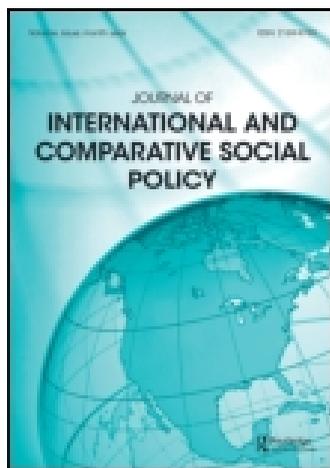


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Publisher: Routledge

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Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjcs21>

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Published online: 11 Jul 2014.

To cite this article: Martin Heidenreich, Norbert Petzold, Marcello Natili & Alexandru Panican (2014) Active inclusion as an organisational challenge: integrated anti-poverty policies in three European countries, *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, 30:2, 180-198, DOI: [10.1080/21699763.2014.934901](https://doi.org/10.1080/21699763.2014.934901)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21699763.2014.934901>

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Active inclusion as an organisational challenge: integrated anti-poverty policies in three European countries

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(Received 30 January 2014; accepted 14 May 2014)

Active inclusion aims at the reduction of poverty by strengthening the agency of excluded persons by the provision of a minimum income, activation and social services. The contribution to poverty alleviation is determined by expenditure levels and the organisation of these three policy fields. This can be shown by three examples: The comprehensive Swedish regime is characterised by high expenditures; the redistributive German regime is characterised by lower service levels and in Italy, all three dimensions are least developed. In addition, the organisation of services differs: Decentralised and discretionary system for the provision of services in Sweden, “creaming and parking” effects in Germany and fragmented providers in Italy. As a result of different expenditure levels and organisational patterns, the selectivity of active inclusion strategies is low in Sweden, medium in Germany and high in Italy. Both the financial and organisational dimensions of active inclusion therefore are decisive for poverty alleviation.

Keywords: concepts of poverty; minimum income provision; activation; social services; coordination

1. Introduction: from minimum income to active inclusion

Which policies are most adequate for reducing poverty? With the activation reforms since the 1990s (Weishaupt, 2011) and the shift towards a social investment perspective (Morel, Palier, & Palme, 2012), the answers to this question have significantly changed. Before these shifts, the emphasis lay on income replacement: Especially a high minimum income which intends to “provide a social minimum based on a means test” (Bahle, Huble, & Pfeifer, 2011, p. 13) and other forms of redistribution were used to reduce social inequalities and income poverty. The reduction of income poverty, which is in general defined by an income below 60% of the median, therefore requires first of all a sufficiently high minimum income threshold.

With the shift to a “new welfare state” in the 1990s, the emphasis has shifted from income replacement and the detailed analysis of minimum income systems (cf. Gough, Bradshaw, Ditch, Eardley, & Whiteford, 1997; Lødemel & Trickey, 2001; Marx & Nelson, 2012) to “the promotion of labour market participation through activation and

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investment in human capital” (Bonoli & Natali, 2011, p. 8).¹ The activation of minimum income and unemployment benefit (UB) schemes amends previously unconditional minimum income scheme (MIS) benefits with the obligation to participate in public job creation schemes, job search activities and training courses. Incentives for job take-up and using employment services are also being strengthened (Bonoli, 2010).

However, the activation of MIS has been criticised as being “partially responsible for disappointing poverty trends” (Cantillon, 2011, p. 445). Nelson (2013, p. 397) also claims that “the increase of ALMP expenditure in Europe is associated with reduced social assistance adequacy”. As a reaction to this criticism, especially the social investment approach has proposed to strengthen the enabling elements of activation policies (Morel et al., 2012). In addition to labour market services (benefits, training and placement), these elements consist mostly of social services (family care, child care, prevention of early school leaving, housing support, health services and care for the elderly) which are essential for including groups with complex social problems (e.g. low qualifications, indebtedness, bad health, alcoholism, addiction, inadequate housing and no transport facilities) into the labour market.

