seen from a longer time perspectives. For many clients reaching a basic level of stability in their life is already a major improvement.

Conceptually, we argue, the diverse problem catalogue might very well be based on the participation ladder model that was developed in Dutch social activation philosophy: participation is a hierarchically ordered stepwise approach. It ranges from isolation (bottom), to social contacts outside the home, participation in organized activities, unpaid work, to paid work with support and, finally, paid work (top). The underlying idea is that the higher people's position on the participation ladder, the more likely the expected robustness of their position on the labour market. The higher one's position, the higher one's transitional capital to move to the next stage. Moreover, the model pre-structures social activation programs: its content depends on the problems that characterize target groups (their position on the participation ladder). The thematic approach stresses the

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<sup>21</sup> See for the way the Dutch Department of Social Affairs and Employment reacted to social research on welfare clients with multiple problems its letter to the House of Representatives of November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010. The letter particularly stresses the need for joint interdepartmental tailor-made programs, of self-direction by clients, and the need for of new methods to prevent and monitor multiple problems.

importance of stepwise climbing to the next phase of participation. The step from unpaid work to paid work is much easier than from living an isolated life to paid work.

The concept of the social ladder enables a more realistic and targeted approach to participation. It calls for focus and it also stresses the importance of a biographical life course approach. Social activation may connect to the “biographical logic”: first one learns how to get up in the morning, how to dress, how to breakfast, how to cycle, to how to acquire professional qualifications. We found some evidence that connecting biography (or life course) of activation clients is seen as a fruitful perspective. In many instances, personal deficiencies that hamper labour market participation are located in a specific life course phase: e.g. school, the peer group, the transition from the world of school to the world of work. Lacking basic soft and hard skills is related to the biographical *Lebenswelt* of activation target groups, e.g. intergenerational transmitting of welfare dependency, growing up in a culture of non-work and of non-participation, and of weakly developed social networks. Looking in such a way at social activation enables interesting links to established theoretical paradigms in the social sciences such as life course theories, biographical approaches, and even generation theory. It not only strengthens the theoretical basis of activation programs but will also yield more realistic policies.

Examining the various, often very varying, social activation programs from a helicopter view a number of lessons can be learned. The main focus, as just argued, should be on ascending the social participation ladder. Not just on participation *per se*, but on climbing the ladder step by step. This also implies that the emphasis must be on learning skills that enable the transition from one phase to the next one. Practically this means that social activation program design must also prompt through-flow and outflow of participants rather than merely in-flow. Programs should be devised in a dynamic way that facilitates phase like participation development. They need focus and monitoring. On these points there is quite some room for improvement as the dynamics of social activation are not always well monitored or systematically evaluated. We need too much better examine the success and failure components of activation programs and for this we need more suited monitoring systems and data.

Organizing activation programs should be done in a smart way. Crucial is that the activation client has to do with one administrative agency or agent. This calls for a de-compartmentalization of local welfare agencies, a new logic of policy organization with low bureaucracy and clear responsibilities (e.g. front office/back office arrangements). If activation program clients lose their way in local welfare bureaucracy they are likely drop-out candidates. Smart local policy design and simple organizational structures are the key issues here. Closely related to this point is that activation programs depend on cross-departmental funding: both local welfare and labor market agencies. Combined budget allocation is essential in this respect. This is, however, not self-evident. It is notoriously difficult to realize multi-agency budget allocation in (local) government. It takes vision, perseverance, and (political) leadership to do so. In case of activation programs this combination is absolutely necessary.

In recent years the social activation philosophy witnessed a process of conceptual reframing and redefinition. This process was partly induced by severe financial problems at the national and local level and the far-reaching budget cuts in the social welfare sector. Almost all interviews signaled the substantial impact of budget cuts on activation programs. It – directly or indirectly – accelerated a program change that prompted reciprocity in the relationship between municipality as the local welfare benefit supplier and the benefit client. The era of “pampering” is clearly over and

municipalities increasingly argue that non-participation of benefit recipients is no longer an option. The full engagement policy of Rotterdam is a clear example. The underlying idea simply is that if one receives a welfare benefit, one is obliged to do something in return - e.g. voluntary work in the community. Reciprocity and social activation will be linked in a less ambiguous and ambivalent way and the emerging rule of mutual exchange (benefit against participation) will become leading. This paradigm shift will decidedly impact the next phase of social activation programs. The culture that goes with this New Deal is on par with the general redefinition of Dutch welfare policy with increasingly stresses reciprocity and obligation.

