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“We are at the bottom of the society”

A qualitative study of dignity related experiences in non-standardized activation policies implemented towards social assistance recipients in Norway

Abstract

Active labor market policies have a long tradition in Norway, and since early the 1990s, conditional activation policies have increasingly become a core component in the provision of social assistance. The primary aim of such policies is to (re)integrate social assistance recipients into the ordinary labor market, and the strategies argued to be best suited for doing so have shifted since the formal enactment in the 1991 Act of Social Assistance.

The 6th principle in ILO recommendation 202 urges member states to respect rights and dignity of minimum income recipients. While drawing on this principle, the purpose of this thesis is to address experiences of dignity among social assistance recipients required to participate in non-standardized activation measures. The research is located in a context where the activation policy over the last decade has undergone both discursive and practical developments. These changes have facilitated new, standardized, policies based in a social investment perspective, which differs from the 1990s ‘work-for-benefit’ focused policies. By applying qualitative methods this study aims to explore how those who have their social assistance benefit conditioned upon participation in ‘work-for-benefit’ activation experience dignity. The role of new policies, which my focus group is excluded from, is explored as a dimension affecting these experiences. A subsidiary aim is to discuss how the arrival of new standardized activation policies may have impacted the social divisions of activation.

The main findings of the study, derived from a thematic analysis of interviews with six participants in two different ‘work-for-benefit’ measures, suggests that strict conditionality, lack of user-involvement and agency, low and unpredictable economical compensation, and content in work assignments, are the most significant factors affecting their experiences of dignity. In addition does the existence of other offerings, accessed by only a few, play an important role in perceived dignity. Findings from interviews combined with a review of the activation policy points, furthermore, towards blurred distinctions in the old divisions between insured and uninsured unemployed, thus, challenging the traditional hierarchies within public welfare while facilitating new ones.

Keywords: Activation policies, conditionality, social assistance, social assistance recipients, dignity, workfare, shame, capability development, Qualification Program.

Oslo and Akershus University College

Oslo 2016

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the participants in the study. It is your willingness to share personal stories and experiences that have made this study possible.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Ivar Lødemel for providing constructive feedback throughout the research process, and for inspiring me to explore the field of activation policy, both prior to, and while conducting my study. Thank you also for giving me an opportunity to be actively involved in the Poverty and Shame Project and other, related projects.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the faculty members of the Master's Program in Social Work, and MIS staff in particular, for support and inclination to help. I owe, also, a big thanks to my family, friends and everyone else who have believed in me and encouraged me both prior to the decision on pursuing a master degree, and throughout the process of doing so.

Special thanks goes to my sister and niece for offering much needed breaks, helping me to refocus my thoughts through getting my mind on something else every now and then. A special thanks also to Simen, who have supported me throughout the whole process in spite of times of frustration. Thank you for putting up with me!

List of abbreviations

ALMP – Active Labor Market Policies

HRD – Human Resource Development

LMA- Labor Market Attachment

ILO – International Labor Organization

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

NAV – Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration

UN – United Nations

EU – European Union

LDO – Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombudsman

NSD – Norwegian Social Sciences Data Service

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Norwegian welfare state has, like most Western European nations, faced a host of new challenges over the past decades. Demographic changes including an aging population and increased immigration, globalization and its effects on the labor market, macro-economic crisis, and increasing unemployment rates have, together, put the welfare state under pressure. New solutions regarding how to face these challenges are being sought, resulting in welfare reforms. The welfare reforms implemented in many of the OECD-countries over the last decade are commonly referred to as the ‘active turn’ in social policy, and have mainly centered around how to activate those standing outside the labor market (Molander and Torsvik 2015, 38). Social security schemes have, hence, been geared towards re-integrating people into the labor force with a focus on reorganizing passive income maintenance benefits so that they stimulate activity and employment to a larger extent.

Activation policies are commonly divided along two main positions expressing different strategies that policy makers pursue. The first is rooted in a rational actor model, which suggests that life on welfare benefits should be rendered unattractive by deploying conditions and compulsory activities so that people choose ordinary employment. The second is rooted in an investment perspective, which emphasizes development and investment in beneficiaries’ human resources as a means to qualify them for employment (Bay, Hagelund, and Pedersen 2015, 31-32). The former is what Lødemel and Trickey (2001) refers to as a labor market attachment (LMA) strategy while the latter is a human resource development (HRD) strategy- and changes in activation policies are often understood in relation to these two positions.

Norway has, alongside other Scandinavian countries, a long tradition of state-run active labor market policies (ALMPs)¹ targeted towards unemployed people with acquired rights to social insurance coverage. So, while ALMPs were practiced prior to the 1990s, developments during the early 1990s entailed a significant shift in the Norwegian activation policy. These developments pertained to expansion of the target group for activation policies, where the recipients of the lowest tier of welfare benefits were included by imposing work-related requirements as a condition for social assistance (Lødemel and Trickey 2001, 2). Later developments, initiated during 2010s, introduced a change in the activation policy for social

¹ ALMPs will be used in this study to denote the state-run active labor market policies and programs

assistance recipients wherein a shift from the 1990s' strong work-for-welfare focus to a greater emphasis on the strengthening of human resources of participants could be observed. This change was facilitated by the introduction of the so-called "NAV-reform" in 2006, which is the biggest governance reform of the welfare administration in Norwegian history. The reform merged the three welfare agencies offering different social security and employment services into one entity named 'The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration' (NAV) with the goal of creating a more user-friendly and effective administration (NOU 2004:13). The NAV-reform and the new emphasis on how to develop human resources and human capital was followed by the launching of the Qualification Program in 2007- an individually tailored two-year program offered to a group of eligible long-term recipients of social assistance with the aim of increasing their chances of becoming self-reliant through work.

The years 2006-2007 were, in many ways, significant in the context of the Norwegian welfare state's history, with both the organizational and programmatic changes acknowledged to reflect an essential shift in the activation policy for social assistance recipients. The NAV-reform blurred the hitherto clear distinctions between state-run services provided to those with acquired social insurance rights, and services provided by local authorities to those without these rights. The post-2007 activation policy, hence, entails a broadening of the programmatic offerings available to those relying on the lowest tier of welfare benefits where the new Qualification Program, the ALMPs, and the traditional 'work-for-benefit' offerings co-exist. Heather Trickey argues that administrations facilitating for more than one type of placement opportunity could create an acknowledged or unacknowledged hierarchy within activation policies and among those targeted by the policy (Trickey 2001, 274). The aim of this thesis is to take a closer look at this aspect of Norwegian activation policy: how those who do not get access to the new broader set of programmatic offerings are affected by the activation policy and what implications the past decade's changes have had for them.

1.1.1 Rationale and motivation for the study

The activation policy has fluctuated over the past decades and two recent- post 2007 developments, in particular, could indicate a new shift in the activation policy, consequences of which are yet to be revealed. The first development relates to a change in the implementation of the Qualification Program, where an adjustment in the funding conditions is of particular importance. The program went from being financed through earmarked money

from the state to being integrated with the block funding administered by the municipality in 2011, which caused a decline in the number of participants recruited. The other development relates to the enactment of a change in the paragraph regulating the use of conditions for social assistance recipients. The wording in legislation was in 2015 changed from ‘conditions *can* be used’ to ‘conditions *shall* be used’, meaning that the conditions of social assistance are to be made obligatory for all claimants. This change has not been enforced yet, and its implications are, hence, not possible to examine. The changing nature of the activation policy landscape has, however, served to catch my interest for the field.

It was in this changing context of social assistance and activation policy that I practiced as a social worker between 2013 and 2015, processing applications for social assistance and following-up claimants. The mandate given to me as a caseworker was to secure livelihood for those incapable of acquiring it by any other means, and to do so with a primary focus on the principle of ‘help-to-self-help’ and on the goal of self-reliance through work. Adherence to conditions of activity was the main rule, and my chief task was to locate appropriate activities for social assistance recipients to participate in. Owing to the changes in funding, the Qualification Program was available to only a few claimants, while the ALMPs were largely reserved for people enrolled into the Qualification Program or similar programs offered through the national insurance scheme. The focus on activation remained strong, low availability of offerings notwithstanding, and long-term recipients of social assistance who had not been enrolled into the Qualification Program often had the option of participating in the non-standardized ‘work-for-benefit’ measures, or shorter job-search courses. I frequently experienced resistance to such an offering on the part of claimants who seemed to prefer the more standardized measures offered through the Qualification Program and ALMPs.

A recent, and still ongoing, research project entitled ‘Poverty and Shame’, which explores the connection between shame and anti-poverty measures, has contributed to new insights on the role the Qualification Program has played for those who gain access to the new offering. This ongoing bulk of research has the International Labour Organization (ILO) recommendation 202 on National Social Protection Floors as a centerpiece. The recommendation, which was adopted in 2012 and signed by 185 member states, including Norway, urges member states to ‘*respect the rights and dignity of people covered by social assistance guarantees*’ (ILO 2012, section 3.6). According to the Poverty and Shame project, the Qualification Program represents an HRD-strategy, and the new features offered by the program wield a positive

impact on the participants' sense of dignity (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 99-100). It is contended in the project, in line with the observation made by Trickey in 2001, that the new wave of activation policies in Norway creates new tiers among social assistance recipients (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 100). This observation acknowledges that those who do gain access to the Qualification Program are affected differently by the activation policy from those who do not, but due to the focus of the project the experiences of those left outside are not explored further.

Based on the knowledge I had acquired as a social worker in Oslo, working on implementing activation policies for social assistance recipients who both needed and desired the services to improve their chances in the labor market, I found myself asking: what about those unable to access the Qualification Program? How do they experience the activation policies? How does their awareness of the existence of other, for them inaccessible, offerings impact these experiences? These concerns do, in a way, 'pick-up' from where the existing research ends. Namely with the hypothesis that the introduction of this 'higher tier' Qualification Program results in a 'residual tier' within the social assistance activation, and that the recipients not enrolled into the Qualification Program are affected by the activation policy differently from those who are (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 101).

My study takes place, hence, in the intersection between ongoing changes in the activation policy on a political level, the implementation of the policy on an administrative level, and existing research on the field. Drawing on my experiences as a former caseworker my aim is to, in a more systematic way, ask the questions that prevailed for me while implementing the policies, with the Poverty and Shame project and the ILO recommendation 202 as central tenets guiding the study.

1.2 Research aim and questions

While much of the recently conducted research in Norway is focused on the Qualification Program and its participants, I aim to focus exclusively on those who, for various reasons, do not gain access to standardized programs but are still required to participate in activation in return for social assistance. I intend to study how a non-standardized activation policy affects experiences of dignity of its participants, and how the last decade's changes, with the

introduction of a higher-tier program, has influenced these experiences. My research questions will then be as follows:

1. *What factors are contributing to the experiences of (in)dignity of social assistance recipients enrolled into non-standardized activation?*
2. *How has the creation of new offerings accessible for some social assistance recipients impacted on the experiences of non-standardized activation?*

Dignity will serve as the lens through which the experiences are interpreted, and the focus of the first question is on exploring possible factors of significance relevant to experiences concerning dignity. The second research question has been developed relevant to the hypothesis presented by the Poverty and Shame project, in which it is asserted that the introduction of the Qualification Program has established stratification within activation policies, impacting the dignity of those unable to access the program (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a). In order to address the two questions I engage in two immersions: the first involves the policy and is based on relevant policy documents and secondary literature. The second immersion concerns user-experiences with regard to implementation of and participation in the policy through a small sample sized study of two non-standardized ‘work-for-benefit’ measures. The policy review serves to contextualize the experiences, while also providing a foundation for the discussion of findings from interviews with participants in non-standardized activation measures.

Conducting a review of the policy and combining it with a small-scale study of experiences related to implementation of, and participation in the policy, has enabled me to create a kind of ‘thick-description’ of the policy activation landscape. The use of different sets of data allows me to elucidate the complexity and the nuances of the activation policy, as well as their impact on dignity on an individual level.

Activation policies are, as implied above, often distinguished according to the strategies pursued, where two main positions become discernible- the LMA-strategy and the HRD-strategy. Different strategies give rise to different policies which, in turn, impacts differently on the experiences of dignity. The differentiation between two main strategies is in this study used as an analytical concept for understanding the policy development and its impact on an individual level. This provides a foundation for discussing what the strategic fluctuations in

the activation policy means for those not gaining access to the new program offerings in general, while highlighting their experiences of dignity in particular.

While the primary focus of the study is on the experiences of dignity in implementation and participation I also look into what the data conveys regarding a possible social division within activation policies. The focus, in this context, is on whether the shift towards an HRD-strategy, represented by the Qualification Program, can be claimed for other activation policies in social assistance as well and, if not, what role this might play in the differentiation of the activation policy. Looking at social divisions, however, is not to be understood as a subsidiary project completely separated from my primary focus on dignity, but rather as a facet with a possible effect on experienced dignity. Drawing upon the LMA-HRD model and relating it to the concept of social divisions will, hence, help me understand the dimensions of (in)dignity in activation policies.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The following chapter delineates the theoretical framework and methodology of the study. It will elaborate on the key analytical concepts used to address the research questions, and utilized when discussing the findings. It will also outline methodological choices and considerations made throughout the study. In chapter three I briefly review the Norwegian activation policy in order to build the context for my primary data collected through interviews. Chapter four addresses the research questions by presenting findings from the interview data clustered into themes representing factors significant to the experiences of dignity, and shortly discuss them. Based on the findings in the interview material and the review in chapter three, chapter five addresses the subsidiary aim while discussing the issue of social divisions. It furthermore, shortly, considers possible consequences of the most recent development in the social assistance activation policy. Chapter six is an enclosing chapter summing up the conclusions and relating them to Norway's commitment to the 6th principle in the ILO Recommendation 202.

2. Methodology and theoretical framework

This section provides an overview of the theoretical framework used for the research along with the methods applied for collecting and analyzing data. The chapter is divided into two main sections, one presenting the theoretical framework and the other outlining methods for data collection and analysis.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework represents theories underpinning the exploration of my research objective, which is the Norwegian activation policy implemented for social assistance recipients without access to standardized activation programs, with a focus on its impact on the dignity of participants. It is this research objective that constitutes my focus of attention, and upon which my selection of theories is based. Various interlinked concepts have been deployed in order to analyze and discuss the data in a nuanced and holistic way. The theories and concepts chosen will be integrated in both my review of policy and in the small sample sized study exploring experiences of non-standardized activation.

In order to answer the research questions, it is important to understand the concept of dignity and its meaning in the context of my research, with the ILO recommendation as a center piece. I commence the presentation with the key concept of dignity as understood in the preparatory works for the ILO recommendation in which the concept of agency plays a central role. This is followed by an introduction of a framework for categorizing policy strategies and the theory on social divisions of welfare, both which help in the mapping factors affecting dignity. The key analytical concepts are presented in the following section with a short elaboration of their relevance for my study.

2.1.1 Dignity

The first sentence of Article 1 in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads *'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'* (UN 1948). The concept of dignity has become increasingly important in contemporary political and ethical discussions; it is a central tenet in the human rights' discourse and *'the closest we have to an internationally accepted framework for normative regulation of political life'* (Rosen 2012, 1).

The ILO Recommendation 202 on National Social Protection Floors, adopted by 185 nations in 2012, sets out the fundamental principles that member states are committed to apply in the design and implementation of social protection floors (Walker, Chase, and Lødemel 2012). The 6th principle urges all member states to *'Respect the rights and dignity of people covered by social assistance guarantees'* (ILO 2012, section 3.6) . How the concept dignity actually is to be interpreted is contested and is also encountered in various kinds of contexts, given different definitions carrying different connotations. Michael Rosen (2012) elaborates on the concept via four different strands- dignity as status, the role of dignity in providing normative standards for commended conduct, dignity as a human value and lastly the strand of dignified treatment. Beitz (2013) argues that it is the two last named that are of primary relevance when assessing dignity in the perspective of human rights, offering greater leverage for the latter (Beitz 2013, 275, 278).

Dignity understood as a human value has its roots in the Kantian argumentation according to which human beings are claimed to have an intrinsic value, a strand that has played an important role in the founding documents of modern human rights' discourse (Rosen 2012, 61). This value strand is related to the strand pertaining to dignified treatment since acknowledgement of the intrinsic human value requires that human beings are treated with respect. Dignified treatment is, according to Rosen, related to both respect for others as agents and respect for their rights. He argues in favor of an understanding where having dignity respected is a right in itself rather than something serving as a foundation for rights in general (Rosen 2012, 62). To be treated with dignity is, hence, a right humans have as holders of an intrinsic value. This intrinsic value is in a Kantian perspective is rooted in our ability to be rational agents capable of following moral law (Rachels 1986, 114), which in turn, relates to Rosen's strand on commending conduct. The different strands are thus interrelated, mandating that respect for dignity requires dignified treatment, which is dependent on an acknowledgement of the human value and rooted in our ability to follow moral laws that commend conduct. A common denominator in the strands of dignity is the recognition of humans as active, reflected agents, a recognition which is, as we shall see, called upon in the ILO recommendation as well.

The dignity principle in Recommendation 202 is rooted in two main arguments. The first is based on human rights' argument proposed in a report by a UN Special Rapporteur, which

relates to the strands outlined by Michael Rosen. The second involves the effectiveness of social protection schemes argued for in the research informing the process prior to the adoption of the Recommendation. The UN Special Rapporteur argued for the necessity of a dignity principle consistent with human-rights based approach, which is rooted in the value strand asserting that all people are born equal in terms of dignity and rights (UN 1948). The note sent by the Rapporteur argues that *'participation can help to reclaim the dignity and autonomy of people living in poverty by recognizing them as active agents with rights and responsibilities, and enabling agency in decisions that directly affects their lives'* (UN 2012, section 37). It is contended that in order to respect dignity fully, these participatory processes must be meaningful for those living in poverty, and they should be involved in all the processes and get a real opportunity to influence the agenda (UN 2012). The human rights and the effectiveness arguments are not conflicting; the UN Special Rapporteur also noted that a human rights approach leads to a more effective and sustainable poverty reduction (Walker, Chase, and Lødemel 2012). The effectiveness argument presented on the basis of the research conducted prior to Recommendation 202, which had also informed the deliberations of it, noted that *'treating recipients with respect and promoting their dignity was not only an appropriate response to the demands of social justice but was also likely to have beneficial effects in the effectiveness of policy'* (Walker, Chase, and Lødemel 2012, 10). Formulations in the ILO and UN documents highlights two important dimensions with a dignity based policy; to *respect* the rights and dignity of people, and to *acknowledge their agency*, where the latter is presented as a prerequisite for the former.

ILO's 6th principle, urging member states to respect the rights and dignity of people relying on social protection schemes will, in this study, be understood in the context of Rosen's strands regarding the human being's intrinsic value and dignified treatment, which also serves as the basis for the human rights argument promoted by UN. I will also incorporate the argument regarding effectiveness as an important dimension for dignity based policies. In line with Rosen's Kantian elaboration and the preparatory works for the ILO recommendation, I will highlight the acknowledgement and promotion of agency as a cornerstone for dignity, both as an element in respecting dignity, and as a means to facilitate effective policies.

2.1.2 Agency

The UN report and the research informing the deliberation process of the 6th principle emphasize agency as a central tenet, both in terms of securing the dignity of social assistance recipients and in promoting the effectiveness of the policies. Involvement and participation in service provision is highlighted as a means to reclaim dignity while stressing that people depending on social protection need to be recognized as active agents, and be given a chance to set priorities and influence decisions affecting their lives (UN 2012). Social security schemes that do not promote dignity risk eroding individual agency along with the ability of people to help themselves. According recipients with dignity and respect, on the other hand, *'helps empower them with the confidence to strive towards self-sufficiency'* (Walker, Chase, and Lødemel 2012, 11) and, hence, increase the effectiveness of the policies.

The concept of agency originates from Amartya Sen's capability approach, which denotes the opportunities and freedom available for a person to pursue the life he or she has reason to value (Sen 1992, 56). It is furthermore often used to characterize individuals as *'autonomous, purposive and creative actors, capable of a degree of choice'* (Lister 2004, 125). These notions of agency are also reflected in Rosen's (2012) value strand where he draws upon the Kantian argumentation while asserting that a human's intrinsic value is founded on his or her ability to be a rational agent and follow moral law (Beitz 2013, 272). Agency is, then, both a reason for dignity to be respected, as well as a prerequisite for dignified treatment to be achieved.