In order to combat poverty and social exclusion, the European Commission (2006, 2008) has proposed to combine these three elements – sufficient income, active labour market policies (ALMPs) and social services – into a strategy which it has termed “active inclusion”. Even if this concept has been introduced as a policy recipe, it contains four important insights into the challenges of enabling activation policies (Clegg, 2013): Firstly, it prioritises labour market integration over redistribution as a means for combating poverty; secondly, it focuses on the weakest segments of the labour market, i.e. on the “sizeable ‘hard core’ of people with little prospect of finding a job (...) [due to problems] such as homelessness, drug addiction, alcoholism, lack of access to basic healthcare and illiteracy” (European Commission, 2006, pp. 2–5).² These are the groups mostly affected by persistent poverty and long-term unemployment. Thirdly, it emphasises the organisational challenges of such a comprehensive strategy whose different strands should be carefully designed and interlinked in order to improve the “coordination between public agencies and services which deliver active inclusion policies” (European Commission, 2008, p. L307/12). Last but not least, active inclusion strategies should be “carefully budgeted, [so] that they do not put medium-term financial sustainability at risk and that they are shown to be cost-effective in the long term” (European Commission, 2006, p. 8). This claim is also at the core of the social investment strategy proposed prominently by Morel et al. (2012) and the European Commission (2013).

Given the active inclusion strategy’s focus on fostering employment opportunities, the integration of excluded groups, an integrated policy design and efficient organisational and financial structures, we can reformulate the initial question “Which policies are most adequate for reducing poverty?” as follows: *To what extent do national policies and administrative systems support the integrated provision of a minimum income, ALMPs and social services in order to reduce persistent poverty and to integrate excluded groups into the labour market?* In the remainder of this paper, this question will be discussed for three countries that are in general seen as examples of Nordic, Continental European and Mediterranean worlds of welfare, employment and activation: Sweden, Germany and Italy.³

In the following, we first analyse the theoretical basis of the concept of active inclusion, which is based on an understanding of poverty that differs from traditional resource-based and redistribution-oriented understandings of poverty (and anti-poverty policy). As is discussed in Section 2, active inclusion aims at strengthening the agency of the most disadvantaged groups by including them into the labour market, instead of providing (only) the

resources considered as safeguarding an acceptable standard of living. In Section 3, we then describe different patterns of poverty and social exclusion in the three selected countries. These different “outcomes” of national inclusion and activation policies will be explained by analysing expenditures for the three pillars of active inclusion. In this way, we take into account the financial prerequisites of active inclusion. Section 4 analyses in detail how the three pillars of active inclusion policies and their interaction are organised in the three countries, because the vertical and horizontal coordination of social and employment services is the second precondition for successful active inclusion policies besides an adequate financing level. Such coordination is challenging because active inclusion requires a broad range of individualised and targeted services (benefit provision, training, job placement, family and care, care for the elderly and counselling) across various political levels (national, regional and local) and involving various types of organisations (private, public and third sector; see Van Berkel, van de Graaf, & Sirovátka, 2012; Van Berkel & Valkenburg, 2007). We conclude that financial support for, and the organisation of minimum income systems, activation policies and service provision are decisive for restoring the agency of the most disadvantaged groups (Section 5).

2. Restoring agency through active inclusion strategies: two concepts of poverty

Active inclusion strategies are based on a different theoretical foundation than traditional anti-poverty policies, which understand poverty as a lack of resources for covering basic social needs and therefore seek to combat poverty through the redistribution of financial means. In the following, the theoretical basis for an alternative understanding of poverty, inclusion and anti-poverty policy will be examined.

Traditionally, poverty and deprivation have been defined by the (relative) lack of resources to

participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which (...) [citizens] belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities. (Townsend, 1979, p. 31)

Financial resources are an essential basis for satisfying basic social needs and social participation, although Townsend also takes into account the normatively acceptable standard of living in a society (Goedemé & Rottiers, 2011, p. 82). This definition of poverty gave rise to the now common operationalisation of poverty as incomes below 60% of the equalised household disposable median income (Table 1).

A variant of such a resource-based poverty concept is the concept of material deprivation. Instead of focussing on the available financial resources, the deprivation concept tries to directly measure the satisfaction or non-satisfaction of basic social needs (Nolan & Whelan, 2011). The deprivation concept enlarges the poverty concept to a multidimensional understanding of poverty, but it does not abandon a purely resource-based view of poverty. Access to necessary goods and services still depends essentially on money.

In 1908, the German sociologist Georg Simmel proposed an alternative concept of poverty. For Simmel, a social actor’s loss of his or her status as an independent, autonomous individual and the fact of being unable to take care of one’s own affairs and obligations are the essential characteristics of being poor – and not a lack of resources. The need for help (*Hilfsbedürftigkeit*) is the defining property of poverty: “The acceptance of assistance thus

Table 1. Two understandings of poverty and anti-poverty policies.