Creating networks and social activation are interlinked. Activation programs, so this study indicates, should also focus on building social networks for and with their clients. Social networks represent clients' social capital and being part of solid social networks empowers activation target groups. Social networks help welfare clients with making the right transition choices and strengthens their transitional capital. Absence of social networks is a major personal barrier to making transitions. We know from social capital research – e.g. in the Putnam tradition – that social networks, reciprocity and, trust are critical conditions for effective social participation. Creating and maintaining social networks are decisive in social activation programs: it initiates norms of mutual exchange which is the basis for pro-social behavior in social groups and communities. Being part of social networks facilitates community participation and advancing the common good.

It is important to emphasize that a cost-benefit analysis of activation programs should not only take financial and labor market parameters into account but also include social gains. If people on the lower end of the social ladder are not successful in realizing the intended transition to paid work (higher end of the ladder) but are able to make the transition to say community volunteering this should be valued too. They did not make the transition from isolation to the formal labor market but they did make the transition from non-participation to participation. The calculus of participation, therefore, should apply a broader societal logic. Community participation of former marginalized groups is an asset in itself: it is good for the activation program subjects and it is good for the communities they live in. In short: society also benefits from the transition from exclusion to inclusion, from non-participation to participation. The lesson here is that transitions at the lower end of the social participation ladder may yield significant personal, social and community benefits. It is good for established welfare states such as Germany and the Netherlands to have a political and policy antenna for transition gains as such among marginalized groups, also when to do not succeed in getting a job in the formal labor market.

Another vital lesson to be learned is that in order for activation program participants to be successful on the labour market we need to bring the employers in. Programs need more input from the labour market demand side: what exactly are the skills and competencies that are needed? It would even be more attractive if employers could play a role in social activation programs as stakeholders. As representatives of the demand side they are an important group that could enhance the sense of realism of programs, also in terms of targeting outflow (the transition to the labour market). A particularly interesting idea is to link social activation programs to health insurance companies. Social activation might improve clients' health which is also advantageous from an insurance business calculus: clients do less depend on health services.

The last and probably most important point is on the prime policy goal of promoting social participation. This is not an innocent policy debate as the answer to this fundamental question is related to the basic issue of how successful activation programs are. If one stresses the dominance

of labour market participation, activation program success is rather more limited than if one underlines the importance of social participation per se of marginalized groups. The choice to be made here goes to the heart of social welfare policy. If activation programs are first and foremost meant to open up new labour market reserves, programs are likely to target the upper segments of the participation ladder. If participation itself is the major goal, activation programs will also include marginal groups at the lower end of the ladder. In the end, or maybe in the beginning, this is a fundamental policy choice that depends on one's view on the role and position of the welfare state. In any case we want to avoid the existence of two parallel cultures of participants and non-participants.

If Germany opts for implementing local activation programs it needs to balance labour market targets and wider social participation goals. Whatever choice or emphasis is made, it is well understood that inclusive policies for marginalized groups have to go beyond standard policy instruments and need novel and creative forms of *Umdenken*. This is true for the Netherlands and this is true for Germany.