The issue of agency may be approached either from a structuralist or individualist perspective (Lister 2004, 129), with the former focusing on whether the structure enables or constrains the agency for groups to impact structures, while the latter its focuses on the possibility of individuals influencing choices in relation to their lives. A perception of agency is important for an individual's sense of identity and self-esteem (Lister 2004, 126), and the position taken in this study emphasizes agency as a central dimension of dignity with a primary focus on the individual perspective. I intend, in this study, to examine the policy context in which my informants are situated, how they experience their ability to be primary agents in their own life, and how this is constrained or enabled by the activation policy in which they are enrolled. Drawing upon the concept of agency while assessing dignity is necessary for two primary reasons- firstly since the ILO recommendation and the UN report, both of which stimulated

this research, makes the connection between the two clear, and secondly- so are, as we shall see, my informants.

The concept of dignity is closely related to shame. In the research project ‘Poverty and Shame’ the concept of shame is argued to be a ‘suitable antidote’ to dignity, even if it is not considered an appropriate antonym (Walker 2014, 195). Shame entails a negative assessment of the core self, which is made in reference to one’s own aspirations and perceived expectations of others, and manifests itself in a sense of powerlessness and inadequacy (Tangny et al., 2007; reviewed in Walker 2014, 33). That shame has a negative impact on both dignity and agency is uncontested. Research reveals, on a consistent basis, that to live in poverty and to rely on minimum income protection schemes is associated with a great deal of stigma and shame. My primary focus being on dignity, however, I will take a point of departure arguing that while shame has a negative impact on dignity, dignity can be negatively affected without its inviting feelings of shame. While assessing the ability of activation policies with regard to facilitating dignified treatment, the issue of shame remains ubiquitous given that the activation policy in question is tied to a social assistance scheme. The role of shame in dignity related experiences will, however, not be subtracted and highlighted as a theme of its own but be integrated into the presentation of the other factors.

A dignified and respectful treatment of recipients of welfare services falls within the purview of procedural citizenship rights that regulates process rather than outcome (Lister 2004, 165). And the principles in the ILO recommendation have become increasingly central to exploring design and implementation of social protection policies. The field of social protection policies being extensive the examination of dignified treatment is possible via different angles along with a focus on different factors. My focus, however, is limited to a small sequence in Norwegian activation policies. In order to understand the impact this non-standardized activation policy has on dignity I require a framework that helps me contextualize the policy. For this reason, I have drawn on a model pertaining to the categorization of activation policies.

2.1.3 Categorization of activation policy strategies

Early attempts to classify and compare active labor market policies followed a welfare regime approach in accordance with the tradition of Esping-Andersen (1990) where it was argued

that different welfare regimes develop ALMP schemes in accordance with welfare state legacies (Fossati 2015, 6). This classification approach has later been refined with subsequent contributions placing greater emphasis on the systematic analysis of basic mechanisms characterizing the policies, and less on welfare regimes (Fossati 2015, 6). I have in this thesis drawn on the model presented by Lødemel and Trickey (2001) in which they make a distinction between policies investing in interventions promoting a quick transition to work (LMA) and policies investing in human resource development (HRD).

These two strategies have different connotations, differing both in terms of strategy design and ideological underpinning. Ideology, which is expressed in the understanding of the problem to be addressed, pertains to dependency perspectives. While the two strategies share unemployment as a core problem to be resolved, the explanations for unemployment and the accompanying dependency on welfare benefits varies. Bane and Ellwood (1994) distinguish between three dependency discourses in which the reasons for dependency on welfare benefits have a different understanding: the rational choice model, the expectancy or psychosocial model, and the cultural model. An LMA-strategy, in which ideal workfare policies are emphasized through ‘work-for-benefit’ requirements, may be argued to be in accordance with the rational model of dependency. In this case, dependency is typically understood as a result of an active choice and unwillingness to work (Lødemel and Trickey 2001, 20). This strategy carries a strong element of social control and makes use of negative sanctioning as a means of making it more attractive for people to choose paid work. The HRD-strategy, which is rooted in the social investment perspective, has, on the other hand, a greater focus on structural explanations for unemployment. It is, accordingly, leaning more towards the psychosocial model, where dependency is understood as resulting from long periods of receiving welfare benefits, which deprives people of the confidence needed to move into work (Lødemel and Trickey 2001, 19). The aim in this approach is to, rather, stimulate the development of human resources through investment in interventions promoting skills’-training and building of human capital as a means to enable access to the labor market (Lødemel 2001a, 297). Policies founded in an HRD-strategy will, thus, have a bigger focus on training, courses and education, in contrast to LMA-based policies, which has a ‘work-first’ focus, prioritizing work-related activities.

The concern of welfare dependency becomes important while legitimizing compulsory activation policies since prevention of dependency holds the notion that passive welfare

benefits act as a barrier to employment (Lødemel and Trickey 2001, 18). Depending on which understanding of dependency is applied the strategy is likely to vary over the LMA-HRD continuum although different discourses or explanations for dependency are not mutually exclusive and often applied interchangeably (Lødemel and Trickey 2001, 19). Applying a theory elaborating the differences in policy strategies will help me analyze and discuss the ways in which the activation policy implemented for those without access to standardized programs affect dignity. This framework is particularly relevant while exploring how the last decade's developments within the Norwegian activation policy has affected social assistance recipients, since the changes in the policy have moved along the lines of an LMA-HRD continuum, where the new programmatic offerings implies an inclination towards an HRD-based policy.

The concept strategy is to be used in line with the definition provided by Lødemel and Gubrium (2014) denoting both political aims and actual programs (Lødemel and Gubrium 2014, 328). This allows me to have a broad focus while reviewing the policy and its implications on dignity, and I will be able to look at its aims, as well as its structure and content in offerings.

2.1.4 Social divisions of welfare

The concept 'social division of welfare' refers to the different ways in which welfare support may be provided and the effects these different forms of welfare provision have on creating, maintaining, or mitigating divisions within the population (Sinclair 2006, 1243). This concept owes its origin to an article written by Richard Titmuss (1974) in which he points at the division between social welfare on the one hand and fiscal and occupational welfare on the other (Lødemel 1997h, 265). He argues that social services should be defined according to their functions and objectives rather than by the administrative framework under which they operate (Sinclair 2006, 1243). By including fiscal and occupational welfare he highlights the social division in welfare that favors those who have access to this type of support, while those relying on public welfare schemes often end up worse off. The main division was then identified to be between public and non-public welfare, an important notion for welfare state theories and social policy research at the time. Since the welfare state has undergone rapid development in the recent decades, however, the modern welfare state calls for analysis along new lines.

Lødemel (1997), in his extensive work on social insurance and social assistance schemes in Britain and Norway, concludes that the development in Norwegian social welfare policy has resulted in strong social divisions *within* public welfare (Lødemel 1997h, 266). It is argued that Norway, in the pursuit of universal social protection coverage through the expansion of groups targeted by the national insurance scheme, has created a particularly strong social division between social assistance and social insurance (Lødemel 1997h, 266). The introduction of the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation for social assistance recipients was in a way a reflection of the division in welfare between insured and uninsured in activation policies, where the two groups was given access to different types of programmatic offerings (Lødemel 1997a, 100). This argument was taken up in a later work by Lødemel and Trickey (2001) where the focus was on how this division influenced activation policies aimed at targeting the residual group subsisting on social assistance. The relevance of the social division concept in this thesis relates to the fact that Norway has witnessed a broadening of programmatic offerings for recipients of social assistance over the last decade while excluding some claimants. The Poverty and Shame project narrows the scope of the concept to a focus on a differentiation within activation policies targeted towards social assistance recipients. By applying this narrowed social division perspective, I hope to be able to discuss how the adding of a higher echelon of activation policies is reflected through the experiences of dignity among those unable to access the new policies.

2.2 Methodology

This section outlines the research procedure while elaborating on the methodological choices and considerations that were a part of the research process. It also outlines methods used for collecting and analyzing data while dwelling on ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

The study uses a qualitative research approach, which is characterized by its contextual and constructionist position, meaning that the phenomena to be studied are understood as outcomes of social interaction (Bryman 2012, 380). The choice of approach is guided by my research questions and sets a framework for the methods used. Basing my research within the qualitative tradition was a natural choice since I wished for an in-depth understanding of the activation policy phenomenon and the experiences related to it. Qualitative research is

traditionally inductive, where theory is developed based on research data (Bryman 2012, 380). This is in contrast to a deductive approach where the research develops from an existing theory aimed at testing a hypothesis. While the two models are often seen as exclusive, the distinction between the two has been criticized, with much research frequently placed somewhere between the two (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008, 55). Abduction is a term given to research developing out of empirical facts, as with induction, but which does not reject theoretical notions or hypotheses as in the case of deduction (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008, 56). Throughout the research process there is, thus, an alternation between theory and empiricism, which corresponds rather well with my approach, where my assumptions deriving from theory and existing research have not been disregarded but used as a means to understand the data I have collected. While theory and hypotheses acted as motivators when exploring experiences related to a specific activation policy and its impact on dignity, they also served as a foundation for elucidating findings. The data collected will, in this way, allow me to discuss a hypothesis while facilitating an understanding that goes beyond the frame of the hypothesis. The abductive approach is promoted by use of different data sources that are linked together in the discussion of findings.

2.2.1 Providing the context; a review of literature and policy documents

While policy studies are traditionally focused on the analysis of policy documents, I have chosen to provide a review of relevant policy documents combined with secondary literature. The primary focus of the review is on the genesis of the Norwegian activation policy, subsequent developments, and the strategies pursued including both their objectives and content. In order to address the research questions holistically I searched for broad-ranging literature including governmental reports and documents (white papers, green papers, hearing notes), legislation and associated texts like circulars, as well as secondary literature and relevant research. The use of broad-ranging literature was necessary since my study is located within the broader frame of existing research to which I aim to contribute with new insights. The material has been collected through searches in Oria, Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar and Noart, in addition to the websites of the Government and The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Organization (NAV). I have conducted searches in both Norwegian and English, with key search words like activation, work-line, social assistance, dignity, conditionality, social assistance recipients, workfare, and shame. Due to the extensive material – in the form of articles, books, and research publications – I have had to make some active choices on

what to include and what to exclude. These choices have been guided by the research questions, which set the scope for my study and inform the relevance of the literature.

The aim of the ‘policy review’ is to provide the context for the experiences of my informants and enable me to explore my subsidiary aim through which I intend to discuss possible social divisions within activation policies. Hence, while the review will not provide any answers to my research question it will, in combination with the data derived from interviews with participants in the specific policy, provide a solid foundation for discussion of possible answers to the questions.

2.2.2 Semi-structured interviews with participants in conditional activation

Interviews with participants in non-standardized ‘work-for-benefit’ activities constitute the primary data for answering the research questions. The method was chosen for its appropriateness regarding exploring the experiences of the activation policy and its impact on dignity. The interviews offer a platform to informants for expressing their thoughts facilitating, thereby, a process for uncovering and exploring the complexities and nuances of the policy and its implications on an individual level. Chapter four will, accordingly, have its focus on exploring the policy through the eyes of those directly affected by it, with the aim of addressing the research questions.

Recruitment

The informants were recruited over a time period of three months. They were all recruited after I initiated contact with the agencies responsible for providing activation measures, which were provided externally in two cases and governed by NAV directly in one. I used a purposive sampling strategy since the research required that informants match some specific characteristics relating to the status of being long-term recipients of social assistance. These recipients would have received benefits for more than six months², be over the age of 25, and be enrolled into a non-standardized activation measure. The time parameter was used since the activation policy in social assistance today targets this group in particular (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 217). The age criterion was employed since recipients under the age of 25 are considered as youths and, hence, covered by ‘youth-guarantee’ with access to other measures.

² Definition is used in line with the one proposed by Norway Statistics; <http://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/artikler-og-publikasjoner/langtidsmottakere-av-okonomisk-sosialhjelp>, Accessed November 7, 2015

The last criterion was used as a means of securing the fact that the recruited are actually able to answer my research questions, which are related to experiences of dignity pertinent to non-standardized activation measures. Due to the confidentiality under which both NAV and other measure suppliers work, I had to depend on cooperation from suppliers in the recruitment process. After some phone calls and emails back and forth with two of the recruitment sites I was able to visit and inform the participants about my project directly, and they were then allowed to volunteer for participation. Through this sampling method I was able to recruit six informants. While searching for more informants I was put in direct contact with two potential informants by one of the external measure providers. In these cases appointments for the interviews were made without my getting too involved. A misunderstanding between me and a contact working as course leader resulted in two interviews with participants enrolled into a state-funded ALMP, who were not part of my target group. This mistake statutes the limitation of relying on others to help in the process of recruiting. The interviews were conducted regardless, but with a focus on how the two informants perceived their program in relation to other programs. Because these interviews served to add nuances to the discussion they were not completely excluded from my analysis.

The two sites giving me my six key informants were two different ‘work-for-benefit’ measures connected to two different NAV-offices. A more thorough description of the sites has been presented in chapter four, and only shortly introduced for now. The first (recruitment site one) is administratively separated from the NAV-office, wherein the services are provided by an external municipal-founded actor. This measure offers work in a canteen placed in an NAV-office from where four of the informants were recruited. The second measure (recruitment site two), also municipal funded, is directly governed by the NAV-office. This measure offers maintenance related work assignments including cleaning of parks and preparation of communal apartments, in which two of the informants were enrolled.

Participants

Anonymity had to be maintained owing to the vulnerable situation of my informants. This is something I will address later in the chapter, and here only note that I due to the anonymity issue introduce my informants jointly.

My eight informants represent a diversity of individuals, with different backgrounds and experiences. There are three women and five men whose ages vary between 25 and 60 years.

All but two are either single or divorced; two have small children with shared responsibilities, and one of the two informants with children lives with the other parent. While one of the informants was born in Norway the time of residence in Norway for the rest varied between 4 and 40 years. Two informants had concluded the Introduction Program for newly arrived immigrants while two had been enrolled into the Qualification Program earlier. Three informants had the present activity as their first and the rest had been enrolled into different kinds of conditional activities before that were either locally arranged or ALMPs. All informants were considered 'long-term recipients' according to the definition provided by Statistics Norway, with the exception of the two ALMP informants who did not receive social assistance during the time of the interview. Time with social assistance as a main income for my six key informants varied between 7 months and 20 years, and only one of them had received social assistance as a main income for less than a year. Two of the eight informants had completed higher education, while one had no education at all and the rest had finished primary school. Work experience and connection to the labor market also varied with two informants never having been employed; three had been unemployed for more than five years, and the rest had been out of employment for around one year.

The two informants who were not participants in the 'work-for-benefit' activation but enrolled into an ALPM have been given the names Ole and Karl. I wish to mention here that wherever their experiences are not connected to the activation that is in focus of the thesis I will use them merely to add nuances to the findings. The four informants from recruitment site one, who work in a canteen, are named as Ida, Heidi, Kari and Lars. The informants recruited from site two, who work with maintenance in their NAV-district, are named as Knut and John.

Interview guide

While conducting the interviews, I used a prepared interview guide. The semi-structured interview allowed me to elicit research-related information from respondents while making room for flexibility so that the latter could talk more freely, allowing me to adapt the interview according to the specific interview setting. I had organized the interview guide into themes subsuming a set of questions that also lent themselves to quick adaptations. Dignity and shame being sensitive issues I made oblique references to them while formulating the questions that were related to agency and perceived challenges. As a means of capturing issues of dignity and shame it was of utmost importance to follow up on experiences by

asking questions regarding feelings and thoughts surrounding them. Such questions, however, were not integrated into my interview guide.

As a former social worker, previously employed as caseworker working with social assistance, I had the advantage of familiarity with the interview setting. I had experience talking with this group earlier and with asking questions that, for many, are perceived as difficult. This gave me the advantage of being more comfortable in the role as an interviewer, while also being able to understand details of the narratives connected to NAV and social assistance. My prior learning saved me some time during the interviews as I did not have to ask the informants for clarifications on formal details related to NAV and the system around it. This gave me more time to focus on the actual experiences.

Having stated the above I need to mention that my experience as a social worker at NAV has biased my interpretation of the information. My preconception, deriving from my work experience and other settings including knowledge acquired during educational experiences, has been further elaborated upon while considering the validity and limitations of the study.

Conducting the interviews

While two interviews were conducted at the homes of the informants on their request, four were conducted at the place of the activity and two in a meeting room at the Oslo and Akershus University College. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes, with the exception of one of the interviews with an ALMP participant, which lasted about 25 minutes. While some of the informants spoke freely about their situation and experiences, others were more comfortable with my asking direct questions for them to answer. Language barriers may, possibly, explain this fact for some of the informants, some of whom struggled to express themselves fluently in Norwegian. One interview was conducted with an adult son interpreting some of the information between me and the respondent.

All interviews were recorded, and transcribed no later than the following day. Limiting the transcription duration enabled me to recall 'unspoken' messages during the interviews including facial and bodily expressions and the context of what was being said how. The language barrier in some of the interviews added an extra dimension to the importance of quick transcription since the intentions of unclear expressions and possible ambiguities in the narratives were easier to understand during the interview and recall directly afterwards.

Transcribing the interviews on a constant basis helped me detect flaws like poorly formulated questions and missing information. All this allowed me to refine the interview guide before the next interview.

2.2.3 Thematic analysis

While thematic analysis is a common approach to qualitative data analysis it does not have an identifiable heritage, nor has it been outlined in terms of a distinctive cluster of techniques (Bryman 2012, 578). A theme can be defined as a category identified through the data that relates to the focus of the research building on codes from transcripts, which can provide a basis for theoretical understanding and contribution (Bryman 2012, 578). The flexibility of thematic analysis makes it applicable both as a realist method, with a focus on experiences, meanings and realities of the informants, and as a constructionist method through which experiences and realities are examined in terms of how they are affected by different discourses operating within society (Braun and Clark 2006, 9). My approach is, however, located in between the two strands. It is what Braun and Clark (2006) refer to as a ‘contextualist’ method where the focus is on both how individuals interpret their experiences and how the social context impinges on these experiences while retaining focus on the contextual ‘reality’ (Braun and Clark 2006, 9). The ‘contextualist’ method underbuilds my abductive approach, through which I aim to examine the policy context as a ‘reality’, of which I have some theoretical assumptions that guide my research, and which affects the experiences and interpretation process of my informants placed in this reality.

The process of analysis commenced as I conducted the interviews and worked with the transcriptions in which I started to identify patterns and themes that could be relevant to my study. Coding of transcripts was done systematically by arranging them into a range of different themes and subsuming the information under ‘main themes’ and ‘sub-themes’ while constantly focusing on their ability to inform my research questions. I identified four main themes that recurred throughout the interviews, which I regard as the most essential in answering my research question on factors regarding activation policy affecting dignity. These themes have been divided into sub-themes, related to specific factors, to sharpen the analysis, making it tidier and easier to follow.

The first overarching theme relates to the structure of the policy, highlighting issues concerning conditionality, and user-involvement. The second overarching theme relates to the delivery of the policy in which economic compensation and content of actual activity have been identified as important factors figuring as sub-themes. The third theme relates to my second research question, and involves the context of the broader activation policy, which mainly addresses the existence of other, inaccessible, offerings. The fourth theme differs from the first three since it does not elucidate factors in implementation or participation affecting dignity, but rather highlights how dignity is affected of it with regard to social isolation and agency.

2.3 Ethical considerations

There are several ethical considerations that need to be adhered to when conducting field research, especially where sensitive and personal information is being sought. The informants participating in my study were in a vulnerable position and life situation, and I asked them to share information about their lives and experiences. Adhering to principles of informed consent and anonymity were, therefore, strong priorities throughout the collection and presentation of data.

Prior to the interviews I had obtained approval from the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Service (NSD) to conduct the study, where both interview guide and consent form were found to meet the requirements of national ethical principles and, hence, approved for use. Abell and Myers (2008) notes that *'It is only when interviewer enters a community that feels threatened, stigmatized, marginalized, powerless or misrepresented that the tactic assumptions underpinning the exercise may come to surface'* (Abell and Myers 2008, 157). This notion proved highly relevant for my study and was manifested through suspiciousness against me and my project by the informants. While informing potential informants about my project, it was important to stress that participation was voluntary, and that to sign up did not entail an obligation to carry it through.