	Poverty as a lack of resources	Poverty as a lack of agency
Authors	P. Townsend	Poverty as need for social assistance (G. Simmel; L. A. Coser)
Contemporary protagonists	Poverty as deprivation and non-satisfaction of basic needs (B. Nolan; C. T. Whelan)	Poverty as inability to make one's own choices (A. Sen). Leads to shame (R. Walker)
Legitimate basis for social assistance	Social rights (T. H. Marshall)	Relevant capabilities as the basis for individual agency
Goal of anti-poverty policy	Providing sufficient resources, goods and services for satisfying basic social needs	Enabling the poor to retake control of their own situation, thereby restoring their freedom of choice
Current political concepts	Protection against market forces through an unconditional provision of (so-called passive) social benefits	Active inclusion and social investment strategies aiming at a combination of income provision, activation policies and social services

excludes the assisted person from the premises of his status and provides visible proof that the poor person is formally declass e" (Simmel, 1965, p. 138). The consequence for Coser (1965) is that the poor are "removed from the ordinary run of men", that they are obliged "to make [their] private life open to public inspection" and that they have no free disposition over the financial resources allocated to them: "[T]he poor are treated in this respect much like children who have to account to parents for the wise use of their pocket money; the poor are infantilized through such procedures" (Coser, 1965, pp. 144–145).⁴ The psycho-social expression of this sociological fact is shame (Walker et al., 2013), which reflects the perceived absence of agency and the denial of a person's status as a social actor.

The implications for anti-poverty policies are far-reaching. It is not sufficient to give resources or financial means to the poor; rather, their status as social actors must be restored or preserved: "Poverty, therefore, can never be eliminated unless the poor are enabled to give as well as to receive (...) The task is to create valued status positions for those who were formerly passive recipients of assistance" (Coser, 1965, pp. 147–148).

These early sociological reflections were taken up in a completely different theoretical and disciplinary context by Sen (1999) who insists on the fact that poverty cannot be combated only by more resources and better services. Instead, mitigating poverty also requires that disadvantaged individuals' freedom of choice (in sociological terms: their status as competent and capable agents) has to be restored: "Without the substantive freedom and capability to do something, a person cannot be responsible for doing it" (Sen, 1999, p. 284). One answer to the question how this agency can be restored has been proposed by the concept of active inclusion – a very specific answer which is (in contrast to the much broader scope of the capability approach) limited to the labour market and to employment and social services which are instrumental in facilitating access to the labour market. By enriching the overall design of anti-poverty policies with enabling elements that aim at improving individual abilities as a precondition for exiting poverty, active inclusion policies directly address the individual lack of agency of beneficiaries through training, child care and elderly care, psychological counselling and other employment and social services. Thus, active inclusion policies seek to reduce the need for help and re-establish the autonomy of the poor to take their own decisions by supporting their access to employment.

However, it has been shown that activation policies aim not only at strengthening the agency, emancipation and individual responsibility of the excluded persons. The transformation of unconditional rights into benefits conditional on the behaviour of the individual implies also new forms of obligations, constraints and disciplinary measures. Serrano Pascual (2007, pp. 18–19) therefore rightly points out that activation policies “use punitive measures in order to influence the behaviour of individuals” and “to control the behaviour of unemployed people systematically as part of the assistance offered to help them find work and gain economic independence”.

In sum: The concept of active inclusion is based on an understanding of poverty which stresses not only a lack of resources, but also the erosion of agency and individual responsibility linked to the status of being poor. In this perspective, anti-poverty policies cannot merely aim at the provision of (financial) resources through minimum income systems, but they must also empower the individual by reducing the need for help – which, according to Georg Simmel, is the sociological core feature of poverty. An important way of restoring this agency is reintegration into the labour market, which is the aim of active inclusion policies. In the following, we analyse the relative weight and organisational implementation of the different facets of active inclusion strategies. We begin by discussing some indicators for the outcomes of anti-poverty policies which seek to restore the agency of the poor.

3. Poverty dynamics and active inclusion in three European countries

Inclusion regimes can be defined as networks of interlinked institutions that regulate the provision of social assistance and employment and social services, and which were historically developed as durable compromises between the redistributive and activating goals of anti-poverty policies. As Bahle et al. (2011) have shown, inclusion regimes regulate the generosity, scope, expenditure level and differentiation of national patterns of income provision on the one hand, and the expectations placed on benefit recipients on the other hand. Inclusion regimes are thus expressions of fundamental social norms of what can be considered an acceptable standard of living and well-being in a given society, and which activities and behaviour can be expected from benefit recipients. Redistributive and active inclusion policies are respectively characterised by a different mix of (unconditional and conditional) rights and obligations.