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## Appendix A List of interviews

Interview number, interview dates, interview place (municipality)

Name interviewee, role interviewee

1. December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, Tilburg
  - Mr. Roy Willems, Program manager Labor Market Policy, City of Tilburg
2. January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Rotterdam
  - Mrs. Dieke Otten, Policy maker, Department Social Affairs and Employment, City of Rotterdam
  - Mr. Koos van Dijk (idem)
3. February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Enschede
  - Mrs. Myra Koomen, Alderman Work and Income (CDA, Christian Democrats), City of Enschede
4. February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Enschede
  - Mr. Benno Hermelink, Director UWV Werkplein Enschede, Location manager UWV Werkbedrijf Enschede
  - Mr. Arjan Kampman, Director UW Werkplein Enschede, Head Work and Benefit, City of Enschede
5. February 18<sup>th</sup>, Roermond
  - Mr. Jan Ramakers, Senior policy maker Social Affairs, City of Roermond
  - Mr. Gerard van Eck, Coach 'opSTAP', City of Roermond
6. February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011, Utrecht
  - Mr. Martin Bluijs, Policy advisor, Social Sheltering ('Maatschappelijke opvang'), City of Utrecht
7. February, 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Utrecht
  - Mr. René M. Leermakers, Director Altrecht Talent
8. March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, Heerlen
  - Mrs. Riet de Wit, Alderman Employment (SP, Socialist Party), City of Heerlen
  - Mrs. Mandy Brouwers, Case manager Outflow 'Baanbrekend Werk', City of Heerlen
  - Mrs. Simone Ruiters (idem)
  - Mr. Erick Hildebrand, Policy maker Employment and Social Affairs, City of Heerlen
9. March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, Heerlen
  - Mr. John Wachelder, Director UWV Werkplein Parkstad Limburg
10. March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Apeldoorn
  - Mr. Eddy Peters, Team leader Work and Participation, City of Apeldoorn
  - Mr. Ruud Berenschot, Team leader Department Work and Participation, City of Apeldoorn
11. March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, Delfzijl
  - Mrs. Egberdien ten Brink-de Vries, Director UWV Werkplein Eemsdelta/ISD Noordoost, Communes of Delfzijl, Lopsum, and Appingedam
  - Mrs. Lidy van Opzeeland, Project manager UWV Werkplein (idem)
  - Mrs. Nynke Walstra, Director ASWA Algemene Stichting Welzijn Appingedam
  - Mr. Jan Snoek, Project leader 'De Inzet', ASWA
12. March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011, Tilburg

- Mr. Jan Hamming, Alderman Social Affairs (PvdA, Labour Party), City of Tilburg
- Mr. Donald Kwint, Policy maker Social Affairs, City of Tilburg
- 13. May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Amsterdam
  - Mr. Niels van Tent, Director Department Work and Income, City of Amsterdam
- 14. May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Amsterdam
  - Mrs. Marlies Koedijk, Team manager, Youth Office Window/Jongerenloket South/Old West, City of Amsterdam
- 15. June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Den Haag
  - Mrs. Marga Oudshoorn, Policy maker Work and Learning, City of Den Haag
- 16. June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Rotterdam
  - Mrs. Brigitte Koopmans, Senior policy maker, Department Social Affairs and Employment, City of Rotterdam
  - Mr. Paul Wiese, Staff Consultant Youth Office Window/Jongerenloket, City of Rotterdam
- 17. June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Waalwijk
  - Mr. Sjoerd Potters, Alderman Social Affairs and Employment (VVD, Liberal Conservative Party), City of Waalwijk
  - Mrs. Marion van Limpt, Director ISD Midden-Langstraat (communes of Heusden, Loon op Zand, and Waalwijk)

## **Appendix B Topic List**

The following topic list (originally in Dutch) was sent to all interviewees in advance of the interview. It closely follows the German topic list sent to us in September 2010 (Leitfaden Soz Akt.docx).

### **Topic list/Instruction conversations Social Activation (SA) in NL en D**

Tilburg, December 9, 2010

#### Introduction

- Henk Vinken (HV) (and Peter Ester PE) are researchers associated with Pyrrhula BV, Social Research Network, in Tilburg (and universities of Rotterdam and Utrecht)
- Work together with Institute for Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung of German Federal Agency (Bundesagentur fuer Arbeit) to see whether lessons can be learned from social activation (SA) in NL and whether or not similar initiatives are in place in D or/and should be
- Impression exists that in D many activities are directed at participation in the labour market, also for those who are at a large distance from the labour market and to whom in NL SA is directed
- Conversation on SA in your municipality/practice, the experiences, the setup and the effects, and also the future now that budget cuts and reforms are imminent
- Conversation by this topic list, which is based on the German topic list; in some cases German colleagues will come and listen as we also do in Germany (border regions Emden-Delfzijl and Aachen-Heerlen)