All the interviews started with my giving out more information about the project and its aims and about confidentiality and anonymity. This was followed by signing of the consent form on which the option of withdrawal was clearly specified. The initial suspiciousness towards the project ran off quite quickly once the interview sessions started, and towards the end the

suspiciousness once again increased with regard to my intentions for seeking the information they had provided me with. Responding to my last question ‘do you have any questions for me?’ several informants asked me to, once more, clarify who I was, what and whom I worked with, who would get access to the information, and what the project was all about. The informants wanted to ensure that their caseworkers would not get access to the information in fear of it affecting their case and economic situation. This underlined the vulnerability of their situation having to depend on a discretionary right, and my responsibility to secure their anonymity. It also underlined the issue of my ‘double mandate’, one which I formally have as a researcher within a master project, and a second given to me by the informants where they expect the sensitive information they have shared to actually make a difference.

Throughout the interviews I also reflected upon the issue of asking questions, some of them of a sensitive nature, causing people to reflect upon parts of their lives that were sore and painful, without being able to follow up on how this affects them. It was important for me to give the informants time to think and ‘gather their thoughts’ before ending the session with some positive words for the future. This helped the informants to ‘tune out’ of the interview and ‘tune in’ to their everyday lives.

2.4 Study limitations

Study limitations represent a range of issues present in research affecting validity and reliability, some of which I have touched upon in different sections outlining my methods. There is no clear prescription for assessing validity and reliability in qualitative research but there are some criteria that need to be addressed (Bryman 2012, 389). One may distinguish between internal and external validity, with the former referring to the extent to which the information obtained actually reflects the information that needs to be obtained, while the latter is concerned with whether the results can be generalized (Bryman 2012, 47). In qualitative research it is the internal validity that is of primary importance, where the assessment of relevance of the data in answering the question needs to be given high priority. The priority given to internal validity is rooted in the nature of qualitative research, where generalizations are not the aim.

Since my research questions are difficult to test empirically, assessing the relevance of data has been dependent on my own considerations. I have used the research questions as tools for

making choices regarding what to exclude and include in the review of policy context. Seeking a certain degree of validity, I found it important make use of different sources of published literature and documents. While reviewing policy objectives and strategies along with potential underlying assumptions impinging on policy formulation, I focused on both formal policy documents, and their assessment in secondary literature. Drawing upon different presentations was, hence, a means for strengthening my review of the policy.

Many of the same considerations accounted for the interview data as well. While creating an interview guide, conducting interviews, and later coding them, all steps involved in the processes were colored by the choices I made. In order to avoid guiding the interviews and the narratives of informants in a specific direction, it was important to ask open questions. For the sake of validity I have sought to make the process as transparent as possible. This has been done by rendering the interview guide accessible, anchoring the choice of themes in the narratives of the informants, and illustrating the presentation of my findings on quotes and excerpts from the interviews. I do acknowledge, however, that the coding and presentation of findings, as with the rest of the study, has been dependent on my interpretations and considerations. Respondent validation is one way in which validity may be secured, with informants able to provide feedback and confirm or oppose the findings (Bryman 2012, 391). The limited timeframe of my study, however, prevented me from deploying this method. The transparency and truthfulness in the presentation of my findings is dependent on ethical guidelines underpinning my research, from the beginning till the end.

It is also important to note that all interviews were conducted in Norwegian with the quotes subjected to translation, which could impact their interpretation. Language and possible language barriers need to be addressed while assessing the validity of a study. Since most of my informants do not speak Norwegian as their native language their representations and narratives, along with my interpretations of them, are likely candidates for linguistic misunderstandings. While conducting the interviews I did everything possible to ensure that I had understood them correctly before transcribing the interviews immediately after having conducted them.

Lastly, it is also important to stress the fact that the qualitative nature of the study in itself too affects validity. Since focus is on the experiences of my informants, the results cannot be scientifically generalized beyond the specific context of this research. Besides, the abductive

approach, which does not disregard my assumptions, also affects the results. My various experiences as a social worker acted as motivators during the research process while my professional background provided me with a set of glasses that I wore while reviewing the policy and conducting and analyzing the interviews. On my part, I have tried to restrict my presumptions to the greatest extent possible and enter the research field with a curiosity to reveal things beyond my previous knowledge.

3. Policy context- the changing scene for Norwegian activation policy

This chapter is concerned with reviewing the policy context with focus on how the activation policy targeted towards social assistance recipients came about and its later developments. The aim of the chapter is to provide a context for the research questions and the findings of the interviews. In order to acknowledge the experiences of dignity in policy implementation and to discuss issues of social divisions it is crucial to first develop an understanding of the policy and its development up to today. The policy categorization framework will serve as a central tenet throughout the review, where developments in the policy will be understood as moving along an LMA-HRD continuum. The review will serve both as a contextualization of findings from interviews and as a foundation for a discussion of these findings.

The development of the activation paradigm in western nations can be divided, according to Lødemel and Gubrium (2014), into three waves of reform: the first occurring in the 1990s, the second during the decade leading up to the financial crisis in 2008, while the third post 2008 wave is still unfolding (Lødemel and Gubrium 2014, 327). These three waves have been recognized as an international development trend that may be traced in Norway as well. I shall draw on these trajectories while reviewing the national activation policy landscape in Norway, and its fluctuations.

3.1 How the policy came about and its early years; the first wave of activation

The traditionally sharp distinction between social insurance and social assistance is important for understanding the development of the Norwegian activation policy (Lødemel, Gubrium, and Harsløf 2014, 21). Lødemel (1997h), in his work on social security schemes in Norway and Britain, notes that the emergence of the Norwegian social assistance scheme has strongly depended upon the nature and composition of the target group it aims to cover. The size and composition of the target group has, in turn, depended on the development of the national insurance scheme, and political choices made in relation to it, rather than on structural factors such as unemployment levels (Lødemel 1997h, 260). Social divisions in the Norwegian welfare state context, for many decades, developed along the lines of the expansion of social insurance, whereby the social assistance scheme was developed to care for the residuum (Lødemel 1997h, 266). Social assistance is, hence, given the mandate of being the welfare state's last safety net with the overarching purpose – in line with § 1 in the Act of Social Assistance – of promoting social security, improving living conditions for the marginalized,

contributing to equality and preventing social problems (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131), and doing so with the objective of promoting help-to-self-help (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012).

While state run ALMPs have a long tradition in Norway and are not a new phenomenon, they have traditionally targeted the unemployed with insurance. Developments during late the 1980s and early 1990s entailed a new distinctive feature focusing on how to include the recipients of social assistance into the activation policies. The 1991 Act on Social Assistance introduced a new principle to modern social assistance. For the first time since the 1930s were local authorities allowed to make use of work-related conditions in exchange for social assistance benefits (Lødemel 2001b, 136). This specific work-based activation policy was integrated into the social assistance scheme, and, hence, developed outside the already existing system of ALMPs available for the unemployed with acquired rights in the social insurance scheme. The introduction of activation policies to the Act of Social Assistance needs to be seen in relation to the increased pressure and rising benefit payments during the 1980s when the number of claimants went from 60.000 to 165.000 annually (Lødemel 1997a, 24). The increasing number of people relying on social assistance generated a fear that generous and unconditional benefits would create a welfare dependency and serve to undermine the work-ethics of the population. The so-called ‘work-line’ was formulated to prevent such dependency with the objective of making all benefit claimants receiving different types of welfare benefits self-sufficient through to work. Over the subsequent years the term ‘work-line’ policy became increasingly apparent in official government reports and gained broad political support.

The activation policy in social assistance was formally legislated by facilitating the use of work-related conditions in exchange for social assistance. This was regulated through one single paragraph stating that *‘It can be made a condition that the recipient carry out suitable work in the municipality of residence for as long as the person receives the benefits’* (LOV-1991-12-13 nr. 81, section 20). Justifications for making benefits conditional addressed a range of concerns, there among economic sustainability, social inclusion, and the norm of reciprocity. The political arguments for introducing compulsory activity in the preparatory works, prior to enactment, contained both educative and disciplining elements in addition to rehabilitating ones. While the parliament emphasized the need for strengthening the connection between rights and responsibilities towards the youth lacking work experience, the

Norwegian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs focused on promoting social security, rehabilitation and development of capabilities for becoming self-reliant (Lødemel 1997a, 65-66). The formulations in the legislation were vague, however, and lack of clarity left it open to the local authorities with regard to implementation. Since no further directions were given and since the regulating paragraph only mentioned ‘suitable work’ it is most likely that training and rehabilitation were never the main intentions of the policy (Lødemel 1997a).

3.1.1 Norway as a European outlier

The early version of the activation policy in social assistance aimed to address increasing problems related to unemployment, especially among the youth, and sought to decrease the pressure on social assistance. This ‘active turn’ in social policies during the early 1990s, traceable in most European countries, was encouraged by the OECD where the secretariat argued in favor of HRD-based policies offering support for the unemployed in order to become competitive in the labor market (Drøpping, Hvinden, and Vik 1999, 142). Norway did, however, pursue a strategy closer to an LMA-strategy, sharing many characteristics with its US counterpart, making it an outlier in the European context. Two main factors have been highlighted as explanations for this workfare-like policy. Firstly, the activation policy for social assistance recipients was separated from the national administrated ALMPs offered to the insured unemployed and secondly, the discretionary nature of the policy ensured that no national standardized programs were put in place, while the burden of implementation was borne by the local authorities (Lødemel, Gubruim, and Harsløf 2014, 38). Furthermore was the strategy pursued in Norway characterized by its high level of conditionality, its lack of emphasis on capability investment, and its focus on negative sanctioning whereby lack of fulfillment could lead to a curtailment or temporary discontinuation of benefits.

All these factors point towards an strategy emerging from a problem-understanding with emphasis on rational choice as the main reason for unemployment, where welfare dependency is understood to be a result of moral decay (Kildal 2012, 184). This discursive underpinning resulted in an activation policy that did not entail new rights or offerings. The policy itself could be referred to as a ‘program’ but merely as a condition that came along with the granting of a last-safety net benefit. During the last decade Europe witnessed a change in the activation policy, with the years leading up to the financial crisis introducing more LMA-based policies in many European countries. Norway, however, moved in a direction that was

opposite to that of the other European states when formulating new activation policy strategies.

3.2 The re-discovery of poverty and the activation policy turn

The early activation policy and its strategy, introduced and enacted in 1991, was the result of a political discussion focusing on rights and obligations. The problem-understanding was dominated by a focus on generous benefits creating a welfare dependency and on individual responsibility regarding taking on work. This discourse dictated the policies for almost a decade with little attention given to processes of social exclusion, marginalization, and structural dimensions of rising unemployment rates. The parliamentary elections in 2001 became a turning point with the issue of poverty, neglected during the strong growth of the welfare state from 1950 onwards, making its way back into the political agenda (Hagen and Lødemel 2010, 284). The new political discussions, led by the right-wing coalition that won the 2001 elections, resulted in the white paper entitled ‘Action Plan Against Poverty’ which states that no one is supposed to live in poverty (St.meld.nr. 6 (2002-2003)). This consolidated a shift in the activation policy where the new ‘work-line’ and its attendant active policy measures were now touted as the most important tools in the fight against poverty.

The white paper entitled ‘Work, Welfare and Inclusion’, which was launched in 2006, became the Labor party’s extended version of the ‘Action Plan Against Poverty’. This paper, along with a green paper launched in 2004 entitled ‘A New Labor- and Welfare Administration’, became the most significant documents of the upcoming policy changes. The white paper from 2006 stresses the fact that the unemployed people who have limited insurance rights are in the danger of ending up in a passive situation characterized by income poverty combined with health- and social problems. It states that this group constitutes a ‘special challenge’ for the welfare state, and that *‘there is a need for a reinforced effort towards people with a weak connection to the labor market’* (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 218). The core of the problem was, thus, understood to be anchored in the individual claimant’s unsettled and marginalized relation to the labor market, while the negative impact this has on the quality of life, in turn, reinforces the marginalized position. Concerns relating to the 1990s’ activation policy, focusing on youth unemployment and welfare dependency resulting from generous benefits undermining the incentives for claimants to take up work, was replaced with increasing concerns regarding how to (re)integrate long-term recipients of social assistance into the labor

market (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 218). This shift brought along a bigger focus on societal and political responsibility in the context of facilitating for labor market inclusion, something that called for new policies.

3.2.1 The emergence of a new policy; The NAV-reform and the Qualification Program

Activation policies bridge social security with labor market policies, and in order to create the means through which they may be linked efficiently cooperation across administrative agencies is required. In the wake of the 'Action Plan Against Poverty' it was acknowledged that too many people aged 18 to 67 were fully or partly standing outside of the labor market depending on welfare benefits, and that the people using welfare services met a fragmented administration that did not reflect the users' need for integrated and cross-sectional services (NOU 2004:13). In order to realize the objectives with the 'work-line', the biggest reorganization of the welfare state in Norwegian history was initiated. The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Organization (NAV) was established in 2006, which merged the three welfare agencies administering social insurance, labor- and employment services, and social assistance, into one entity. The main goals of the organizational reform was to increase efficacy, create a more user-friendly administration, and move a larger number of people away from passive benefits into the labor market (St.prp.nr. 46 (2004-2005), 10).

The NAV-reform, initiating new activation policies, brought along two major changes. One of them incorporates the that broader set of ALMPs which earlier had been reserved for those with acquired rights to the social insurance scheme, were now made available to social assistance recipients. The other major change was the introduction of the Qualification Program in 2007, which was launched by the Labor Party through white paper 'Work, Welfare and Inclusion'. The program was promoted as an important tool in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and was aimed at activating a larger number of long-term recipients of social assistance (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 218), an objective the old approach had failed to achieve. Activation was, thus, both a goal in itself as well as a significant tool in the fight against poverty and exclusion. The program was molded along the existing Introduction Program for newly arrived refugees and non-western immigrants. The Introduction Program was implemented in 2004 and is conditionally enforced at a local level and consists of training and internships along with a monthly allowance (Gubrium 2009, 6). The Qualification Program is regulated in the Act of Social Assistance where it is clarified

that the program, lasting a maximum of two years, *shall* contain work-related activities, and *can* also offer other services that are considered to promote transition to work (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131, section 30).

The program was presented as an individually tailored one, with all participants granted the right to an individual plan that may be co-negotiated (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 225, LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131, section 33). Since 2003, all recipients in ‘need for long-term and coordinated services’ are entitled to an individual plan (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131, section 28). The general right to the plan for basic social assistance recipients is, however, based on what ‘long-term and coordinated services’ are interpreted as, and is, hence, unlike for those enrolled into the Qualification Program, a right of discretionary character. The individual plan rendered the activation policy more individualized than before and the plan became a tool through which user-involvement could be secured, while serving as a ‘welfare-contract’ through which the relationship between rights and responsibilities was to be concretized (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 177). User-involvement has been stressed as the means through which human inviolability could be ensured by accepting the users’ competence to make their own decisions (NOU 2004:13), which is an important element in securing dignified treatment.

The Qualification Program comes with a standardized benefit that is somewhat higher than the national norm for basic social assistance. It is paid like a taxable salary each month, meaning that it gives rights for vacations, pension points, and sick-leave. The program is offered as a statutory right to eligible claimants while following the principle of subsidiarity at the same time, meaning that participation in the program can be used as a condition for continued support from the social assistance scheme (Schafft and Spjelkavik 2011, 132). Although the target group for the program is vaguely defined it is primarily aimed at long-term recipients of social assistance. While assessing eligibility, four main criteria need to be considered. First, the claimant has to be of working age (19-67), the second and third criteria require a lowered income- and work capacity, but without acquired rights in the social insurance scheme. The fourth criteria, which is solely based on discretion, relates to the claimants’ potential to draw benefits from the program- their ‘employability’, on the one hand, and to their need for the program on the other. This means that the claimants’ participation is aimed at increasing their ability to achieve gainful employment (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 219), and that the program is considered necessary for them to do so. Those constituting the target group of the Qualification Program are, thus, not different from the

long-term recipients of basic social assistance, other than those who are enrolled into the program are believed capable of improving their situation through participation.

In contrast to the LMA-strategy's work-first focus represented by the 1990 activation policy, the Qualification Program and the increased access to ALMPs *did* entail something new for Norway's social assistance recipients while moving the policy closer towards an HRD-strategy (Lødemel, Gubrium, and Harsløf 2014, 32). The Qualification Program introduced upgraded benefits as well as services that could be tailored to individual needs in ways that had not been possible earlier. The research project 'Poverty and Shame', which focuses on what the Qualification Program means for incidences of shame-related experiences for participants, notes that the features of the program offer a new sense of dignity (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 99). This development did, once again, make Norway an outlier in the European context. The general trend in European activation policies, reflecting stricter conditionality, tougher sanctions, and cuts in benefits all threatens human dignity along with risking a reinforcement structural poverty (Duffy 2010, 15). The new rights offered by the Qualification Program are, obviously, only available for participants of the program. However, the new ALPMs made available for basic social assistance recipients through the NAV-reform, combined with the right for all to get an individual plan through which the 'human inviolability' is to be ensured could indicate a change towards HRD-based policies also for those who cannot access the Qualification program.

3.3 Post 2007 activation policies- a new diversity

Activation policies have been important tools in the political fight against social exclusion and poverty over the last decade. Norway is among the OECD countries to have granted most to active labor market policies in relation to passive benefits (Ross 2014, 9). The regulation of activation, as formulated in the 1991 Act of social assistance, remained in place when the 2009 version was adopted. The policy adjustments enacted during the 2010s did, however, entail changes for some among the large pool of claimants who had not been offered the Qualification Program given that the NAV-reform had rendered the broader set of ALMPs easier accessible. A preparatory document to the 2009 Act on Social Assistance indicates 'work-related' conditions as relevant when making use of the condition-paragraph, and elaborates that work-related activity can include participation in ALMPs, local qualifying measures, active job-search or acceptance of specific job offers (Ot. prp. nr. 103 2008-2009).

This indicates that the condition-paragraph has broadened its focus from only ‘work-for-benefit’ to include a range of different activities, where both ALMPs and the Qualification program are to be considered.

3.3.1 The limited reach of the Qualification Program

While the Qualification Program, in many ways, marked a shift in the Norwegian activation policy a national supervision of the program conducted by the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision between 2013 and 2014 detected various violations in its implementation. Main findings reveal that the municipalities have been struggling to identify potential participants and that the information about the program is inadequate and fails to reach the population (Helsetilsynet 2015, 8-9), which leads to a random recruitment of participants. There is a lack of knowledge about the program being a statutory right for those who fulfill the eligibility criteria (Helsetilsynet 2015, 16), meaning that many social assistance recipients who might be eligible and, hence, entitled to the program, never get considered.

The issue of participant recruitment must be seen in the light of changes in the program’s funding conditions in 2011, when it went from being a responsibility of the state, financed through earmarked funds, to being a part of the block funding administrated by the municipality (The Directorate of Labor and Welfare 2015). The number of participants in the program peaked in 2009 at around 9.000 but declined rapidly after the change in 2011; since 2013 it has remained stable at around 5.500 (The Directorate of Labor and Welfare 2015, 4). The number of claimants accessing the program is low compared to the number receiving social assistance, which was 125.400 in 2014 of which around 45 percent were defined as long-term recipients (Langeland, Dokken, and Barstad 2016, 26, 30). Despite the Qualification Program’s inability to reach the population has compulsory activity increased (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013), indicating deployment of other types of active conditions.

3.3.1 Increased use of, and diversity in, work-related conditions

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs ordered a survey on the municipalities’ use of conditions in social assistance in 2013. The survey shows that the NAV-reform seems to have increased the use of work-related conditions, and that the NAV-offices place greater emphasis

on promoting activity among the recipients than before (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 38). The survey also indicates diversity in the conditions deployed by the local NAV-offices.