The empirical analysis of inclusion regimes has to start from indicators illustrating the patterns and dynamics of inequality and poverty (cf. Table 2). The usual indicator is the poverty rate that is strongly influenced by the more or less egalitarian income pattern of

Table 2. Poverty and social exclusion: selected indicators (2010).

	Sweden	Germany	Italy
Income inequality (Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income)	0.227	0.274	0.298
At-risk-of-poverty (share of persons below 60% of the median income, % of the population)	12.9	15.6	18.2
Exit from poverty (non-poor persons who were poor one year ago, % of the poor)	35.4	36.5	33.3
Persistent poverty (persons who have been poor in the current year and at least two out of the three preceding years, in % of all poor)	31.9	57.1	59.2
Long-term unemployment (unemployed for one year and more; in % of total unemployment)	17.8	47.4	48.5

Source: Eurostat and own calculations on the basis of EU-SILC and SOEP.

a country (often measured by the Gini coefficient) (see Atkinson & Marlier, 2010). Therefore, the poverty rate is correlated with the inequality of disposable income. A useful indicator could also be the exit rate from poverty, which however does not take into account how long a person succeeds in leaving poverty. This indicator might thus be exaggerated if many persons oscillate around the poverty threshold. The best indicator for the sizeable “hard core” of poor and excluded people on which active inclusion policies are focused is the proportion of persistent poverty (in % of the poor) (see Fouarge & Muffels, 2000; Stevens, 1999). The best indicator for the “hard core” of persons excluded from the labour market is the share of long-term unemployment (in % of total unemployment).

The last two indicators in Table 2 show that Sweden succeeds in lifting poor people quickly out of poverty and unemployment, while Germany and Italy are characterised by a very high proportion of persistent poverty and long-term unemployment, although the inequality level and poverty rate are significantly lower in Germany than in Italy. Both the success of the Swedish inclusion regime in restoring the agency of the poor and unemployed and the relative failure of the German and Italian inclusion regimes have to be explained.

Before looking at different organisational challenges associated with vertical and horizontal coordination that determine the availability of active inclusion strategies, a first answer to the question why the Swedish inclusion regime fares significantly better than its German and Italian counterparts focuses on the budgetary constraints of active inclusion, i.e. on expenditure data. Our first hypothesis is *that a high minimum income and high expenditures on ALMPs and social services are decisive for combating poverty, bringing the unemployed into employment and thus restoring their agency*. This hypothesis can be tested on the basis of selected indicators for the three pillars of active inclusion (cf. Table 3). For minimum income provision, we use three indicators provided by the OECD and one indicator from Bahle et al. (2011, p. 170) on MIS coverage; for ALMPs, we use the expenditure for ALMPs (unweighted and weighted by the unemployment share) and an indicator calculated on the basis of estimates of Venn (2012) for the strictness of monitoring and sanctioning of benefit recipients; and for social services, we use two indicators provided by EUROSTAT pertaining to the provision of social services in general (disability, old age, survivors, unemployment, housing, family and social inclusion) and family services more particularly. On the basis of these indicators, Sweden, Germany and Italy can be described as representatives of three different patterns of active inclusion.

Sweden can be considered an example of a comprehensive inclusion system. In spite of the reduction of expenditures for ALMP in the last years, Sweden is still among the active inclusion front runners, with the highest spending level on ALMPs and high levels of minimum income provision for married couples, singles and the long-term unemployed. In contrast to other countries, the Swedish expenditures on social services are higher than that in other European countries, while the monitoring and sanctioning of benefit recipients are less strict than that in other European countries. Sweden is an example of the “service approach countries” (Kautto, 2002). In Sweden, all three pillars of the active inclusion model are highly developed. Therefore, the preconditions for restoring the agency of the excluded should be very good.

In Germany minimum income levels, at least for couples, are even higher than that in Sweden. Redistribution is a distinctive feature of the German inclusion regime. The activation pillar is also highly developed, whereas the role of social and family services is clearly below the Swedish level. This regime is thus based on two of the three pillars of an ideal-typical active inclusion strategy.

Table 3. Three dimensions of active inclusion: selected indicators (2010).