#### Startup example

- Many clients have difficulties with day-to-day competences, especially when they are long term social benefit recipients. They in danger of getting difficulties with day schedules, organizing themselves, building trust, and mingling among other people.
- SA until now oriented on stabilizing the situation of these people en learning competences again which enable them to actively participate in society (far before work becomes part of the picture)
- All kinds of low threshold ways, from theatre projects to healthy behavior courses...
- Via training, qualification or work stimulation developing and stimulating participation

#### Our question

- What is the status as regards SA in your municipality/your domain of experience
- Please give examples

#### You as a person/in your function

- Field of experience/previous activities/biographical background

- Organization
- Existing SA/stimulation instruments (constant-change)
- Field of activities
- Changes resulting from reforms/upcoming budget cuts

#### SA measures and design

- Examples
- Aimed at individuals or groups
- Legal framework in which measures fit
- What are participants doing exactly
- Which goals are aimed at and which are met
- Do participants recognize the need to engage or is the pressure from the organization key to participation
- How do you assess closeness/distance from labour market when implementing measures
- Do measures fit in normal practice in the organizations and what are the number of participants
- Budgets per project/year
- Do these initiatives remain or will they be cut, in what exactly and with which argument

#### Participants

- Describe participants, a.o. age, sex, education/papers, health, life habits
- Life situation
- Motivation to participate
- Do you see differences in groups related to type of measure
- Which groups should participate and do they
- Are target specified for separate groups (compare 'co-inciders' ['samenlopers'] i.e. people with several benefits; homeless, etc.; new-existing influx; 'self-reporters' ['zelfmelders'] i.e. participants not chosen by UWV; other people in the neighbourhood; crisis-permanent attention; people not in benefit, work or training but who want to ['nuggers' or 'niet-uitkeringsgerechtigden']

#### Measurement development

- Route of development of specific measurement; more broadly: phases in thinking and acting as regards SA
- Who initiates SA, decision maker in organization or what is the initiating level c.q. implementor/supplier
- In what framework is SA taken up (e.g. in neighbourhood approach)
- What underlying instrument/conceptual framework is used (the so-called self-reliance ladder, participation ladder, etc.)
- Overlap with other measures (e.g. poverty control, GGD city/regional health care associaiton, youth care)

- Relationship UWV-city-supplier (perhaps national government, national city association VNG, G32 association for 32 largest cities except largest 4, G4 association for 4 largest cities)
  - o At start and after some time; who is responsible; how is cooperation
  - o Do different organization have same concept of SA (cf. concept of reintegration)
  - o What does it mean when organizations are not all equally experienced with SA, or broader with stimulating social participation
  - o Would it be better (in terms of organizing and results) when all would be in one hand
  - o What are the limit of market control, what can be done better or should be turned back if that would be regarded necessary
- What would be the desired participants and type of SA according to the legal framework and to what extend is the practice diverting from this
- Do you have opportunities to report SA initiatives, to suggest them
- What are the communication channels in reporting/suggesting these needs in the organization
- Can you sufficiently allocate SA according to your needs/the need in the market
- What are successful, innovative SA initiatives and for what type of participants particularly
- What are obstacles to have everyone participate
- Are their argument in favour or against more methodical systematic control on SA
- Which actors and money channels are (more) relevant (in the future)

#### Targets and results

- Which targets are to be attained and which are attained
- What feedback do you get from participants
- What are the experiences of case managers and work mediators (have those who participate in SA become more easy to mediate)
- Are there result criteria and are they met
- How can one make activation (quantitatively) visible (more healthy, day rhythm)
- How do you value chances and risks of SA
- What measures are desired for the future
- IS SA more than a first step to prepare problem groups for the labour market versus sustainable ties with society (participation)