The overarching goal of easing the accessibility to ALMPs is to prevent people from ending up as long-term recipients of social assistance by intensifying provision of skill-investments through re-schooling, training, and guidance (Dale-Olsen, Røed, and Schøne 2006). A range of ALMPs are now available to recipients of different kinds of welfare benefits that may be summed up in four main clusters: wage subsidies for employees, internships in ordinary labor markets or in the sheltered sector, labor market training where courses and internships are combined, and job-search courses. These offerings, lasting between a couple of weeks and ten months, come with a state financed, standardized benefit aimed at covering daily living expenses. About 55 percent of the municipalities have access to local programs and activities for the claimants, and the use of local programs versus national AMPLs varies from one municipality to another depending on availability of programs and resources (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 29). While conditions related to participation in ‘qualifying measures’ are reported to be used frequently, qualifying measures concerned with education or work-for-benefit register the lowest frequency (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 31). About 30 percent of the NAV-offices have work-for-benefit as an available measure, the use of which varies depending on other available options in the municipality (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 30).

Access to a broader set of programmatic offerings available through ALMPs has not only increased the use of conditions but it also seems to have stimulated ideas regarding how to best tailor the conditions to the needs of the individual (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 40). The survey reveals that 90 percent of the local NAV-offices make individual assessments regarding what kind of conditions are appropriate (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 8). Many caseworkers do, however, express concern for lack of appropriate measures due to the claimants’ complex labor market barriers. The most common barriers reported relate to unresolved health issues, unacknowledged problems with substance abuse, language barriers, and limited work experience (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 8).

An increased use of national standardized programs with regard to activating social assistance recipients notwithstanding, the implementation of the policies is still characterized by a strong local autonomy and decentralized structure. Each NAV-office’s access to, and use of, ALMPs

is regulated by economic resources. How the ALMPs and the Qualification Program are organized and distributed is, hence, regulated by locally decided policies, which makes documentation difficult to acquire. In many NAV-offices the ALMPs are largely reserved for those enrolled into the Qualification Program, so the claimants' actual access to different measures depends on both resources and administrative organization in the municipality of residence (cf. Schafft and Spjelkavik 2011). The provision of different activation measures should be based on an individual assessment of the claimants' need. But even if respondents in the PROBA survey report that they seek to tailor the conditions to a greater extent, relatively few seek facilitation in terms of user-involvement and co-negotiation. The survey reveals that 40 percent report they do this 'seldom' and another 40 percent 'now and then' (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013, 46). This indicates that the assessment regarding what kind of conditional activity is appropriate does not account for the claimants' own points of view. This, in turn, could imply that the competence to make one's decisions as a means of acknowledging 'human inviolability' (NOU 2004:13) might not be nurtured.

Increased diversity in activation policy has, as one might expect, not resulted in common regulations, and the decentralized structure still dominates the implementation. Activation policies and their different measures share the overarching goal of moving people away from welfare benefits and into gainful employment and self-reliance, although the implementation is still left to the local authorities. The legislative texts do, however, set out some overarching guidelines even if they are few and vague. Social assistance should, as a rule, be provided without conditions. Conditions could be applied, however, where they encourage the self-reliance of recipients through employment, motivating them to overcome hardship (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012). Whenever conditions are used they should not become 'disproportionately burdensome' but incentivize the recipients to take responsibility for their own lives (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, Section 4.20.2.1). 'Work-for-benefit' is specifically aimed at allowing recipients' to gain work experience, particularly those facing problems in gaining employment due to lack of experience, and who can increase their prospects in the labor market by undertaking work assignments in the municipality (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, section 4.20.2.70).

Kjellevoid (1995) makes a distinction between primary goals and subsidiary goals in her juridical dissertation regarding the use of conditions in social assistance. While facilitation for transition to work is to be considered as a primary goal, the municipality's economy could

constitute a subsidiary goal (Lødemel 1997a, 66). ‘Work-for-benefit’ measures seem to be highly cost-effective alternatives compared to programs requiring more resources; the findings from a recent report indicate that the municipalities get the costs connected to administering such measures back in the form of production (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2015). Even if it is not accepted as a primary goal, the effect of the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation on the local economy can serve as a less explicit sub-goal, and then have a significant impact on choices and priorities made in relation to implementation of the activation policy.

Increased use of active conditions in return for social assistance notwithstanding; the current government seeks to further enhance municipalities’ deployment of conditions, and the development the past three years points towards a new wave of activation policies in Norway.

3.4 Recent developments in the activation policy

Since the new right-wing government took office after the 2013 election, the political debate on activation policies has flared with a new strength. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs ordered a survey in 2013 on the municipalities’ use of active conditions through which “*great variations in use of conditions*” were detected (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014). The survey revealed that one in five NAV offices makes use of active conditions in 80 percent of the cases and another one in five utilize them in 20 percent of the cases, while the rest are placed between the two (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014, 3).

As a result of this, the government distributed a consultation paper with suggestions involving changes in the Act on Social Assistance in June 2014. The paragraph regulating the use of conditions will now be changed from ‘*It can be made a condition that the recipient carries out suitable work in the municipality of residence for as long as the person receives the benefit*’ (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131, section 20), to ‘*Conditions on activity shall be stipulated for the granting of social assistance, unless compelling reasons argue against it*’ (St.prp.nr. 39 L (2014-2015), 140). The suggested change was adopted in the Parliament Proposition 39 L (2014-2015), with the overarching goal of increasing the use of conditions, making it a standard practice for all municipalities by enacting an obligation for NAV to impose active conditions upon the claimants. The consultation paper notes that the responsibility for the way conditions are implemented will remain with the local authorities. It also states that whenever

there is an exemption made from the main rule on use of conditions, it will require a formal justification on the part of the case-worker (St.prp.nr. 39 L (2014-2015)). The enacted change is by the government expected to increase the recipients' possibilities of becoming self-reliant through ordinary employment by '*counteracting passivity and improving the incentives for transition to work*' on the same time as it will '*increase the legitimacy of the welfare scheme*' (St.prp.nr. 39 L (2014-2015), 5). The aim is, thus, to decrease the number of people receiving social assistance over time, since passive benefits are considered '*an inappropriate solution both for the individual and the society*' (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014, 4). The connection between use of active conditions and departure from social assistance is accordingly one of the most central arguments, serving as a foundation for the enacted change as well as for the argument of a strengthened legitimacy of the scheme.

The changed wording of the paragraph means that all social assistance recipients will have their benefits conditioned upon participation in a work-related activity. The broad approach to 'activation', which was initiated during the 2010s, is continued in the ongoing policy formulation wherein activation may be tied to local arrangements, national programs, or activities organized in cooperation with private program suppliers and educational institutes (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014). The ministry has suggested that a possible increase in expenses resulting from the change will be earned back through a reduction in social assistance expenses and increased tax revenues (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014). There is, thus, no intention of increasing the resources in order to facilitate an expansion of the program portfolio or to initiate closer follow-ups of the claimants. The discussion on what the activation should comprise and how it should be financed is largely absent both in the consultation paper and in the proposition, an issue that has been criticized by several of the consultation bodies (Fellesorganisasjonen 2014, Fylkesmannen i Oslo 2014, Oslo Kommune 2014, KS 2014, etc.).

The rhetorical change that now can be discerned might indicate a new shift in the activation policy. The enacted change has not yet entered into force, and the consequences of the change are yet to be revealed. The critique from the consultation bodies do suggest, however, that the changes points towards a stricter rhetoric focusing on the norm of reciprocity and on rights and responsibilities, while investment-based policies are not being prioritized.

3.5 Summary; Change along a LMA-HRD continuum

Throughout the development of the activation policy since its formalization with the 1991 Act on Social Assistance, Norway has gone from being a European outlier in LMA-strategies to being a precursor in HRD-based policies. The policy reform adopted during the 2010s was characterized by increased diversity in the activation policy offerings, with different ALMPs becoming more accessible to social assistance recipients and with the launching of a new program targeted specifically at long-term recipients. For those able to participate in any of these new programmatic offerings this means a full- or partial movement from basic social assistance towards standardized benefits along with a greater predictability in economy and stability in terms of content and timeframe of the activity.

The 2010s reform solutions, which were based on the same rational choice assumptions that marked the LMA-strategy of the 1990s, did, nevertheless, indicate a move towards HRD-based policies, which seemed to facilitate greater dignity (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a). Respondents in the Poverty and Shame project, comparing their experiences under the program with those that they had undergone as basic social assistance recipients, testified to this while reporting a higher degree of dignity (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 99). The program, no doubt, offers greater security in the short-term and greater predictability in the long term owing to the features of the benefit as well as the programs standardized structure where it resemble the contours of ordinary working life (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 99).

Evaluations and national supervisions conducted after the remodeling of the activation policy reveal a lack of fulfillment in the implementation of the Qualification Program. There is a lack of knowledge regarding how to implement the program, leading to failed informative work- causing a drop in recruitment with people entitled to the program not being considered (Helsetilsynet 2015). Besides, work-related activities constitutes only six percent of the social sector's operating expenses³. This relatively low percentage is reflected in the caseworkers' perceptions regarding the unavailability of appropriate measures to offer the claimants. Moreover, the ALMPs are often reserved for those enrolled into the Qualification Program or other corresponding programs tied to the national social insurance scheme, which means that basic social assistance recipients are left with fewer options. Differentiations accorded by respondents in the Poverty and Shame project to their statuses as Qualification Program

³ <http://ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/statistikker/soshjelpk/aar/2015-07-06>, accessed February 25, 2015

participants contra basic social assistance recipients indicate differences of experience between different measures. And these differences of experience might, in themselves, affect dignity.

Not having entered into force, the enacted change in the Act of Social Assistance was not relevant for the experiences of implementation during the time of my data collection. It is, furthermore, not possible to conduct a review of the policy itself or of implications for policy strategies. It will, however, be pursued a discussion in chapter five of possible consequences of the change, relating it to the LMA-HRD-continuum.

In the forthcoming chapters I will address a conditional activation measure ‘offered’ to some of the social assistance recipients who has not gained access to the nationally standardized programs. I will explore the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation, which is a locally implemented measure available in 30 percent of the municipalities in Norway (PROBA Samfunnsanalyse 2013), with a focus on dignity related experiences. This is a type of measure that neither gives access to any of the new rights or features offered to those enrolled into the Qualification Program, nor to those participating in ALMPs, and could, hence, appear to be a ‘leftover’ from the 1990’s workfare policy.

4. Presentation of findings; Factors in non-standardized activation affecting dignity

In this part of the thesis I will move focus from the overarching national activation policy to a narrower focus on a locally implemented activation policy geared towards social assistance recipients who are not enrolled into the Qualification Program or other nationally standardized activation programs. With the aim of addressing my research questions I will explore how compulsory activation policy in social assistance is experienced among 6 participants in two different locally administrated ‘work-for-benefit’ measures, with a focus on factors affecting dignity and the impact of new, inaccessible, offerings.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is organized around the main themes related to dignity identified through the coding of interviews. Alongside, I will consider legislative texts related to the themes in order to place the experiences in context and capture the nuances of the policy. I seek to gain an understanding of non-standardized activation exemplified through two ‘work-for-benefit’ measures through deploying data deriving from interviews and legislation. My aim is to explore factors in the activation policy affecting the dignity of social assistance recipients who are not offered national standardized programs in general and the Qualification Program in particular.

Referring to Michael Lipsky, Hagelund and Terum (2015) notes that the actual ‘street level’ implementation of the policy *is* the policy since legislation and regulations alone never will reflect the complete reality of it (Hagelund and Terum 2015, 134). The actual implementation and delivery of policies is, according to this perspective, what should be in focus of attention when examining policies and assessing their implications and effectiveness. My study, deploying a ‘contextualist’ method for analysis while focusing on experiences of dignity related to both implementation of the policy and participation in it, centers on this perspective. While the importance of the role of politics, institutions, and policy formulation process are acknowledged, these dimensions are not the primary focus here. Focus is, rather, on the actual implementation, serving as the ‘contextual reality’ for the experiences that I aim to explore (cf. Braun and Clark 2006). The separation of experiences related to implementation versus participation is not a straight forward one; from a participant perspective they often coincide

and overlap. Some experiences, however, are more clearly related to one than the other- as with content of the activity, where the experiences of the informants more clearly relates to their actual participation in the specific activity. The mentioning of both as separate entities is done since the informants' experiences are related to both while stressing that focus of the study is not limited to the way the policy is implemented.

That social assistance is connected to a great deal of stigma and shame has been established throughout research conducted on the field. My focus, however, is more explicitly on the role of activation policies with regard to fulfilling ILO's requirements concerning dignified treatment for the recipients of social assistance. My informants subsist on basic social assistance, and shame connected to their statuses as social assistance recipients is significant for this group. However, in order to seek answers to my research questions other factors, too, need to be addressed. Selection of themes has been made with the aim of elucidating my questions in the best way possible. Hence, my focus is on factors contributing to the experiences associated with (un)dignified treatment, where shame is an important dimension.

I identified five main factors in which experiences of dignity were particularly present. These are revealed in the presentation clustered according to where they are placed in the implementation process, but the experiences under the different themes relate, as mentioned, to participation as well as implementation. The themes are presented as follows: structure of activation including the factors conditionality and user-involvement, delivery of the activation including the factors activity content and economic compensation, the broader activation context, which is related to existence of other inaccessible offerings and, lastly, the impact of the activity elaborating on the issues of social isolation and agency. By elaborating on how the structure is implemented rather than its role for the policy design, the first themes all relates on the actual 'street level' implementation of the policy through the experiences of its participants. Structure and delivery are, in this study, both pertaining to implementation and the separation of them is not clear-cut, but made as a means to make the presentation easier to follow. The last theme, on the other hand, is not to be understood as a step in implementation or as a part of participation affecting dignity but, rather, as an elaboration of *how* the implementation and participation affect dignity.

The focus is on the experiences of the informants and I rely on short excerpts and quotes from the interviews to initiate discussion. Findings from the interviews are, in the next chapter,

mapped to the review from chapter three and discussed vis-à-vis LMA-HRD-based policy strategies and social divisions.

Before presenting the main themes, I briefly introduce the recruitment sites. This is followed by a presentation regarding how my informants understand the aim of their participation in the activity, something which provides a background for the themes affecting their experiences of dignity.

4.1.1 Description of the measures

The activation policy in focus is characterized by its decentralized structure and lack of clear directions in legislative texts relevant to how the paragraph regulating the use of conditions is to be applied. The ‘work-for-benefit’ policy, unlike the Qualification Program and the ALMPs, does not come with any minimum requirements and no new rights are connected to participation in the activity. The lack of direction in the legal provisions, besides the more general goal of self-reliance through employment, means that the administration and content of non-standardized ‘work-for-benefit’ measures vary greatly both between and within municipalities.

I recruited informants from three different measures. One of the measures is a 44-week long ALMP-course called ‘Work and Opportunities’ offered by a state-funded but private provider, comprising a three-week theoretical learning exercise and a 41-week internship placement in the ordinary labor market. The two informants participating in this course received a standardized benefit, and not being social assistance recipients at the time of the interview—they were outside my research target group. The two main sites of recruitment were both ‘work-for-benefit’ measures located in Oslo. The first measure, site one, is provided by a public actor. It is financed by the municipality, but administratively separated from NAV. The measure offers work in a canteen to recipients of basic social assistance and participants in the Qualification Program. They provide follow-ups of clients, with varying degrees of cooperation with the caseworkers of NAV. The time frame in the measure is not standardized; one of the informants has been in the same activity for two-and-a-half years. Recruitment site two is also a public-provided measure, and is administratively governed by NAV in the district where it is located. This measure offers maintenance work of different kinds, including cleaning and maintenance of parks and preparation of communal apartments. Like

site one, the timeframe for the activity is not standardized with one of the informants in the same activity for a bit over a year. In contrast to site one, the participants in site two do not get additional follow-ups besides the one from their social assistance caseworker. Both activities are organized on a daily basis by full-time employed ‘work-leaders’ who are not social workers but hired due to their competence within the specific activity. Enrollment in the ‘work-for-benefit’ measure does not come with benefits other than the social assistance benefit participants receive prior to their enrollment into the activity.

The lack of regulation and direction implies that the normative discourse dominating the politics, besides economic resources, could play a significant role in how the legislative texts, including utilizing conditions, are interpreted and implemented. The non-standardized nature of the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation and its lack of emphasis on capability investment are reflected in the narratives of my informants, both in terms of how they understand the aim of the activity as well as its content and structure.

4.1.2 Aim of activation from a participant perspective

Due to the discretionary and non-standardized character of the activity, informants in my study came up with different interpretations of the aim of the activity they were participating in. Only three of the six informants from the ‘work-for-benefit’ measures reported they understood employment as the ultimate goal, while the two participants in the ALMP both understood the course they had enrolled in as a measure aimed at bringing them closer to the labor market. The three ‘work-for-benefit’ participants, who reported employment to be the ultimate goal, understood it as a long-term goal with the activity as being one step towards it. All the eight informants distinguished between long-term goals, where they perceived to be one, and the short-term additional effects the activity had on their lives.

One of the three informants, Ida, from the ‘work-for-benefit’ measure, understanding employment as the ultimate goal, focused on the possibility of practicing Norwegian. She identified language-skill improvement as the main intention of the activity, leading, in the long run, to improved chances in the labor market. The other two, Heidi and Kari, showcased the aims of their activity in line with the legislative texts while referring to lack of work experience. They stated that participation in the activity aimed to give them needed experience that would eventually come in handy when moving into ordinary employment. Of

the two, only Heidi believed that the activity actually served an important role in transition to employment- that it was useful for acquiring self-reliance. Kari's experience did, on the contrary, lead her to believe that her activity 'was of no use' and that it did not take her closer to the labor market, which means that she experienced discrepancy between the intended goal and the usefulness of the activity as a means of reaching it.

The three informants who reported that they did not understand the aim of their participation as a step towards employment had different explanations regarding why they had been compelled to participate in the activity. On being questioned with regard to the aim of the activity John, an informant from recruitment site two who conducts maintenance work for the municipality, answered that "*She (the caseworker) is throwing me into activity only to fit me into the statistics (...) all caseworkers need to show results (...) it is all about money and resources.*" On being asked the same question Knut, from the same measure, argued that "*The aim of putting me here is so that I don't become a parasite.*" These two statements indicate that John and Knut did not understand their participation in the activity as a move towards employment and self-reliance. They, instead, elaborated on the conditional activity basing it on the norm of reciprocity stating that in order to get something one needs to give something on one hand and on the sub-goal concerning resources on the other (cf. Kjellevold 1995, Lødemel 1997a). The third participant who did not focus on employment, Lars- a site one recruit, shared a quite different understanding of the aim aligned with the activity. He expressed the view that the primary goal of the activity involved him becoming socially active and getting something to organize his life around. Most of the informants talked about social activation as a short-term additional effect, but only Lars mentioned it as a primary goal. Lars was also the only one out of the six 'work-for-benefit' participants who said that he had an explicit aim with the participation. This was something that, in agreement with his caseworker, had been integrated into a written plan.

The dialogue with the caseworker and the (non)existence of an individual plan are important factors accounting for the perceptions of aims of the conditional activity. Barriers against the labor market and whether employment is considered a realistic goal are also important. All six key informants had one or more barriers that, they argued, prevented them from entering the labor market. The barriers related to health, age, lack of education, and lack of work experience- and the extent to which the activity contributes to 'building down the barriers' is central to understanding the aim of the activity. Ida, Heidi, and Kari- all from recruitment site

one- understood employment to be the long-term goal of their activity. Ida and Heidi expressed the view that the activity did, in fact, contribute to moving them towards that long-term goal. For them, employment was perceived as realistic in the long run. Kari, Lars, Knut and John believed, on the other hand, that the activity did not lessen their perceived barriers, barriers that were related to health issues, age, and an excluding and tough labor market. Lars, Knut and John did, furthermore, not see employment as a realistic goal at all. Their perceptions of the aim with the ‘work-for-benefit’ activity were different from those of the others. The two informants working with maintenance focused on what might be considered as less accepted subsidiary goals that are not explicitly spelled out in the regulating legislative text. It might, thus, seem to be a mismatch between the goal of this type of activity, aimed at providing participants with requisite work-experience, and the needs of my informants. This leads my informants to draw other conclusions regarding the purpose of their activity.