	Sweden: an example of comprehensive inclusion	Germany: an example of redistributive inclusion	Italy: an example of minimal inclusion
Minimum income for single persons (in % of median household income, including cash housing assistance)	51.0	43.0	0.0
Minimum income for married couples	42.0	51.0	0.0
Minimum income for long-term unemployed (over 60 months of unemployment; 4 family types)	65.0	61.0	9.0
Minimum income claimants (share of population 20–64 years; 2007)	2.3	11.3	(low)
Redistributive intensity (difference between the income inequality [Gini] before and after social transfers)	0.06	0.04	0.01
ALMPs (expenditure in % of GDP)	0.81	0.56	0.32
Activation intensity (in % of GDP; per percentage point of unemployment*100,000)	0.10	0.08	0.04
Conditionality (monitoring of job search and sanctions for refusing job offers (0: low; 2.5: high; 2011))	0.75	0.94	1.5
Social services (benefits in kind, without sickness/health care, in % of GDP)	5.65	1.63	0.35
Family services (family benefits in kind, in % of GDP)	1.59	0.99	0.63

Sources: Eurostat, OECD, Bahle et al. (2011, p. 170) and Venn (2012).

Finally, *Italy* has been chosen as an example of a minimal inclusion model because all dimensions of active inclusion are less developed in Italy than in Germany and Sweden. Italy's investments in social services, activation policies and income protection are lower. The redistributive power of the welfare state as measured by income inequality before and after social transfers is lower than that in the two other countries. Therefore, the possibilities for restoring the agency of the poor and socially excluded should be very limited.

On the basis of these mostly financial indicators, one cannot explain the previously described poverty dynamics especially in Germany and Italy. Given the strong role of activation and income provision in Germany, a significant gap between the proportion of persistently poor and long-term unemployed people in Germany and Italy could have been expected rather than quasi-identical proportions. Therefore, other factors have to be considered for explaining the observed national patterns of poverty and social exclusion.

4. The organisation of active inclusion in three European countries

Besides the financial constraints previously discussed, the outcomes of active inclusion strategies also depend on the way in which public, private and third-sector organisations in Sweden, Germany and Italy deal with fragmented competences as well as with the heterogeneity of the required employment and social services. Therefore, we will now discuss the implementation of active inclusion strategies in the three countries. The following

analysis is based on a document analysis and 45 semi-structured expert interviews with relevant policy-makers involved in the making and implementation of anti-poverty policies at the national level in the three countries. The interviews have been transcribed, coded and analysed following the guidelines of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000). *We focus on the concrete organisational structures of providing MIS, activation and social services because we assume that the outcomes of active inclusion – the social integration of the poor and long-term unemployed and the restoration of their agency – are not only a result of the previously discussed expenditures, but also of the coordination of heterogeneous policy fields and actors and different administrative and political levels.* Therefore, we begin first by discussing the horizontal dimension of coordinating minimum income benefits, ALMPs and social services. This involves the coordination of different tasks, actors and types of organisations (public, private and third sector). Secondly, we analyse the vertical dimension of these coordination tasks, since social services are traditionally offered and organised at the municipal level, whereas public employment services (PESs) are usually regulated at the national level.⁵

4.1. Comprehensive inclusion in action: the Swedish case

Minimum income protection in Sweden consists of the social assistance system, which is regulated by the Social Services Act in effect since 1982 and restructured in 2001. It can be defined as centrally framed and based on local autonomy (Bergmark & Minas, 2010; Minas & Øverbye, 2010). In accordance with the Swedish tradition of pronounced municipal autonomy, the funding responsibility for social assistance lies primarily with the 290 Swedish municipalities. Organisational changes, social innovation, decision-making structures and administrative divisions and outcomes thus depend on political decisions taken in the municipal Social Service Boards, as well as on the practices of social workers. With respect to the high level of decentralisation and extensive discretionary powers, one has to ask whether the Swedish social assistance system is well equipped to provide all three pillars of active inclusion and to restore the agency of the excluded in a coherent way. This especially concerns access to and the provision of ALMPs, which require the involvement of different levels and policy fields.

4.1.1. Minimum income provision

The Swedish social assistance legislation consists of a national framework law drafted in general terms, mostly in the form of general intentions, objectives and imprecise requirements regarding benefit eligibility. Responsibility for both implementation and funding is based on discretionary powers at the local level. The municipality and local administrative authorities have both the possibility and responsibility to shape their own (more detailed) rules. Furthermore, social workers assess whether or not social assistance is granted. The same applies to the duration of the benefit, the size of additional subsidies and the beneficiaries' obligations. This weakens the prediction of individual entitlements (Billquist, 1999; Byberg, 2002; Minas, 2005; Puide, 2000), which also increases non-take-up (Gustafsson, 2002; Mood, 2004). However, certain regulatory mechanisms restrict a full decentralised profile of social assistance. Since 1998, the National Board of Health and Welfare has had the responsibility to develop national standards for social assistance, defining both the amount given to households and the kinds of needs to be included in the standard. In 2013, changes in national regulations have made it possible and advisable that local governments take a stand on what is to be considered a reasonable amount for covering each

need included in the standard, without changing the total amount (National Board of Health & Welfare, 2013). Furthermore, the individual has a legal right to appeal to an administrative court, which applies to all decisions made under the Social Services Act.

4.1.2. *Access to ALMPs*

Social assistance in Sweden is generally directed more at activation than at redistribution, as indicated by the high expenditure on ALMPs. Since the 1990s, a dual structure of labour market services has emerged. Besides the PES at the national level which is run, regulated and funded according to the same standards all over the country, the municipalities provide complementary labour market services. In the early 1990s, the number of unemployed people rose quickly, which meant a huge challenge for Swedish labour market policies. This led to local initiatives taken by municipalities to run local activation programmes to complement the PES offers (Johansson & Hornemann Møller, 2009; Thorén, 2012). Since 2013, legal changes in the Social Services Act allowed the local authorities to require social assistance recipients, irrespective of age, to participate in local activation projects. However, the coordination between the local offices of the centrally organised PES and the municipalities is weak. Several respondents referred to the lack of coordination in terms of a “drainpipe”. Following the drainpipe-logic, every government department and public authority focuses on its own specific responsibility and acts in accordance with its own financial leeway. A leading European Social Fund (ESF)-employee revealed: “The PES is governmental and the social services are municipal, and they obviously face major challenges in cooperation. At the same time they have a mutual responsibility, but it’s not working.” In principle, social assistance beneficiaries have access to public social welfare services such as PES services like any other citizen. However, in practice, a part of the social assistance beneficiaries are covered by municipal activation programmes and receive less assistance from the PES because the latter avoids registering persons with multiple barriers to employment, operating instead according to the marketisation logic embraced by the central government. In the words of a representative of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions:

PES and social services are driven by different logics. Some jobs seekers are evaluated as unemployable by PES because they are considered to be too far from the labour market, while the social services make another assessment and find the same people as suitable to establish themselves on the labour market. Therefore, municipalities have started their own local activation projects to help these people.

Starting in January 2008, the present Centre-Conservative government has been pushing for an increasing role of private profit-oriented providers in order to support the unemployed with more effective types of coaching activities (Lundin, 2011; Lundin & Thelander, 2012). Even the local authorities use for-profit providers for local activation services such as apprenticeships and education for unemployed people, yet different patterns and degrees of cooperation between public and private providers can be found at the local level (Panican, Johansson, Koch, & Angelin, 2013).

4.1.3. *Access to quality services*

A set of laws guarantees universal access to social services such as social work, counselling, primary and secondary education, childcare and elderly care. These services are provided

and coordinated by the municipalities. Beneficiaries do not have any privileged access to particular public services, e.g. debt counselling, financial advice or drug counselling, but can apply for such services at the local social welfare office like all other citizens. Hence, there is no automatic link between redistributive inclusion strategies and social services. However, in line with the Swedish principle of universalism, quality services are broadly accessible to everybody. Non-public providers can be found in the areas of education, health, elderly care and childcare.

To sum up, the main feature of active inclusion in Sweden is universal access to social and employment services in combination with a high level of decentralisation and local discretion in the fields of income provision and local activation. Firstly, social workers have high discretionary power in assessing to what extent a person is entitled to social assistance. Secondly, the dual structure of ALMP provision between the PES at the national level and the municipalities at the local level comes along with a lack of coordination and cooperation. Especially the services of the PES are difficult to access for those beneficiaries farthest from the labour market. Although social services are not directly linked to social assistance, they are broadly accessible to all citizens. Finally, patterns and degrees of cooperation between public and private providers vary at the local level, but the overall role of non-public providers has increased since 2006.