Despite social assistance and activation programs tied to benefits aims at being of short duration, two of my informants remained with the same activity for over one year with the longest period lasting for two-and-a-half years. The duration for the activation measure, as far as the others were concerned, varied between one to seven months. The ALMPs being standardized both Ole and Karl from the ALMP course were aware of the timeframe of their activity. This was in contrast to the six ‘work-for-benefit’ informants, who expressed uncertainty in relation to the duration of their activity. Experiences related to being in an activity differ in the context of age, time spent receiving social assistance and the duration conditional activity. Even with experiences being similar across the different types of measures, the individual differences are too big and the number of informants too small to enable their grouping while presenting findings. That is why I chose to subtract themes recurring in all interviews related to dignity in the implementation of and participation in ‘work-for-benefit’ activation as one type of measure, instead of looking at differences between different sites of recruitment.

4.2 The structure of the activation

Separating the dimensions of structure and delivery of a policy is, as mentioned, not a ‘natural’ differentiation, since the two are closely connected. I have, however, chosen to do separate them in order to make the presentation tidier. This part elaborates on two main factors in the structure of the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation recurring throughout the

interviews, namely conditionality and user-involvement. The two factors are important in terms of how the activity is organized and designed while informing also the actual ‘street-level’ implementation. User-involvement and conditionality were strongly present in the experiences of dignity and important elements in the informants’ perceived agency.

4.2.1 Conditionality

Policymakers operate under the general understanding that they must calculate and apply the correct incentives to motivate social assistance recipients to enter the labor market (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 93). Use of conditions has, alongside means-testing of benefits, traditionally been the most significant element in the incentive-based calculus. All my informants had their benefit conditioned upon participation in a ‘work-for-benefit’ activity. All the informants, except Lars, were required to be engaged in full-time activity; Kari and Lars had their activity combined with regularly scheduled meetings with caseworkers while Heidi had it combined with a language course.

Circular 35 (2012), which specifies directions regarding the use of Act of Social Assistance, states that conditions need to be deployed in close connection with the overarching goal of help-to-self-help. It goes on to note that use of conditions entails an obligation for NAV to make an assessment of whether conditionality is expedient to deploy for specific claimant and whether the condition serve the overarching goal (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, section 4.20.1). A condition involves an obligation or limitation for the recipient and can, thus, be burdensome and limit one’s freedom to choose and act. The circular stresses that those conditions that are disproportionately burdensome or limits the freedom of the recipient in an unreasonable way are not to be practiced (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, section 4.20.2.5). Conditions have to be reasonable and consistent with the aim, which means that the use of conditions of participation in work-related activities are not to be understood as a retaliation of the benefit received (Kane and Köhler-Olsen 2015).

The experiences of conditionality varied between the informants, and were closely related to whether the activity was perceived as meaningful or not; this correlation is supported by other studies conducted (cf. Lødemel and Johannessen 2005). If the activity was considered meaningful the condition was experienced as less intrusive, as Heidi working in the canteen pointed out when stating:

“I want to be in activity, so the condition on activation is fine. It is the conditions related to handing in all the papers that wears me out. I have to concentrate a lot to make everything right in order to get the money”

It is clear from this statement that the conditional activity is not a big problem in itself, since she wants to be there. It is the condition related to documenting her continuous need for social assistance that is experienced as burdensome, a notion echoed by most informants.

Even when the compulsory activity was not necessarily perceived as ‘disproportionally burdensome’, all six of the informants talked about the condition as a kind of ‘threat’ that they needed to comply with. It is, thus, not necessarily the participation in activity itself that is experienced as a hassle, but rather the way in which it is implemented. Lars, who reported his experience of the activity as meaningful on several occasions, said that *“If I do not fulfill the conditions, they will stop the payment, and then it is straight out on the streets.”* John pointed out in a similar vein that his caseworker had told him that if he did not attend the activity, payment would be stopped. He added:

“It was a threat, if you are not doing as you are told they cut you out. And they do not take the reasons for non-compliance into consideration... It might not be about whether you want to be there or not, it could be that you are not able to”

These statements indicate that even if the activity is perceived as meaningful, the condition is experienced as a threat- a threat concerning taking away a very means for existence if compliance was not forthcoming. Since this group already relies on the last safety net, economic sanctioning will have devastating consequences. John’s statement touches upon the rigidity in the implementation of sanctions while noting the indifference towards individual situations. This rigidity affects feelings of self-worth, a fact reinforced by Ida who said *“You can never say no, if you do you will not get paid, and you feel like nothing.”* This, obviously, exerts a negative impact on the experienced meaningfulness of the activity.

While the informants did not experience the conditions as shaming, it was the way they were implemented that adversely affected recipients’ dignity, partly because the condition was perceived as a threat. Knut said that he felt mistrusted and under constant suspicion for taking advantage of the system and that the condition was a way of controlling him. He stated that *“They are always trying to find faults with you (...) they think you are a terrorist or crook. Where is the trust then?”* Participants’ perception with regard to dignity promotion is affected

by their being unable to explain their situations and present their point of views during the implementation of the conditional activities. User-involvement, then, emerges as the second major theme in the structure affecting the experiences of dignified treatment.

4.2.2 User-involvement

The right of users to be involved in the decision-making processes on issues affecting them has been the subject of political discussions over the last decade. Like the promotion of dignity, this too may be said to be founded on arguments having both ideological and practical concerns (Heum 2010, 167). The ideological arguments emerges from a democratic and human rights' perspective and are mirrored in the green paper 'A New Labor- and Welfare Administration' where it is stressed that human inviolability must be nurtured by accepting one's competence to make one's own decisions (NOU 2004:13). A more practical approach, on the other hand, focuses on the quality and cost-effectiveness of the services. Under this approach the involvement of users is primarily understood as a means of increasing the accuracy and, hence, the cost-effectiveness of services (Heum 2010, 167).

The Big Norwegian Encyclopedia defines the terms of user-involvement as *'Those who are effected by a decision, or use a service, gets the possibility to, either by themselves or through a representative, influence the decision process and design of the services.'*⁴ User-involvement is a statutory right enacted in § 42 in Act of Social Assistance, which states that *'As far as possible are services to be co-negotiated with the recipient. The meanings stated by the recipient are to be given due weight'* (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131). As noted earlier, the right to an individual plan is a primary tool for the realization of user-involvement; all users in need of long-term and coordinated services has the right to an individual plan which is to be co-negotiated with the claimant (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131 section 28). The right is, in contrast to the one for those enrolled into the Qualification Program, discretionary in its character since long-term and coordinated services has not been clearly defined. Circular no. 35 (2012) specifies that user-involvement serves the twin purpose of increasing the quality of services while obliging the claimant take responsibility for them (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, section 5.42.1). User-involvement is an important tool for ensuring a dignified treatment of the individual recipient, and in order for user-involvement to be real, the NAV-office has to keep the recipient informed throughout the whole process with all the

⁴ <https://snl.no/brukermedvirkning> Accessed February 4, 2015 (my translation)

information adapted to the recipient's prerequisites (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, 5.42.1).

None the 'work-for-benefit' informants claimed to have heard of the term individual plan. Even Lars, who was the only who seemed to have a written plan connected to participation in the activity, appeared unfamiliar with the term. The others reported not having received sufficient information regarding how long they were supposed to be in the activity, what the next step was, and what the specific intentions were with regard the participation in the activity. Ida and Heidi were assigned to the 'work-for-benefit' activity by their caseworkers on their expressed wish to be in some kind of activity. Heidi told her caseworker that she would like to be in an activity, but she points out that *"I did not get any information about courses or different programs. I have never been asked what I want. It is exhausting to never know what is going on."* Lars was the only one who stated that he had been invited to discuss options available before the commencement of the activity. Information was, thus, either limited or nil before the assignment of the conditional activity. Knut observes that *"You get a gun pointing towards your head; they tell you that it is either this or nothing. You do not get any choices."* Several informants touched, either explicit or implicit, upon the issue of not having a plan for what they are doing. This affects the experiences involving the meaningfulness of the activity and the dignity of participants thereby.

John recalls that his initial attempts to get his caseworker to cooperate met with resistance. He says, *"I told her that I did not want to be here, that they had to listen to what my ideas and plans were, but she only answered that they would stop my benefit if I did not go."* He reports that he has now given up trying to initiate cooperation and contact with NAV. Follow-up experiences were generally better for those participating the activity organized by an external measure supplier. In this case the responsibility of following up on the activation was, to a larger extent, delegated to people others than social assistance caseworkers. All the informants reported that their caseworkers at NAV were unavailable and that they were 'left on their own' with no attention heed as to how they were doing. John adds that *"It is the same routine for everyone; it is a pre-decided course that you have to walk through. They do not care about anything as long as you comply."* This statement gives the impression of neglect evinced by informants who lacked a written plan. They express a joint feeling that their competencies have been ignored while their needs were insufficient assessed during the implementation of conditions. Even though all informants wanted to participate in an activity

only two reported that the activity assigned to them had been adapted to their specific needs and competencies. The legislative text lays down specifically that the conditions should be implemented in close cooperation with the recipient. While co-negotiation is not a prerequisite for the use of conditions, in cases where NAV imposes one-sided obligations the demand for individual assessment is stricter (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, section 4.20.2.1). Despite the fact that the informants might wish to be in an activity, the condition on activity seems, however, to be one-sided imposed for most of them. Five of the six informants reports that they perceive that their needs has not been properly assessed, and they feel that their statutory right to be involved is not being fulfilled.

The fact that the informants claimed they did not have an individual plan is rather significant. The right to have a plan is dependent on the assessment of need and, hence, subject for discretion. There is little doubt, however, that the claimants compelled to participate in different activation measures at least require coordinated services, even if they are not long lasting ones. The lack of individual assessment and fulfillment of the right to be involved affects the participants' feelings of self-worth. Ida points out that *"They put all of us together under one umbrella, without taking individual differences into consideration. It makes me feel like I am nothing."* This statement bears witness to the fact that not being seen as an individual and not being involved in the decision-making affects dignity. Lack of user-involvement and failure concerning 'recognizing them as active agents' (cf. UN 2012) is experienced as undignified treatment. The lack of user-involvement in service design, and the lack of attention given to the participants after they have been enrolled into the activity could also indicate a 'caseload reduction' tendency, with the caseworkers using the activity as a means to ease their own workload. After NAV case-workers have located an activity for the claimants to be placed in, the work with following it up is made a responsibility of the activity leaders or external measure providers. This lack of involvement and proper follow-up negates dignity from a human rights' perspective while from an effectiveness perspective it makes the services less adapted to the needs of the recipients, and, hence, less effective. My informants also reported experiences of undignified treatment in relation to the content of their activity. However, if the tasks they are made to do are perceived as dignifying or 'worthy' the lack of co-negotiation and the presence of strong conditionality seemed to be experienced as less negative.

4.3 The Delivery of activation

The delivery of a service is, as implied above, dependent on policy structure. This will be clear also from the presentation of the two factors elaborating on content of activity and economic compensation, which are the sub-themes here. These two factors play a role in the experience of dignity and the incidences of shame, while content of activity is the factor that separated the experiences observed in the two main sites of recruitment most clearly.

4.3.1 Content and character of the activity

Content and character of the work assignments were in the informants narrations more closely connected to experiences of participation in the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation, rather than to the way it is implemented. The informants did with regard to this factor elaborate both on the actual content in the work they were assigned, as well on the structure of it, being a part of social assistance.

The two main sites for recruitment of informants from are of two types with one involving work in a canteen and the other maintenance work of various kinds. Experiences concerning the work differed between the two sites as well as between informants individually. While the informants working in the canteen had few or no negative objections regarding the work tasks, those conducting maintenance works to a larger extent did. According to John there are some who *“Do not dare to wear the work-jackets in public. We have been in parks picking needles used for drug injections, and if one of my old colleagues were to see me... What would they think?”* He points to two dimensions- the work in itself and the context around it. Picking needles in the park was something that he experienced as unworthy. He also made point of stressing the fact that he had been doing it as a recipient of social assistance, a fact that was publicly visible because of the jackets he and the other participants in that activity wore. Both factors contributed towards heightening his feelings of shame since he was afraid of what others would think if they were to see him. John adds, *“I hide, they must not see me. All of them would look down on me, and I would become nothing for them.”* Contrasting his present situation with that of a year ago, when he was working, John notes that there is a difference between ‘a job and a job’. This underlines the importance of the individual context; the (work) history of a person is a significant dimension in the experiences of the content of the activity. Informants with more (and more recent) work experience did in general have a more negative perception of the kind of work they were made to do, while informants with

less work experience had a more positive attitude towards the assignments. Kari says, *“It is a good place to be in, I enjoy it. It gives me the opportunity to try out new things”*, while Knut argues that *“It is better than doing nothing, I like physical work, and I get to help people”*, both whom have limited work experience. To be in an activity serves to mitigate the stigma of remaining unemployed since it is better ‘than doing nothing’, and consensus runs high on this among the informants. The content of the assignments, however, reinforces the feelings associated with stigma and shame for some more than others.

Five of my six informants in the ‘work-for-benefit’ measure said that they do not tell people that they ‘work for social assistance’. They either tell white lies about the actual work they are doing or whom they are doing it for. Kari said she usually tells people that she works in a canteen without mentioning that it is through social assistance. Another informant lies about the type of activity he is involved in while admitting that it is through NAV. This means that the activity’s structure and its content are important in the experiences of dignity and shame. For some it is the ‘work-for-social-assistance’ that is the shaming dimension while for others it is the ‘unworthiness’ of the work assignments.

Some informants, particularly the two working with maintenance, indicated that were doing work the municipality would normally have hired someone to do. Knut said *“We have been to places where there are bedbugs. Do they really mean that I have to work there and bring the bedbugs home?”* This implies a perception that the participants are made to do work requiring special knowledge and skills. Stressing that the ‘payment’ for the work is so low that no one else will accept it another informant referred to the activity as ‘social dumping’ and ‘forced labor’. Economic compensation, hence, emerged as a theme dominating the narratives of my informants, who all shared experiences regarding how the low levels of benefits and ‘working for free’ affected their dignity.

4.3.2 Economic compensation

My informants recruited from the ‘work-for-benefit’ measures are recipients of basic social assistance. Unlike the Qualification Program or ALMPs ‘work-for-benefit’ measures are bereft of any standardized economic compensation. The benefit is means-tested and levels are locally decided; the only guideline given is that the level has to be high enough to provide a ‘decent living standard’, which involves more than just basic needs like housing and food

(Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, section 4.18.1.1). While deciding which expenses to cover, the assessment is aimed at enabling a sober living standard, adapted to the general society in which the person lives, and to individual circumstances (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012, section 4.18.1.1).

All of my ‘work-for-benefit’ informants had social assistance as their only income, and all of them had it conditioned upon participation in work-related activity. The benefit was typically granted for two months at a time with the requirement of submitting documentation to prove continued need every month. The two informants participating in ALMPs received standardized benefit aimed at covering living expenses with which they managed to live alongside a state funded housing allowance and spouse income. My six ‘work-for-benefit’ informants received money to cover housing along with a locally standardized amount that sought to cover basic subsistence. One of the informants noted that they had been promised extra money for their work, which they never got.

The informants spoke about the social repercussions of being perpetually short of money. They also had to suffer the stress of not knowing whether their application would be accepted the next time. Ida narrated *“The insecurity is eating me, the money might get stopped if I miss out on one small thing, and that does not feel good, especially since I have children.”* She lives the constant fear of not having enough money to feed her children; since the father of the children only has a small and unstable income they are dependent on getting the benefit in time every month. John also spoke about the effect his situation had on the children, whom lived with him on weekends: *“The worst part of it is that I have kids (...) I do not want them to feel that there is a difference from what they had before.”* In order to spare the children from his economic difficulties, he has been trying to over-compensate by buying them things he cannot afford, which makes the situation even more difficult.

Living in constant insecurity has emerged as a major concern for all informants. Knut says:

“If we were paid for the work I would have a foundation and some security without being constantly faced with danger of eviction. I would not have been as aggressive and negative as I am today. As it is I am on pins and needles all the time”

Lack of proper payment is, obviously, a foundation for insecurity, which affects the emotional state of participants in a negative way. It is also a source for feelings of unfairness as

expressed by Ida who said, *“The activity I am in does not generate income, it does not feel good to be working all day without getting paid for it”*. The informants perceive their activity as a job with all of them referring to it, constantly or occasionally, as their work. Lars expressed it explicitly while stating that *“I do think about it as a job, one I that am doing without a salary.”* John echoed his sentiments when saying that *“We are working, and it is an important job we are doing- that is why we always say that we work for free.”*

The informants spoke about the frustration of not being valued for the work they do, both in terms of payment and in terms of expressed gratitude from activity leaders and NAV. They feel devalued, which affects their self-esteem and willingness to continue their participation in the activity. Knut says:

“I just want to have a solid foundation, and be appreciated. They do not show appreciation for the work we are doing (...) it creates frustration- you become negative and they approach you negatively. It is a vicious circle”

To not be valued for one’s work, either in monetary or in verbal terms, affects the self-worth and dignity of the participants. To be acknowledged for one’s work is an important dimension in dignified treatment since self-identity is closely connected to one’s activities on a daily basis. Lack of appreciation leads to negative attitudes, which serves to demotivate the participants.

The informants shared stories about the harsh living associated with basic social assistance and about the importance of self-discipline as a means to make everyday life work. Lars said that *“You can’t live on it. There is no money, you have nothing. But I do live, I make plans based on my benefit, and I have to follow it. I can never leave the plan.”* This corresponds with Kari’s experience who said *“I have to make plans all the time in order to make ends meet (...) I do not eat much, and the money gets used up every month.”* The European Committee of Social Rights, in its concluding report in 2013, criticized Norway for its inadequate levels of social assistance benefits, noting that the requirement regarding securing of adequate living standards is not withhold (European Committee of Social Rights 2013). Subjected to this inadequacy my informants described the effect the shortage of money and constant insecurity regarding making ends meet was having on their ability to participate in society. Living on social assistance is connected to a great deal of stigma and shame, which relates to the structure of the benefit as a ‘last safety-net’ income. My informants, however,

add an extra dimension when elaborating upon how they ‘work for free’. They feel taken advantage of by working full time without their prospects changing with regard to employment or in any other positive way. According to their experience is the lack of proper payment reinforcing the undignified treatment during the implementation of the activation policy. The informants’ perception of their activity as one in which they were ‘working for free’ was often contrasted with other types of offerings and activities available for social assistance recipients, which by most of them were understood as ‘better’.

4.4 The broader activation context and awareness of existence of other (inaccessible) offerings

The research project Poverty and Shame, focusing on the role of the Qualification Program, underlines the fact that new features offered through the program gives a new sense of dignity with the participants contrasting their experiences with their former identities as basic social assistance recipients (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 99). Experienced presence of positions within a specific context, and the understanding of the reasons for one’s own position are important for the way people perceive themselves, and important for their dignity. This section elaborates on the perceived differences between activation measures as experienced by the basic social assistance recipients compelled to participate in a ‘work-for-benefit’ activity. It further explores how this experienced differentiation effects dignity, and does as such address my second research question.

All my informants were aware of the existence of different types of activities and courses; some of them have been in a long chain of activation measures while, for others, this was their first activity. Two of the informants had applied for the Qualification Program and were at the time of the interview still waiting for the application to be processed. Both argued that they ‘deserved’ to be taken into the program and that it would be unfair if they were rejected. John stressed that he *“is doing a good job and is a serious person”* and that he sometimes is the only one showing up for ‘work’ in the morning. He observed that NAV should, in that case *“at least offer me the Qualification Program.”* He continued arguing that it is not even certain he would need the program for as long as one or two years since he *“wants to work and is still really interested in applying for jobs.”* Heidi, who also had applied for the Qualification Program on the advice of other participants in her current activity, argued along the same lines stating that *“If I don’t get the Qualification Program it would be highly unfair*

because I have worked so hard here, and I should be given the help I am entitled to.” When asking Heidi whether she felt that she had deserved a place in the program she answered *“Yes, I do. I work five days a week, I am the last one to leave, and for the last six months I have only been away 2 days. I am never absent, I like to work!”* These statements indicate that they understand the assessment of eligibility with regard to participation in the Qualification Program as being founded on deservedness based on previous efforts; since they have ‘worked hard’ and ‘done a good job’ they should gain access to the program. They seem to relate deservedness of participation in the program to whether their employability has been proved by working hard in the activity they are enrolled into now. The ‘work-for-benefit’ measure is then perceived as a kind of eligibility test for the program. John and Heidi appear to express the view that they have ‘earned’ access to a better option since having shown that they will be able to draw benefit from it in terms of prospects for employment and since they have proven that they really want to work.

While elaborating on main differences between the Qualification Program and the ‘work-for-benefit’ activity tied to basic social assistance the informants highlighted payment over the level of benefit; and particularly stressed on how the payment was organized. They emphasized that the Qualification benefit is taxable, entitling recipients to acquire pension points and vacations. Ida elaborated upon this when saying, *“They (participants in Qualification Program) pay taxes and can have vacation, and it is not like that with social assistance.”* John argued in a similar vein while observing that *“The qualification benefit is like a salary, and you are able to earn for pension, which is really important for me.”* They also spoke about how those who were in the program get closer follow-ups with have a plan connected to their activity, which they had been invited to co-negotiate. The informants identified these offerings through the Qualification Program as contributing to the increased possibility to getting a sense of direction and structure in life, which they experienced as impossible while remaining on basic social assistance. Knut kept returning to a general desire of a solid foundation, and how this would improve his life:

“You do not have to write applications, it is a safety net and you know what you have, it enables you to pay bills (...)it offers a feeling of responsibility enabling you to be the master of one’s own life”

To have a standardized taxed benefit is equated with greater predictability and, hence, more responsibility and autonomy in one’s own life. The constant necessity of applying for the

benefit anew combined with requirements of documentation to prove one's continued need, along with the low level of the benefit, has a negative impact on the dignity and self-worth of the recipients. They feel mistrusted, taken advantage of, and live in constant fear of what the following month will be like.

Some of the informants also spoke about how 'normal internships', offered either through the Qualification Program or through ALMPs, were closer to real jobs. They stated a preference for being placed in internships in the ordinary labor market over conducting work for the municipality. John said that he *"Would rather have an internship in the ordinary labor market. An internship is ok. But there is a problem with the possibility of being taken advantage of."* They were all aware of the risk being taken advantage of by employees who were extracting free labor, while also acknowledging the limited possibility of being offered employment by the end of the internship period. They did observe, however, of there being a possibility at least, however small, which was more than they could expect from the 'work-for-benefit' activity. Kari argued that the activity she had been placed in felt useless in many ways and stated that *"I will not get a job here, because they do not employ people at all. So being here will not help me to get a job. I want an internship where I have the possibility of getting employed later."* Even if the conducting work assignments for the municipality contra being in internships in the ordinary labor market were the primary focus in the informants' elaborations on differences, some of them did also highlight other possibilities offered through ALMP courses. John stressed that *"They should try to offer me something, like a course. They should look at my CV and maybe they will see what I need."* He did not believe that the activity he was involved in would serve to increase the skills he would need to gain employment. While stating that this probably would be true also for an internship, a course based on his previous experiences and lack of skills could increase his chances in the labor market.

Both the Qualification Program and the various ALMPs were perceived as better options than the 'work-for-benefit' activity my informants were participating in with the main reasons cited as standardized content and payment offering greater predictability, and the potential in increasing prospects of employment. The latter was particularly highlighted by the informants who had not been enrolled into the Qualification Program, while those who had been participating in the program without succeeding in gaining employment were not as positive. Lars, who had been enrolled into the Qualification Program a few years ago, argued that *"The*

difference is not that big... in the Qualification Program you do get an hour-based salary. But you end up in the same place either way."

Some of the informants even argued that the work-for-benefit measure, being billed as a 'low-threshold-activity', is more harmful than helpful in terms of transition to ordinary employment, and does not look good one's CV. John pointed out that those who should help you move closer to the labor market are the ones who on the same time contributes to exclude you from it. He observed that "*You even have to qualify for the Qualification Program! I mean even NAV won't take me in, how am I then supposed to get a job?*" He later continued to argue that "*We are at the bottom of the society; I am at the bottom, you cannot get further down.*" These quotes sums up the experiences shared by my informants in several ways- they perceived their activity as the 'last resort in the last resort', and that while the Qualification Program and ALMPs offered a way out, that path were unavailable to them. John also commented on the fact most people received social assistance without being compelled to participate in an activity. Wondering where they were he asked why they 'got away with doing nothing' while he was forced to work for his benefit. There is obviously a perception of unfairness and randomness in the distribution of activation measures where conditional 'work-for-benefit' is understood as a kind of punishment, which adds an extra dimension to the experience of indignity and segmentation.

My informants, in different ways, expressed the view that there is a differentiation even within the bottom rung where they are placed in the 'lowest tier' of activation options. Ole, who participated in the state funded ALMP, noted that people on all types of benefits gets access to the same programs. He believed this to be a bit unfair since some having earned their rights to the benefit deserved it more. Karl, who was also enrolled into the ALMP course, acknowledged the fact that you are not in contact with social assistance in the same way when participating in the Qualification Program or in an ALMP, and that the distance from social assistance makes the situation less stigmatizing. This indicates that there are some hierarchies both *within* programs between participants depending on what type of benefit they have, and *between* different activities, where it is the perceived distance from social assistance that matters. These experienced hierarchies are likely to be more apparent where the range of programmatic offerings are more extensive and the availability of different programs more present, but where the distance between activities and different target groups still is small.

Those of my informants who earlier had been enrolled into the Qualification Program did not seem to be as concerned with hierarchies based on deservingness as those who had not been in the program, but who wished to be so. The experienced differentiation based on status of different programs might thus decrease when one, as Lars noted ‘ends up the same place’. The difference in structure of benefit is, however, highlighted as important independently of activation history. The work leader in the canteen, in charge of people participating in the Qualification Program as well as people receiving basic social assistance, noted that there is a difference in degree of follow-up between the two groups. He experienced that those left on basic social assistance did not receive the same amount of attention and follow-up from their caseworkers as those enrolled into the Qualification Program. This corresponds with the informants’ experiences and the observed caseload reduction tendency, and could contribute heighten the perceived differentiation between the two groups. The informants from the canteen, however, did in general not express the experience of a hierarchy as clearly as those from the maintenance measure. This indicates that the content in work assignments is a factor that is equally or, maybe, more significant for experienced hierarchies as the existence of different groups within the same activity.

It is clear from the interviews that there is a great deal of shame and stigma connected to this ‘bottom tier’ activation in itself and that this is reinforced by the experiences of undignified implementation and the perceptions of the content of the activity. Yet the informants also spoke about the positive impact participation in activity had on them as well as the possibility of social participation it offered.

4.5 The impact of the activation on social isolation and agency

This section, in contrast to the first three, is not related to factors in the implementation or participation affecting dignity. It is, rather, an elaboration of the experienced consequences of it on the personal everyday life. I was able to subtract two main themes in the coding, which were present in all the interviews. The two subthemes – social isolation and agency – are important to present since they inform both the expediency of the activity as perceived by my informants as well as its impact on dignity.

4.5.1 Social isolation and the importance of meaningful activity

That long-term recipients have less social capital and less access to social networks to provide them with important resources has been established throughout a range of research conducted on issues of poverty in Norway (Wel 2006 et al , Naper, Wel, and Halvorsen 2008, Vrålstad 2012). The relation between low social integration and poverty is particularly true for rich countries, where the poor lack personal intimate contact to a higher extent while participating in social networks to a lesser extent (Harsløf and Seim 2008, 19). Unemployment and its negative implication in terms of social withdrawal along with the stigma attached to interacting with local social services seems, then, to be reinforced in societies where unemployment rates are low and self-reliance through work is highly valued (Gallie, Paugam, and Jacobs 2003, 3-4).

Several of my informants have a long history as social assistance recipients and all of them have testified about social isolation being a very real problem. Heidi contrasted her status as a client to the more 'normal' status as an employee noting that *"I cannot participate like everyone else; they can travel, go out, and do normal things which I cannot since I am a client. Social assistance makes you a nothing."* Her status as a client combined with lack of money makes her feel less worthy, which hinders her in terms of parity participation in society. The informants spoke about the combination of poor economy, shame, and lack of energy as the main reasons for their social withdrawal. John noted that to be in full-time activity, combined with lack of money and the constant (dis)stress this causes, drains him of energy to do other things like spending time with friends and applying for jobs. He said *"I do not have the time, I am too tired! (...) I never go out. If I do not have my kids I do not do anything."* The informants also shared a feeling of reluctance regarding turning to friends and family for both economic and emotional support in fear of being a burden, which made them feel lonely. Lars said *"Life has stopped (...) before I used to go out and see friends, I cannot do that now. You cannot involve and drag family and friends into your problems, and it makes you feel lonely."* Knut summed it up along similar lines but made the shame dimension more explicit when stating *"I do have friends, but it is humiliating to turn to them for help."*

The informants' status as social assistance recipients and the impact it has on their life situation has resulted in a loss of contact with both the wider society and personal network, which makes them feel lonely and isolated. Social isolation within this group is an

acknowledged problem among politicians with the labor market argued to be the most important arena for both inclusion as well as for self-realization and achievement of social status (St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 173). Labor market integration is, thus, the solution for both material- and social problems and the ultimate goal for policies applying compulsory activation. With the increased tailoring and individualization of the services, based on a contractual model of service provision in which rights are contingent on obligations, the claimants are given increased responsibility to *“pursue and equip themselves for inclusion in exchange for the opportunities opened up by the government”* (Lister 2004, 79, St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007), 178). The primary responsibility to get (re)integrated into the labor market, and into the society in general is, thus, understood to be one in which it is up to the individual.

All of my informants spoke about the importance of being in an activity and the positive sides of meeting people regularly. This was a recurring theme for all the informants regardless of what they felt about the content of the activity. However, those who experienced the activity as meaningful expressed a greater social exchange resulting from participation than those who did not. Lars spoke about the ‘bad thoughts’ that dominated his life when being alone and stated:

“If I were not here I would only sit home alone, looking into the wall. That is stressful and causes headache, it is when I am alone that the bad thoughts comes (...) so this is better. It makes the activity feel meaningful”

He argues that the social interaction offered through the activity makes the activity feel meaningful. Lars was the only one of the six participating in a ‘work-for-benefit’ activity who had an activity plan formulated. He was also the one who argued that the primary goal for him being in the activity was to break the isolation he found himself in after a longer period in passivity. It is clear, then, that the activity does comply with his perceived goal of it and that it gives positive results. Knut also stated that he felt better being in the activity and said *“This is what keeps me going, it is better than doing nothing and I like physical activity. I am in much better shape now, now there is variation in my life.”* Heidi, similarly, noted that *“I get to meet a lot of people (...) I am a lot happier now than last year, my situation has improved by participating in the activity.”*

The informants experienced the activity as a base for escape from worries and psychological distress; almost all of them mentioned how negative thoughts tended to build up when they

were sitting at home alone and how the daily activity helped them suppress this, if only temporarily. Three of my informants argued that their health turned for the better as a result of being in activity where they get to meet other people, but they also noted that there is a difference between the socialization occurring in this arena, and other types of socialization. Lars elaborated on this when he said *“My network has improved in one way but I do not know these people outside of these doors. This is different from having a real job. The colleagues changes every day here.”* Lars has been in the same activity, working in the canteen, for two-and-a-half years. He spoke about how the high turnover of participants made it difficult to actually get to know people, and that he missed the social stability that an ordinary work provides. John also noted that the people he meets every day now are different from those he would normally socialize with. He says:

“I guess it is good to be in activity, but I am not a part of the group which they (NAV) mean needs a routine or direction in life (...), it is not that I have anything against them (colleagues), but NAV even told me that I do not fit in here”

The informants, thus, differentiate between the socialization they get exposed to through participation in this ‘work-for-benefit’ activity and the type of socialization they would get through an ordinary employment, or other arenas they would have chosen had they been able to.

Despite the positive effect the activation has on social isolation only two informants meant that it facilitated the transition to employment while emphasizing how interacting with others had improved their language skills. The ‘social networking’ offered through this type of activity does not seem to improve the ‘bridging capital’; the connection between people with different backgrounds and social identities, which is often required for progress in the labor market (cf. Wel 2006). Neither does it seem to improve the ‘bonding capital’, which refers to the strong connections between friends and family, since the socialization is limited to the interaction occurring at ‘work’. Due to its low economic compensation it seems to, rather, hinder activities that promote the bonding capital. It might, hence, be questioned whether socialization promoted through the policy actually facilitates ‘help-to-self-help’ and ‘taking responsibility for their own inclusion’ on the part of the participants.

The informants emphasized that the activity itself serves an important base for escaping psychological distress, although it does not foster quality relations, neither on a personal nor

on a formal level. So, while the activity increase the dignity of participants by breaking vicious circles of social isolation, it also reinforces the factors leading to social withdrawal with respect to poor economy, draining of energy, and feelings of shame. The reinforcement of these negative factors, combined with doubts regarding the activity a means of moving closer towards the self-reliance, exert a negative impact on both self-esteem and dignity while lessening the motivation for participating in the activity decreasing, thereby, its effectiveness.

4.5.2 Agency vs. resignation

This theme is closely related to the three main themes presented above; whether the policy is perceived as facilitating and promoting agency does, in many ways inform how dignity is affected by the factors outlined. Agency is, as noted, subtracted as an important concept both due to its relevance in the ILO recommendation, and due to the attention given to it by the informants. Agency can be constrained by one factor alone or by all factors combined; agency can be understood as a theme that permeates all factors elaborated upon in this chapter.

The idea of agency is used, as noted in chapter two, to denote the autonomous and purposive individual who are capable of making their own choices (Lister 2004, 125). Agency is a core dimension in the individuals' construction of self while a sense of agency is important for self-esteem and dignity. To promote agency is accordingly also an important element in the pursuit of effective policies, a link which is highlighted the preparatory works to the ILO Recommendation 202. The capability of making one's own choices and practice agency is dependent on a range of circumstances connected to opportunities and freedoms available for an individual in a specific context. The context can function either as a facilitator or a constraint for the practice of individual agency, and the degree to which the policy promotes agency can, thus, be directly related to individual experiences of (un)dignified treatment as well as to the effectiveness of the policy.

My informants returned to the issue of agency throughout the interviews; the (in)ability to impact one's own life was clearly an important dimension of being a social assistance recipient in compulsory activity. The issue of agency was, in the narratives of my informants, connected to how both the structure and delivery of the activity directly limited individual freedom on a daily basis on the one hand, and how they perceived that the activity influenced

their possibility to change their course of life in the longer run on the other. Lars touched upon this when talking about how his life had been put on hold:

“Life has stopped, you cannot depart from the frame given by them (NAV), you cannot make any plans. I only have one direction to go in; if I were to leave the path they have set up for me, I would fall completely outside. I am dependent on constantly doing as they tell me”

Feeling that the strict conditionality constrained his life he explained that he experienced difficulty while talking about the future since the situation he is in hinders him from making plans for his life. All the informants exhibited with a reluctance to talk about the future saying they try to avoid thinking about it at all.

The combination of conditional activity, low-level benefits, and lack of user-involvement and individual plans made the informants feel subservient. They believed that they had no ability to actually impact their own lives in a significant way; they spoke about feeling trapped into a system which they had no power to break free from, and that this made them feel resigned. John elaborated on the perceived ability to impact his own life, and the role of his activity while saying that *“There is no way outside of the system; I have been working with a good heart on everything they assign me, but it has not taken me anywhere... it does not matter what you do.”* He makes a connection between his own efforts and the uselessness of the activity he is in, saying it does not matter how hard he works since the activity will not take him any further anyway. He continues by explaining how this affects him:

“I am starting to lose faith. That is the worst part, I sometimes doubt myself. I am starting to feel that there is no way out, that I am completely helpless. I know now that they cannot help me here”

The informant express hopelessness about a situation in which he perceives the activity, on the one hand, as an eligibility test for access to better options and, while on the other, as one that does not allow the situation to change. The fact that NAV sets the premises, which the informants feel obliged to comply with, combined with the perceived uselessness and the futility of their own efforts has led to a feeling of resignation. The subject of resignation figured in all the interviews with some informants feeling overwhelmed and others, who had a long history as social assistance recipients, reconciled to it.

The informants spoke about being stuck in a rut in which they were expected to oblige to conditions in order to receive the benefit, which is settled at a level high enough for them to cover basic living expenses but too low for them to be able to ‘get their head above the surface’, as one informant expressed it. The scarcity of both money and time seems to create a rhythm in their lives that they are unable to change, they have seemingly become captives in ‘the tyranny of scarcity’, which creates a compulsive character of everyday life (Stjernø 1985, 109). Lars captured this notion when he stated that “*At least I live, and as long as I live I am fine*”, a view that most of the informants expressed in one way or another.

Most of the informants perceived the activity as a place of oblivion, which does not improve employment prospects. The activity does not offer ‘more’ in terms of economic compensation nor does it give room for co-negotiation; it drains the participants of energy with regard to practicing agency and making changes on their own. It is experienced as a place for biding time owing to the lack of better options- or to the lack of access to better options, and almost all informants shared a feeling of ‘existing without living’, as expressed by John. The feeling that they are placed at the bottom of a hierarchy in which there is little they can do to climb is all-pervasive. The perception of the activity functioning as an ‘eligibility test’ touched upon by Heidi and John is, after some time is spent at the same place without anything changing, altered to a perception of the activity as a dead end and the initial motivation declines and turns to resignation. John and Knut both spoke about how the lack of options made them consider ways outside of the formal system; they felt pushed towards dishonesty as the only means to change the situation. John said “*I have started to think about how to get out of the system (...), if I should choose the dishonest way. I can plan for something that allows me to take advantage of the system.*” Knut, in a similar vein, observed that “*You do not get enough to live for; I might have to do something criminal (...), it brings out the psychopath in you.*” He went on telling that “*I have started to think, to plan for the next step. I have to find things I can use against them in order to protect myself, I have to have a back-up plan (...) and create a façade.*” They both felt that the system had them trapped, and that this forced them to consider controversial ways as a mean to alter their circumstances.

Differences in perception with regard to agency and level of freedom occur across the informants, however, with both age and time on social assistance emerging as important factors. Ida, who is the youngest, observed that even if she did not believe that she could change the specific situation she is in right now she did not, like the others, believe that there

is ‘no way out’. She expressed a desire to pursue studies later on, saying that studies would help broaden her possibilities for impacting her life and future. To be in the ‘work-for-benefit’ activity was for her both a way to get work experience and a possibility to practice her language skills, which could make it easier for her to apply for studies. The two informants recruited from an ALMP also expressed a more positive attitude towards the possibilities ahead of them. While admitting that their freedom to pursue their life goals was limited, their narratives did not reflect a feeling of resignation to the same extent as those participating in ‘work-for-benefit’ measures. Karl explained that he did not really want to be in a course or an internship, saying that *“I would rather have a job, but I won’t get a job without the course, and they (course leaders) help me in the process of getting a job.”* Both the ALMP and the ‘work-for-benefit’ informants understand the courses and internships in ordinary labor market as a more suitable way of reaching goals of employment, and the feelings of resignation appear in the narratives accordingly.

The informants sense a lack of agency because of which they are unable to become primary agents in their own lives, and the constraints on agency are located in both structure and delivery of their specific activity. Inaccessibility to better options despite one’s best attempts added to this, and reinforced the perception of not being able to impact one’s situation. The perceived lack of agency permeates experiences of both implementation and participation in this specific type of activation policy, giving rise to feelings of indignity and resignation. The experienced neglect of dignity in the conditional basic social assistance activation is a drawback in the Norwegian welfare system. A policy that does not promote agency but ends up draining the participants of energy and motivation is unlikely to offer support for help-to-self-help and self-sufficiency with any degree of effectiveness. On the contrary, it leaves the participant in a hopeless dead-end situation with prospects for employment decreasing the longer the activity continues.

4.6 Summary and discussion; two dimensions in experiences of dignity

The aim of this chapter has been to address the two research questions by presenting factors affecting participants’ experiences of dignity in the non-standardized ‘work-for-benefit’ activation. The second question, focusing on impact of new policy offerings, has been addressed in a theme by its own, presented as a factor affecting the experiences of dignity. The overarching themes have been divided into structure, delivery, context, and impacts. Five

main factors have been identified as significant in assessing dignity, including: conditionality, user-involvement, content, economic compensation and the existence of other inaccessible offerings. The last theme on social isolation and agency serves as an elaboration of effect of the other factors on an individual level. Examining the experiences of social isolation and agency are, thus, important dimensions in assessing if the implementation can be argued to be dignifying.