4.2. Redistributive inclusion in action: the German case

Eighty-six per cent of the 7.5 million persons (9% of the population) who received a minimum income in Germany in 2010 received UB II, which is the dominant MIS. UB II is an MIS for working-age persons and their households, and is accompanied by enabling as well as demanding policies. On the one hand, the employability of beneficiaries was improved by identifying multiple barriers to employment that should be met by adequate labour market and social services. On the other hand, the acceptable work criterion was tightened and a sanction regime installed (Dingeldey, 2011). Thus, besides providing minimum income benefits, UB II is closely coupled with labour market and social services for working-age persons. Because the delivery of UB II requires the cooperation of multiple agencies in different policy fields, it is a huge organisational challenge to coordinate all three pillars in order to ensure broad access to all benefits and services. Therefore, the question is whether this horizontal and vertical coordination functions in practice.

4.2.1. Minimum income provision

UB II is available to all persons living in households whose income and assets are below the nationally defined social minimum. The UB II minimum income benefit is non-discretionary and can be considered a legal right, even if benefit-reducing sanctions can be imposed on beneficiaries.

4.2.2. Access to ALMPs

Beneficiaries have no right but privileged access to the employment and social services constituting the enabling elements of UB II. Except for job counselling and placement, these services are discretionary. UB II is administered by the Federal Employment Agency (FEA) and the German municipalities. The FEA is responsible for benefit payments, additional demands, contributions to the statutory health and long-term care insurances and labour market services. The municipalities are responsible for housing and heating

costs and social services. In order to organise the delivery of all UB II transfers and services in a coherent way, the administrations of both municipalities and the employment agency have been merged into currently 410 integrated local organisations, the so-called Jobcentres that function as one-stop shops. With the exception of 25% of the municipalities organising Jobcentres on their own, the national FEA regulates labour market services that are implemented locally. Outcomes are measured in an on-going monitoring process. Some interviewees also reported that the Jobcentres are primarily oriented towards fulfilling the targets of labour market integration set by the supervising FEA. This results in a work-first orientation that seeks to place as many persons in work as possible in a short period of time, leading to “creaming and parking” effects because it is increasingly hard to find jobs for persons distant from the labour market. A representative of a Free Welfare Association (FWA) explained how targets set by the FEA collide with satisfying the needs of beneficiaries:

There is the group of the so-called distant from the labour market (...), who often have physical disabilities, mental health problems, or low qualifications. The focus cannot be on “labour market integration as quickly as possible”, but that is what a Jobcenter is monitored on, the so-called integration rate which is set as a target by the FEA: “Well, accomplish an integration rate of let’s say five percent or let’s say 10 percent”.

Complementary to the Jobcentres, private providers play a central role in the provision of labour market services at the local level in Germany. Outsourcing labour market services such as activation and training measures was informed by the need to provide individualised services to unemployed persons (Eichhorst, Grienberger-Zingerle, & Konle-Seidl, 2008, p. 44). While payment for placement services is performance based, activation and training measures are paid for on a fees-for-service basis (Zimmermann, Aurich, Graziano, & Furtés, 2014). Following target values such as efficiency and effectiveness, contracts are awarded to private providers that offer cheap labour market services guaranteeing quick success, which additionally produces “creaming and parking” effects. Another representative of a FWA reported:

It is also the question of how the procurement law is actually organised and what one actually needs to do. Is the best offer the cheapest one or not? There are huge discussions. And this has led to this informal situation. Even if it is legal in accordance with the procurement law, providers will have relatively short and quick successes of placement because they feel better off with this. And this also leads to these creaming effects.

Both public and private labour market services therefore focus mainly on persons close to the labour market.

4.2.3. *Access to quality services*

Labour market services can be flanked by social services such as childcare, debt counselling, psycho-social counselling or drug counselling. However, our interviewees identified a limited offer and a lack of coordination between employment and social services. The local organisations regulate the provision of these services on their own. Following the German tradition of public–private partnerships in the provision of welfare, social services are mostly carried out by FWAs whose services are paid from the federal purse (Zimmer et al., 2009). The majority of the Jobcentre’s front-line staff are administrative clerks and therefore often not qualified to identify individual needs for social services such as drug

counselling. Interviewees confirmed that close contacts between the Jobcentres and the FWAs contribute to a better coordination of individual integration trajectories. However, the existence of such interfaces between Jobcentres and social service providers depends on the commitment of local actors. Links between social services and minimum income benefits and ALMPs vary strongly between municipalities. In general, the integration of ALMPs with social services and the offer of social services are very limited.