The five main factors identified as significant in the assessment of experiences of dignity in implementation of, and participation in, this ‘work-for-benefit’ activation may be broadly categorized into two main dimensions. The first is the position in itself, referring to the position the informants holds as participants in the ‘work-for-benefit’ activity, which accounts for conditionality, lack of user-involvement, content of work assignments and economic compensation. The second is the position in relation to other positions, referring to the existence of other, inaccessible, offerings, which the informants contrast their own position up against. Both these dimensions affect the dignity and the agency of the participants separately, and combine to exacerbate the negative experiences of the activation.

4.6.1 The position in itself

The position in itself, meaning how the activity is structured and delivered to the individual, was characterized by experiences relating to strict conditionality, lack of user-involvement, unworthy work-assignments, low economic compensation and a constantly present threat of sanctioning. Implementation of the policy, as experienced by my informants, has a clear focus on control, evident both through the compulsory activity as well as through the strict demands of documentation of continued need. This control-dimension is perceived as a hassle, which affects their feelings of self-worth on an elementary level. They perceive the ‘contractual model’ of service provision as being one-sidedly imposed, and feel pressured to ‘sign’ in order not to lose their very means of existence. This constrains their individual agency and they experience that there is little being done to facilitate participatory processes.

The legislative documents are formulated in a way that corresponds to dignified treatment, yet experiences accompanying the implementation and participation bespeak otherwise. The structure of the policy with conditionality and user-involvement as central elements, proved important in determining whether the service was perceived as dignifying or not, while

exerting a lower impact on feelings of shame. The delivery in terms of economic compensation and activity content was, however, related to both dignity and shame. While the low-level of the benefit and the lack of economic compensation for the work conducted clearly contribute to experiences regarding undignified treatment, it was its function as a 'last-safety-net' scheme that added a dimension of shame. It was, in other words, the structure and context around the benefit that contributed to shame-related experiences, which underlines the difficulty in separating 'structure' and 'delivery' while assessing the 'street-level' implementation of the policy. The content of the actual activity does too affect the experiences attached to dignity while, in some cases, also exacerbating feelings of shame; whenever work assignments are perceived as unworthy there is an attendant feeling of shame. Furthermore, the activity's perceived ability regarding lowering the barriers towards the labor market is also an important dimension in the experience of dignity. This is especially true where the lack of skill-investment coupled with a narrow focus on 'gaining work experience' fail to meet the needs of most informants, making activity feel meaningless.

I did however observe a difference between the two sites of recruitment as far as the experiences of both structure and delivery were concerned. The informants from the canteen did not, in general, have as many negative experiences related to dignity and shame as those conducting maintenance works. Two possibilities can help shed light on this matter where the first involves differences in experiences of participation. The participants in the canteen found the work-tasks to acceptable whereas some of the assignments performed in the maintenance work were experienced as both unworthy and shaming by the informants. The shame dimension in the maintenance work was reinforced by the out-door working while wearing jackets bearing the insignia of the measure, which made it possible for the public to identify where they come from. The canteen participants, on the other hand, had been saved this humiliation since they did not need to face others than the employees at NAV they served. The second factor relates to implementation, and more specifically to the way in which the activity was administrated. The canteen activity was administered by an external provider whereas the maintenance activity was directly governed by NAV. An extra 'mentor' assigned through the external provider meant that informants enrolled into the canteen measure were able to report a closer follow-up compared to those enrolled into the measure administrated by NAV. The degree of follow-up was partially reflected in the experiences of dignity with a closer follow-up seeming to contribute to a perception of dignified treatment. The informants who had been assigned an external 'mentor' did not, however, experience a greater degree of

user-involvement. They differentiated between the treatment they had received from NAV and from the measure provider, and the external mentor was seen as a kind of support with no decision-making powers. Independent of measure all informants testified to a demanding treatment with regard to economic compensation as well as the general lack of user-involvement. They all also shared a feeling of decreased agency and hassles connected to unilaterally imposed conditions and strict control-regimes.

The perceived dignity of the ‘position itself’ is dependent upon a range of different factors that, independently or in conjunction with other factors, yield experiences of dignity and feelings of shame in different degrees. It is important to note that the non-standardized structure of the measure in itself seems to be significant in the context of experiences regarding undignified treatment. The experience of dignity is also dependent upon the perception of the aim and usefulness of the activity relevant in overcoming labor market barriers, the individual context related to personal characteristics and history, and on the broader context in which they are situated, which brings us to the next dimension.

4.6.2 The position in relation to other positions

How the participants understand and situate themselves in the broader activation policy context is also significant to the experiences of indignity and shame. The informants contrasted themselves and their activity to other activation options; some explicitly stated that they understood themselves to be at lowest tier in the bottom rung. Two of the informants elaborated upon the assessment of eligibility for standardized programs as based on deservingness. In other words; those who prove themselves worthy by working hard in the activity they now are in are likelier to gain access to better options. When working hard did not pay off and did not give them access to other offerings, the experience of agency was lowered and the informants expressed resignation.

The different offerings are implicitly or explicitly ranked among the claimants based on content, economic compensation, resemblance to ordinary employment, and distance to social assistance. This contributes to ‘shaming’ with the ‘work-for-benefit’ frequently perceived as a ‘low-threshold’ activity targeted towards those less capable or less deserving. This indicates an experienced hierarchy among different activation options with participants believing that they have to earn their way up by working hard and complying with the conditions. Such an

experience impacts the self-image of ‘lower-tier’ participants in a negative way, especially when working hard does not pay off as expected. The findings from the interviews suggests, in other words, that the creation of new offerings accessible only to some has contributed to a segmentation in which the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation is in the lowest tier. The extent to which the ‘position in itself’ is experienced as dignifying or not does affect the extent to which the ‘position in relation to other positions’ impacts on dignity. It has been found that whenever the activity was perceived as unworthy, the perceived differentiation was exacerbated. This is clear from the fact that informants from the canteen, enrolled into the same measure as participants from the Qualification Program, in general, did not express the presence of an experienced hierarchy as clear as those from the maintenance work. It must be noted, furthermore, that my data was collected in a big municipality, where the alternatives to ‘work-for-benefit’ activation are many. The number of existing alternatives might contribute to make the negative impact of ‘the position in relation to other positions’ more present than in smaller municipalities where the options are fewer.

The narratives showcase the complexities besetting the experiences of dignity and feelings of shame and the ways in which they do so. The individual context is highly relevant for the experiences, given that differences exist *between* individual experiences along with the ambiguities *within* the narratives of informants. I observed that the same factor, for one and the same person, can be experienced as unworthy in some cases while contributing to feelings of increased dignity in others. This ambiguity was particularly evident in the informants’ narratives relating to how being in the activity served as a means to mitigate stigma and increase dignity offering, as it did, possibility to end social isolation. The same activity, however, could also be experienced as undignified and shaming. It is clear, nonetheless, that all informants experienced a lack of agency, where both the position in itself and the position in relation to other positions are perceived as constraints on their ability to be active agents in their own life. Despite being in activity the participants end up in passive situations, which have a negative impact on self-esteem and motivation while the prospects of employment and self-sufficiency decline along with the length of the activity. The ‘work-for-benefit’ activation seems, then, to counteract its own goals and its effectiveness is questionable.

There is no straight-forward answer to questions aiming to explore processes in policy affecting dignity and shame. The findings from the interviews do, however, confirm my impression regarding reluctance towards ‘work-for-benefit’ measures. They also, in a way,

answer my question pertaining to why that is so; social assistance recipients prefer measures with features that they experience as dignifying and which promotes their agency, and the ‘work-for-benefit’ measures are perceived, on the part of the claimants, not to do so. The weighting of different features and their impact are, however, compounded and is dependent on structure and delivery as well as the context of the activity.

The next chapter brings the findings from the interviews together with the review in chapter three in order to discuss more thoroughly what the last decade’s changes in activation policy has meant for ‘work-for-benefit’ participants. The focus is on the analytical concepts of Human Resource Development and Labor Market Attachment. It is also related to a discussion on social divisions of welfare. I will also engage a discussion of possible implications of the past years development in the Norwegian activation policy.

5. Discussion

Previous chapter aimed to address the research questions by presenting, and shortly discuss, findings related to factors affecting dignity and the impact of new, inaccessible offerings on dignity related experiences. This chapter goes on to discuss these findings more thoroughly. By combining my interview data with the review from chapter three I intend to elucidate the broader implications of the new policies, relating it to the issue of social divisions. The point of departure in this study is informed both by my professional experiences, as well as by my theoretical pre-understandings. It permeates all choices made throughout the thesis- from the research question to discussion and conclusion, and all the parts in-between. The discussion is based on my interpretation of the findings, and due to the qualitative nature of the study, it is not my intention to draw any definitive conclusions or generalize my findings. The aim of the discussion is, however, to consider the findings from the interviews in a broader context and present one possible angle for understanding the activation policy and its post 2007 development from.

I will commence to discuss the positioning along the LMA-HRD continuum and how it has affected those not given access to standardized programs by drawing on the analytical concept of social divisions of welfare. This will be related to a discussion of possible implications for dignity and also to an elaboration of an emerging activation policy paradox. Lastly I will bring up the most recent developments, whose outcome we yet do not know, and discuss possible implications for the policy landscape with a particular focus on those left without standardized options.

5.1 A new social division of welfare?

As noted in chapter two, the concept social divisions of welfare refers to the different ways in which welfare support can be provided, and the effect these different forms of provision has in terms of creating, maintaining, or mitigating divisions within the population. The existence of a social welfare division in the Norwegian welfare state been established throughout research conducted on social protection, most notably by Lødemel (1997, 2001) who focused on the division between social insurance and social assistance, and what this division meant for the design of the activation policies. With the introduction of ‘work-for-benefit’ activation in early 1990s, the traditional division between insured and uninsured was reflected in the activation policy, and hierarchies in activation policies became apparent between the two

groups (Lødemel 1997a, 100). The aim of the following discussion is elucidate the concerns put forward in the Poverty and Shame project, arguing for a possible development of new social divisions in activation policies among the uninsured welfare recipients (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a). The discussion is pursued by contrasting the standardized rights-based Qualification Program to the non-standardized ‘work-for-benefit’ measure, focusing what the past decade’s development has meant for a potential social division within activation policies targeted towards social assistance recipients in particular.

5.1.1 Social divisions along a LMA-HRD continuum

Norway’s movement from being an outlier in LMA-based activation policies to being a prosecutor in HRD-based policies has brought along changes with significant implications for those targeted by the policies. With the introduction of the Qualification Program and the Introduction Program, coupled with the access social assistance recipients have been given to ALMPs, Norway has not only been able to broaden the activation portfolio for the most marginalized groups in the welfare state, but also move a section of long-term recipients from basic social assistance to other types of income maintenance. The change that the Qualification Program represents has been praised internationally due to its promotion of ‘active citizenship’ and provision of ‘intensive personal support’ (Duffy 2010, 15). Meanwhile has the ‘old’ approach not been fully abandoned; the formulation in the paragraph regulating activation of social assistance recipients has remained the same as in the 1991 version of the Act on social Assistance, but with new sections added in Circular no. 35 (2012), aiming to reflect the new administrative reality.

The strategies on which the Qualification Program and the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation are founded differ in a range of aspects relating to both to the normative discourses underpinning them, as well as economical and programmatic offerings. Even if the reform solutions, as noted by Gubrium and Lødemel (2014a), were based in the same rational choice assumptions that also guided the 1990s’ LMA-strategy, the discourse took a turn during the early 2010s while acknowledging political and societal responsibility in terms of facilitating integration. The discursive shift did, thus, gave rise to new policies with the interventions focusing to a larger extent on fostering human capital investment while on the same time to accentuating the rational dependency perspective, even if less so than before, through retaining the conditional element. These new policies, offering new rights and features for those with

access, have been reported to encompass positive impact in several respects, there among on the dignity of the claimants (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a).

Since the rational-choice assumptions still serve as the dominating normative foundation for the activation policies it has been possible to sustain the LMA-strategy alongside, or under, the new HRD-based policy without its challenging the legitimacy of the policy by becoming contradictory. The ‘work-for-benefit’ activation continues to represent an LMA-based policy with focus on control and use of negative incentives, emphasizing interventions assumed to promote quick transition to work, and has continued to be implemented in varying degrees alongside the new HRD-based policies. During the course of my study I was unable to observe traces of the HRD-strategy ‘trickling-down’ to the non-standardized ‘work-for-benefit’ policy. This specific activation seems, then, to be a remnant of the 1990s’ workfare approach without its being able to draw benefit of the developments during 2010s. The NAV-reform has, however, facilitated increased diversity in terms of how the conditions are applied; the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation can now be combined with other activities, including both state-funded and locally initiated measures. This development is reflected in the circular in which a broader range of activities is mentioned as appropriate conditions in addition to ‘appropriate work for the municipality’ (Rundskriv nr. 35 - Sosialtjenesteloven 2012). Whenever the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation is combined with other measures or programs, it can imply a greater focus on investment and individual tailoring. The extent to which this is done is, however, unclear.

My findings presented in the previous chapter indicate that experiences of dignity in the implementation of and participation in activation policies are affected by two main dimensions: the position in itself, and the position in relation to other positions. The LMA-strategy pursued in the ‘work-for-benefit’ policy is, thus, one important dimension in itself impacting on dignity. But the adding of a new layer of rights-based activation policies with upgraded services and upgraded benefits on the top of the old ‘work-for-benefit’ policy also have implications on the dignity of those subsisting basic social assistance activation. The fact that the policies targets the same group, and that the access to the new offerings is perceived as random and unfair does likely contribute to exacerbate the experiences of indignity among the basic social assistance recipients.

5.1.2 A social division in activation policy and consequences for dignity

With the total social assistance population comprising around 125,000 individuals, of which between 40 and 45 percent are considered long-term recipients, is the approximately 5.500 people with yearly access to the Qualification Program forming a relatively marginal group. The existence of the program could, however, despite its limited reach, heighten the marginalized distinction of those who fail to move up the new tier of social assistance (Gubrium, Pellissery, and Lødemel 2014, 189). This means that the Qualification Program, and to some extent the ALMPs, creates a segmentation within activation policies where those who continue to remain on basic social assistance could be perceived as ‘unfit’ for human capital formation (Gubrium, Pellissery, and Lødemel 2014, 187). As a result they might be subjected to stricter activation policy more firmly rooted in the LMA-strategy’s rational choice dependency perspective.

Evidence in previous the chapter suggests that the high level of conditionality in the ‘work-for-benefit’ measure is important for the experience of dignity and dignified treatment. Conditionality relies on some basic presumptions regarding the agency of minimum-income recipients, which includes the assumption that they *‘lack individual motivation to participate in society, and that they have to be steered into correct behavior’* (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014q, 210). Participation in the Qualification Program may be applied as a condition for continued assistance, but it is an exception to the more general rule according to which conditions undermine agency and contributes to heighten shame since it is based on a human-capital strategy and adds more to pre-existing rights, facilitating greater predictability and, hence, promoting agency. Unlike the compulsory ‘work-for-benefit’ activity a condition of participation in the Qualification Program is, thus, accepted as ‘fair’ since the activity is perceived as meaningful (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014q, 211). The more apparent presence of rational choice assumptions in the implementation of ‘work-for-benefit’ activation, combined with lack of individual assessment and promotion of agency, make the participants experience this policy as controlling and mistrusting.

The division of the activation policy along an LMA-HRD continuum indicates that the new layer of activation rooted in a social investment perspective has transmuted the ‘work-for-benefit’ into a ‘residual’ activation for those who are not considered worth investing in. The experience of being at the bottom of a hierarchy of different activation measures contributes

to heightening feelings of shame and it affects the dignity of participants. The ‘work-for-benefit’ activation, with its features and strict control regime, is in addition perceived as a punishment while the Qualification Program is seen as something awarded to deserving claimants. This reinforces the segmentation and experienced differentiation between the policies, while heightening the experience of undignified treatment of those who are not offered the program. The experiences of undignified treatment could make the policy contra productive, where the participants loses motivation, and seeks ways to get out the system they feel trapped in, even if these ways are dishonest.

The new rights tied to the Qualification Program not only indicate a social division within social assistance activation in terms of the activity’s content, but could also be claimed contributing to a social division along the more traditional line of income maintenance. The level of the Qualification benefit is not necessarily higher than basic social assistance but its additional features impart greater predictability while heightening the possibility of planning one’s life in a longer perspective, which is the difference highlighted as important by the informants. Relying on basic social assistance also means, for my informants, supplying requisite documents on a monthly basis justifying their continued need, which adds an extra control dimension and ‘hassle’. The feeling of being mistrusted this brings along adds to the experience of a (un)dignified treatment during the implementation process. The new economic and programmatic rights tied to the Qualification Program imply, then, a ‘double social division’. Social divisions and hierarchies within public welfare have always existed yet the differences were less keenly felt, perhaps, when the distance between the levels were larger. The hierarchies are likely to be more visible for recipients of welfare services now as the barriers between services have been built down with the NAV-reform. This may be particularly true for recipients living in municipalities where the numbers of alternatives to the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation are many.

The structure and content of the standardized Qualification Program has been contrasted with the ‘work-for-benefit’ measure by both program participants and basic social assistance recipients. The former is based on a human investment strategy while the latter has a more present rational choice dependency perspective. It might, based on the findings from the interviews and the Poverty and Shame project, seem like that the policies based in the LMA-strategy are more geared towards those considered ‘unfit’ for human capital development, which leads me to a discussion on an activation policy paradox.

5.1.3 *The emerging paradox in Norwegian activation policy*

About the ‘Welfare Paradox’ Lødemel (1997h) argued that the way in which the Norwegian social security system is organized, with an extensive social insurance system aiming to promote universal social security, has led to a paradox. The paradox is reflected in a highly selective and residual social assistance scheme, which has developed alongside an institutional and universal insurance scheme (Lødemel 1997h, 271). So, while the expansion of the national insurance managed to lift a majority of the risk groups out of poverty, a small segment was left to rely on a decentralized, means-tested, and discretionary social assistance scheme. Social assistance, thus, plays a residual role in the larger Norwegian social protection system, and *‘the paradox of a residual system prevailing under the extensive institutional welfare arises from the focus on the extensions of alternatives to social assistance’* (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 87). After exploring the post 2007 developments of the activation policy one could ask if a paradox, similar to the one observed in the income maintenance schemes, could be observed also in the way the current activation policy in social assistance is implemented.

Claimant access to the Qualification Program may be said to be institutionalized through two types of policy structures. The first is based on the policy formulation level where the formal target group is determined, and the second on a local implementation level where public welfare officials distinguish one claimant from another based on individual characteristics and need (Gubrium, Pellissery, and Lødemel 2014, 192). Long-term recipients enrolled into the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation and the participants of the Qualification Program might, then, be part of the same target group on a political level yet differentiated on an individual level based on caseworkers’ discretion. The Qualification Program aims to integrate the most marginalized into the broader society through investments promoting transition to work, targeting those in need of an extra effort, while still applying an eligibility criteria based on employability (cf. St.meld.nr.9 (2006-2007)). The employability criteria relates to participants ability to benefit from the program with regard to the programs overarching goal of promoting self-reliance through employment. This means the claimants with a lower level of employability, standing further from the labor market, might get excluded.

The discretionary element in the Qualification Program could, in other words, lead to ‘creaming’ owing to the municipality’s limited resources, changes in funding, and top-down pressure to deliver results with regard to transitioning to employment. The participants with the highest level of employability are, in that case, chosen over those with the weakest position on the labor market (Gubrium, Pellissery, and Lødemel 2014, 192). The bad risks may not, therefore, be considered for participation in the program despite their bigger need for human capital investing services. This causes a paradox where a program developed for integrating the most marginalized into the Norwegian society is offered to people considered to have the highest level of employability, leaving the former with LMA-based ‘work-for-benefit’ measures, which are less focused on training and development of resources and more on work experience. John captured this paradox when he said “*You even have to qualify for the Qualification Program*”, expressing his feelings of resignation over the concern that if not NAV was able to find room for him, how could he then expect an employer to? Those standing farthest from the labor market are, thus, ‘offered’ activities which those standing closer to the labor market would be, logically speaking, in a better position to benefit from.

As shown, has the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision been critical of the recruitment processes of the Qualification Program, dubbing it as random (Helsetilsynet 2015, 9). The reports conclude that knowledge about the program is inadequate, which is reflected in the social assistance population that is bereft of sufficient information about the program. It is concluded, furthermore, that neither the claimants nor implementers are being aware that the program is a right for those fulfilling the eligibility criteria. This failure to provide social assistance recipients with a right they have could in itself indicate an undignified treatment. When the alternative for those not enrolled, moreover, is based on another strategy and rhetoric, the perceived unfairness adds to the negative experiences of the policy.

5.2 Towards universalization of conditional activation

With the new right-wing coalition in government, the activation landscape is, once again, undergoing significant changes while use of condition is made obligatory for all recipients of social assistance. The enacted, but still not enforced change will most likely exert an impact on activation policies in terms of ways in which it is implemented and possible also with regard to movements over the LMA-HRD continuum and, perhaps, their ability to fulfill the

ILO principles. Following section will shortly discuss these concerns, drawing on some of the critique put forth by the consultation bodies.

The discussion on how the implementation of the change is to be financed has, as noted, been absent during the initial policy formulation process. Trondheim municipality argues that if the resources are not increased, while the eligibility criteria for the Qualification Program are made stricter due to the change in funding conditions, local solutions will be sought. This, they argue, could result in a situation in where some recipients get cemented into a ‘work-for-benefit’ group, vailing the need for internships in the ordinary labor market (Trondheim kommune 2014). After being roundly criticized on the issue of financing, the government called for a more thorough assessment of potential implementation costs, which is the main reason for delay in effectuation.

The enacted change has also been criticized for not taking the heterogeneity of the social assistance population into consideration while hampering the possibility of making exceptions from the use of active conditions. The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombudsman (LDO) notes that people with lowered work capacity and immigrant backgrounds are overrepresented among social assistance recipients. It is stressed that their low participation in the labor market could be due to a discriminative and exclusive labor market (Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet 2014). LDO goes on to argue that fighting poverty and exclusion resulting from a structurally caused unemployment by necessitating participation in work-related activities in return for social assistance is likely to be ineffective and experienced as degrading and harassing (Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet 2014). That the new policy might have a negative effect on the claimants’ dignity is a cause for concern, which could undermine the positive changes observed during the developments occurring in the 2010s. Several consultation bodies have, furthermore, expressed a concern about the enacted changes undermining the social assistance function as a last safety net (Fylkesmannen i Oslo 2014, Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus 2014, Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet 2014). LDO takes this concern even further when arguing that it could be contradictory to international human rights and cause a weakening in the realization of the right to social security (Likestillings- og diskrimineringsombudet 2014).

Developments occurring over the recent past within the Norwegian activation policy indicate a new phase with implications still to be unfolded. The policy documents do, however, point

towards a stricter rhetoric where the activation policy is tightened. The obligation for caseworkers to make use of active conditions towards all recipients might go on expense of the possibility of adapting the measures to individual need and, hence, inhibit the transition to employment (Kane and Köhler-Olsen 2015). The consultation bodies are concerned about negative the impact this could wield on both the dignity and the rights of social assistance recipients, where both the problem of unemployment and the responsibility to resolve it may get (further) individualized through measures built on a strict rational dependency perspective. The enacted change does not come with more resources, which could increase the use of non-standardized measures which, as we have seen, affects dignity in a negative way due to the low level of predictability and high level of conditionality. By exchanging *shall* from *can* and restricting the possibility of making exceptions one can now talk about a universal activation obligation for the recipients of social assistance (Kane and Köhler-Olsen 2015). While applying a broad approach to what ‘activation’ could be understood as- the preparatory works indicate that it is not a universalization of ‘work-for-benefit’ activation that is sought. The increased focus on place-then-train oriented policies (Spjelkavik 2012), coupled with lack of resources given to implement the change could, however, well render true Trondheim municipality’s prophecy on increased use of LMA-based ‘work-for-benefit’ measures. One should remember, though, that diversity with regard to how active conditions are used has increased as a result of the NAV-reform. Examples abound in municipalities showcasing inventiveness facilitating new activities and new combination of activities that are not necessarily rooted in the 1990s narrow ‘work-for-benefit’ approach.

6. Conclusion – Residual activation and Norway’s commitment to the ILO Recommendation

This thesis examines dignity-related experiences of long-term social assistance recipients with benefits conditioned upon participation in ‘work-for-benefit’ activation. More specifically has the focus been on examining factors affecting dignity in this specific type of activation. Summaries and short discussions have been provided in the end of chapters three and four, while chapter five sums up the findings from previous chapters and elucidate them more thoroughly with the view to discuss how the activation policy impact the issue of social division. This chapter will briefly enclose this thesis by drawing some conclusions based on the findings and discussion with regard to Norway’s commitment to the 6th principle in the ILO recommendation 202.

Chapter three and five points out that the development of the activation policies in social assistance have contributed towards increasing dignity of recipients who gains access to the new offerings, providing them with new rights focusing on retaining principles of autonomy and active citizenship (Duffy 2010, Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a). At the same time does this development seem to contribute towards decreasing the sense of dignity for those who do not gain access to the program. Through the utilization of in-depth interviews I was able to address my first research question concerning factors affecting experiences of dignity in non-standardized activation. The interview-data, analyzed through a ‘contextualist’ thematic method, revealed five main factors relevant for dignity in ‘work-for-benefit’ activation. These factors included conditionality, lack of user-involvement, content of work assignments, economic compensation, and lastly the existence of other, inaccessible, offerings, which relates to the second research question. The informants also elaborated upon the effect these factors had on dignity in terms of social isolation and agency. In the summary and discussion of chapter four it is argued that the factors related to experiences of (in)dignity may be divided into two main dimensions: the position itself and the position in relation to other positions. Yet the findings themselves do not provide a basis for concluding whether one is more important than the other.

The findings from my interviews corresponds with those of the Poverty and Shame project, which notes a strong interplay between security and dignity (Gubrium and Lødemel 2014a, 214). Security, in the case of my informants, refers to both economic stability and to

predictability of the activities, none of which is guaranteed in the non-standardized and conditional ‘work-for-benefit’ activation in which they are enrolled. The more rights-based Qualification Program is, through its standardized structure, in contrast noted to be able to secure greater predictability in both respects. A rights-based practice, furthermore, offers the claimants the possibility to demand their rights and put forward complaints when rights are not fulfilled. The non-standardized and discretionary ‘work-for-benefit’ arrangement might make it more difficult to reveal lack of fulfillment, and it might be easier for implementers to ‘get away’ with undignified treatment. The lack of statutory rights and standardized offerings may, in other words, affect the rule of law of the group of people enrolled into basic social assistance activation.

To have one’s dignity respected is, as noted in chapter two, a right in itself- a right that is founded on humans’ inherent value and that requires dignified treatment. Dignified treatment, being a procedural citizenship right should, in turn, be rooted in a human rights approach while acknowledging and promoting the agency of the recipients, which will also increase the effectiveness of the policy (UN 2012, Walker, Chase, and Lødemel 2012). The informants in my study testified about a lack of agency throughout the implementation, present both in structure and delivery of the activity. A particularly important factor with regard to the agency of the informants was the absence of individual plans. To not provide the participants with individual plans could be considered as a lack of fulfillment of a right they have as recipients in need of ‘long-lasting and coordinated services’ (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131, section 42). Lack of plans coupled with testimonies of not being invited to discuss options or opinions indicates, furthermore, a lack of fulfillment of the more general right to user-involvement (LOV-2009-12-18 nr. 131, section 42). In addition to failing in meeting some of the requirements of national legislation, the implementation of the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation implies, for the same reasons, a failing ability to fulfill the requirements of the 6th principle in the ILO recommendation. If the dignity of Norway’s minimum income recipients is to be nurtured, their rights need to be respected and fulfilled. The ‘inherent value’ of participants in conditional activity must be granted through dignified treatment, which requires that they are acknowledged as active agents capable of making decisions of their own (cf. UN 2012). The experiences of the ‘work-for-benefit’ activation were, moreover, characterized by perceptions of a strict control-regime and low economic compensation. These experiences, reflecting the ‘position in itself’, was found to be contrasted against the new investment-based policies, which paved the way for a discussion on the ‘position in relation to other positions’.

The discussion in chapter five contends, supported by conclusions of the Poverty and Shame project, that the last decade's development in activation policies has made the social divisions landscape more complex, blurring the traditional insured/uninsured divisions, causing new divisions to emerge. The interview-data testifies about an experienced hierarchy within the activation policy, which confirms the hypothesis on differentiation between basic social assistance activation and the Qualification Program asserted in the Poverty and Shame project. The 'position in relation to other positions', in which my informants perceive themselves to be in the bottom tier, adds to the indignity of the factors observed in the 'position itself' while exacerbating experiences associated with undignified treatment. It is suggested in the discussion, furthermore, that this new division represents a paradox where the new policies, which are aiming to integrate the most marginalized, applies the eligibility criteria allowing for creaming. This results in a situation where those who logically should be targeted by the HRD-based policies have to rest content with a measure based in a LMA-strategy without sufficient heed to the claimants needs.

The factors negatively affecting dignity are, thus, identified to be a blend of characteristics of the policy itself, the way it is implemented, and the fact that it is experienced as a 'low-threshold' offer, subsumed under other and better offerings.

Through the steps taken towards HRD-based policies, represented by the Qualification Program and the increased diversity in conditional activities offered through ALMPs, it seems like Norway became better equipped to care for the dignity of the minimum income recipient. Despite reports recording failures of implementation in some areas, evidence from the Poverty and Shame project stand, as noted, witness to a more dignifying treatment, which corresponds to the demands of the 6th principle formulated by ILO in recommendation 202. This fact, however, holds true only for the minority that actually gains access to the new offerings. Whether the non-standardized 'work-for-benefit' activation in itself has changed as a result of adding a new higher-tier program is not possible to assess with the data presented in this study. What is clear, however, is that the informants' experiences of dignity have been negatively affected. So while one step was taken in the direction towards dignifying policies, it seems like it one the same time spawned new welfare hierarchies, worsening the situation for those without access to the new programmatic offerings. It could, then, be argued that the ability to care for the basic social assistance recipient's dignity when implementing non-

standardized activation policies is rendered even more difficult than before. Furthermore, the negative impact of the new experienced hierarchy on dignity, self-esteem, and motivation is likely to also have a negative effect on the policy's effectiveness. So regardless of which of the two arguments one chooses to apply with regard to the promotion of dignifying policies, the 'work-for-benefit' activation seems unsuitable as a means to reach the goals, either it is to promote dignity as a right in itself or as a means of creating effective policies.

As an ending remark in the discussion in chapter five, it is noted that the new right-wing government is currently pursuing what seems to be an expansion of non-standardized activation policies. This is noted to be significant due to the non-standardized activation's seemingly inability to fulfill rights, respect dignity and promote agency. The positive developments observed during the 2010s could then risk being hampered in the pursuit of a stricter rhetoric with deeper roots in a rational dependency perspective. It is noted that while the broad approach towards activation remains in place, the prolongation of the 2010s' investment-based strategies might be under threat owing to the lack of resources extended to the municipalities for implementing the change. The proposed and enacted universal activation could, then, point towards a widening of the residual activation rather than an increase of the more recently introduced higher-tier policies. How the enacted change will impact the dignity of social assistance recipients is yet to be revealed, but the consultation bodies have expressed a concern that it will entail a degrading and harassing treatment of the claimants. The positive impact social activation has on social exclusion may, thus, be dwarfed by negative experiences of a strict control regime and constrained agency that dominates the experiences of non-standardized activation.

6.2 Ending remarks

My study has served to highlight some specific factors of importance in assessment of dignity during the implementation of non-standardized 'work-for-benefit' activation, which was the issue addressed by my first question. As stated in chapter two, my findings cannot be generalized beyond the context of my specific research project. What I can assert, however, within the frame of my study and as an answer to my second question is that the informants experience a hierarchy in the activation policies owing to developments over the last decade in which the 'work-for-benefit' activation is placed in the bottom, and that this affects experiences of dignity in a negative way.

A clear-cut conclusion about what affects dignity and how it is affected during implementation of conditional activation is not possible, yet some tendencies have surfaced that should be taken into account when designing and implementing policies. Promotion of agency by facilitating for participatory processes along with investments in capabilities and skills seems to be important for a sense of dignity and self-worth. Undignified treatment, on the other hand, serves to decrease self-esteem and counteracts help-to-self-help and is, as such, likely to decrease effectiveness of the policy. Creating dignifying policies are, in other words, important not just in terms of taking care of the most marginalized in the society and fulfilling the minimum standards set by international organizations, but also for meeting the goals of self-reliance and employment in an effective way. Dignified services also require resources, common implementation guidelines, and some minimum standards. Coupled with participatory processes, this is likely to increase the ability to secure dignity as a right in itself, as well as promote dignity as a mean to increase effectiveness of the policy.

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Appendix I – Request for interview and statement of consent

Forespørsel om deltakelse i prosjektet «Aktiviseringstiltak i Sosialtjenesten og opplevelser av deltakelse»

Invitasjon om å delta i forskningsprosjekt om kartlegging av aktiviseringstiltak for personer som mottar sosialhjelp og som ikke deltar i Kvalifiseringsprogrammet, og erfaringer med dette.

Bakgrunn og formål

Mitt navn er Sanna Simonsson, jeg er utdannet sosionom som nå tar en master ved Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus i Internasjonal Sosial Velferd og Helsepolitikk hvor Ivar Lødemel, professor ved avdeling for samfunnsfag er min veileder. Jeg skal skrive min master om aktiviseringstiltak med arbeid som målsetting. Mitt fokus vil være på personer som har mottatt sosialhjelp i minimum seks måneder og som ikke deltar i Kvalifiseringsprogrammet, og personlige erfaringer med disse. Formålet med studien er å belyse bruk av tiltak i sosialtjenesten, hvordan disse oppleves og påvirker mottakere.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Jeg ønsker å snakke med personer som har mottatt sosialhjelp i minimum seks måneder og som ikke deltar i Kvalifiseringsprogrammet. Intervjuet vil ta ca. 40-60 minutter og vil følge en semi-strukturert intervjuemetode, som betyr at noen spørsmål er forberedt, men hvor det også er åpent for den som blir intervjuet å formidle sin fortelling på sine premisser. Fokus i intervjuet vil være på hvilken type aktiviseringstiltak (program og/eller generelle aktivitetsvilkår) som er brukt, deltakelse og samarbeid med saksbehandler i sosialtjenesten ved beslutninger om disse, tanker om effekt av dem både i forhold til arbeidsmarkedet og i forhold til livssituasjon, økonomisk situasjon og opplevde utfordringer og mestringsstrategier. Samtalen skal handle om situasjon her og nå og noe om bakgrunn for den. Deltakere i intervjuet bestemmer selv hva som skal fortelles og ikke, hvis noen spørsmål oppleves som vanskelig trenger man ikke å svare.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Det er ikke noe krav om å fortelle navn eller bosted eller andre ting som er direkte personopplysninger. Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp med lydopptaker og det vil i tillegg bli tatt notater for å sikre at jeg ved gjennomgang av informasjon har nøyaktige opplysninger tilgjengelig. Alle opplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Det er kun meg og min veileder ved Høgskolen som vil ha tilgang til de personopplysninger du deler, og materialet vil bli oppbevart hvor det er utilgjengelig for andre. Informasjon vil ikke bli delt med saksbehandler eller andre ved sosialtjenesten. Prosjektet er planlagt å avsluttes i mai 2016, notater og lydopptak vil da bli slettet og material vil bli anonymisert ved publisering. Oppgaven vil kunne sendes til deltakere hvis interessert i å ta del av resultater.

Deltakelse er frivillig

Intervjuet vil foregå på norsk og kan gjennomføres enten ved Høgskolen, eller vi kan avtale et annet møtested f.eks. ved ditt lokale NAV kontor. Å delta på prosjektet er frivillig, og du kan

når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Deltakelse i prosjektet vil ikke påvirke din sak hos sosialtjenesten, det vil heller ikke påvirkes hvis du velger å trekke deg.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Sanna Simonsson på telefonnummer 968 52 768. Veileder for prosjekt Ivar Lødemel nås på telefon 672 38 162

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

(Dato og deltakers signatur)

Appendix II – Interview Guide

Intervjuguide for semi-strukturerte intervjuer i masterprosjekt om bruk av aktiviseringstiltak mot langtidsmottakere av sosialhjelp

Introduksjon

Fortelle om temaer som skal dekkes i intervjuerne med hensikt å belyse deres erfaringer med aktiviseringstiltak og vilkår for sosialhjelp og effekt på praktisk og personlig plan.

Fortelle om anonymitet og gjennomgang og signering samtykkeskjema

Material: Verktøy for innspilling og for notater vil bli brukt under intervjuerne

Tidsramme; 45-60 minutter per intervju

Demografiske spørsmål

Alder, kjønn, utdanningsnivå, arbeidsbakgrunn, sivilstatus og familiesituasjon, bo-tid i Norge (hvis innvandret)

Tema 1- Bakgrunn/Oversikt over situasjonen

- Hvor lenge mottatt sosialhjelp, eventuelt andre inntekter
- Endringer i livssituasjon som medførte hjelpebehovet
- Siste arbeidsforhold og varighet
- Tidligere perioder med sosialhjelp
- Eventuelle utfordringer knyttet til helse som påvirker arbeidsevne

Tema 2- Deltakelse aktiviseringsstrategier/tiltak

- Deltagelse i fulltidsprogram i regi av NAV
 - Type program og aktivitet
 - Varighet og fullføring
 - Var deltakelse obligatorisk for sosialhjelp?
 - Hvem fremmet forslag om deltakelse?
 - Annen type ytelse i løpet av deltakelsen
 - Har eventuelle andre program vært diskutert?
 - Er deltakelse i program et ønske?
 - Hvilket og hvorfor?
 - Har noen andre typer vilkår for sosialhjelp blitt brukt?
- Har stønad blitt stoppet/reduert på bakgrunn av at ikke oppfylt vilkår?
 - Hvis ja; hvor mye og hvor lenge?

Tema 3- Informasjon og involvering

- Kjennskap til programmer og hvor informasjonen kommer fra
- Om individuell plan
- Opplevelse og forståelse av informasjon om rettigheter, tilgjengelige programmer og muligheter for bruk av vilkår og sanksjoner
- Opplevelse av involvering og grad av delaktighet i beslutninger
- Opplevelse av argumenter for bruk av vilkår i forhold til meningsfullhet

Tema 4- Opplevelse/erfaringer med aktiviseringsstrategier/tiltak

- Opplevelse av aktiviseringstiltaks og vilkårs innvirkning på livssituasjon
 - I forhold til muligheter til jobb
 - I forhold til (hjelpe)behov
- Fornøydhet med tiltaket/ene
 - Hvis ikke; hvordan kunne det blitt gjort annerledes for å øke utbytte av det?
- Tiltakenes innvirkning på økonomisk situasjon
- Tiltakenes innvirkning på personlig plan
 - Føler du at du og din kompetanse ble ivaretatt i forbindelse med tiltak? (innen, under efter)

Tema 5- utfordringer og mestring

- Hva oppleves som vanskelig i nåværende situasjon
- På hvilken måte har dette (opplevde vanskeligheter) påvirket;
 - Syn på seg selv
 - Sosiale liv
 - På et emosjonelt plan
 - Familie
- Hvordan har eventuelle tiltak bidratt til dette?
 - Positiv effekt/Negativ effekt
- Hvordan oppfattes situasjon i forhold til andre;
 - Familie, venner, andre i lignende situasjon (eks. andre sosialhjelpsmottakere med tilgang til andre tjenester/tiltak)
- Hvilke strategier brukes for å takle utfordringer/ting som oppleves som vanskelig
- Støtte i nettverk; økonomisk og emosjonelt
 - Er sosialt nettverk forskjellig nå fra før
- Følelse og opplevelser av respekt i møte med sosialtjenesten
 - Hvis nei; hvorfor og hva kan gjøres annerledes?

Tema 6- Fremtiden

- Hvordan ser fremtiden ut om 6 måneder, om 1 år
- Opplevelse av muligheter til å påvirke egen fremtid
- I hvilken utstrekking og hvordan kan tiltak gjennom NAV kan bistå til å påvirke fremtid?