Summing up, the German UB II scheme generally provides minimum income benefits covering the nationally defined subsistence minimum as well as ALMPs. The Jobcentres are responsible for the delivery of UB II. These Jobcentres are designed as one-stop shops, most of which are joint ventures between a municipality and the FEA. Activation strategies are regulated at the national level and implemented locally. The monitoring procedures of the FEA vis-à-vis local Jobcentres as well as the efficiency- and effectiveness-oriented private providers trigger “creaming and parking” effects. While the MIS and activation pillars are closely connected, the link to decentralised social services as the third pillar of active inclusion is rather weak. Especially due to institutional constraints such as an enormous local variety of interfaces between Jobcentres and providers of social services such as the FWAs, not all beneficiaries have access to quality services. Personal advisers who are not qualified to identify beneficiaries’ needs further reinforce this effect which reduces the opportunity to restore the agency of the most disadvantaged groups.

4.3. Minimum inclusion in action: the Italian case

The Italian active inclusion regime is characterised by the absence of a general, tax-financed, non-contributory MIS for working-age individuals, a non-binding national regulatory framework for social services and a high territorial diversity in terms of benefits, beneficiaries and service offers. Also labour market policies are very weakly developed in Italy as a result of low investments, accordingly underdeveloped active measures and a contribution-based UB system providing adequate protection only to a limited segment of the unemployed (Jessoula & Vesan, 2011). The absence of a national MIS reflects and stabilises the essential role of the Church, the family and kin solidarity as a source of both care and income support for household members (Naldini, 2002). In addition, the existing residual forms of minimum income support, activation policies and social services for poor individuals are hardly coordinated with each other. In the last decade, some promising and mostly experimental forms of active inclusion could be observed. The question is whether a coherent active inclusion regime is emerging in Italy.

4.3.1. Minimum income provision

With the exception of a short experimentation period until 2002, Italy has no national minimum income system for the whole population. Social assistance has been considered a competence of the family, Catholic welfare institutions and the local level – but not of the central state. The economic crisis since 2008 has favoured the introduction of a new measure, the *Carta Acquisti* (Social Card (SC)). This SC corresponds to the payment of €40 per month to poor Italian citizens older than 65 years of age or with children under the age of three. The restricted eligibility criteria, low generosity and lacking conditionality of the SC as well as the fact that no special services are foreseen strengthen the passive nature of the measure, which provides only limited additional resources for buying food and paying for utilities. In 2013, a new SC (NSC) was introduced on an experimental basis, which is an important step beyond the residual, passive and charitable orientation

of the previous Italian MIS. The NSC is universal in scope, although some groups have priority access; it is much more generous than the ordinary SC (€231–404 per month depending on household size). It provides a mix of cash transfers and social services and implies rights and duties defined in personal contracts with the beneficiaries. The NSC is also characterised by a clear governance architecture in which local municipalities and third-sector organisations play a key role besides the Italian Post and the national insurance agency. The main weakness of this measure is the fact that it is once again a scarcely financed pilot project currently operating in only 12 larger Italian cities, whose future depends on the interests and orientation of future governments.

In this scenario, the regional and local level plays a fundamental role in providing income support to families at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Some regions have introduced regional MISs, financed by regional resources and managed in association with the municipalities. In the absence of a national regulatory framework, these measures are usually discretionary. In addition, municipalities provide income support benefits subject to budgetary constraints. Benefit amounts, eligibility criteria and the benefit duration differ strongly between regions and municipalities.

4.3.2. *Access to ALMPs*

The Italian PES is state-centric, hierarchically organised and judged as fragmented and inefficient, although reforms in 1997 improved the situation by the creation of regional employment agencies (*servizi per l'impiego*) and some years later also by private agencies (e.g. for job counselling or training). These decentralisation processes increased the role of the regions and provinces in the area of active inclusion (Borghi & van Berkel, 2007). Between 1997 and 2003, the reforms were furthermore accompanied by targeted activation programmes that tried to overcome the dominance of passive labour market policies in Italy (Graziano, 2012). In addition, local programmes have been implemented, sometimes in partnership with private actors (in Turin, for example, by a foundation of the bank *Compagnia di San Paolo*; in Milan, by the public foundation *Fondazione Welfare Ambrosiano*). However, substantial implementation gaps and regional disparities in the performance of placement and labour market services persist. For example, the difficulty of offering suitable jobs or valuable training courses in areas where unemployment is particularly high has hampered the effective translation of activation principles into practice (Jessoula & Vesan, 2011). Activation measures have been funded mostly by the ESF and therefore have taken place primarily at the regional level and in Northern Italian municipalities, which led to huge regional disparities – once again due to the lack of a national framework.

4.3.3. *Access to quality services*

The national framework for social assistance does not establish binding criteria and therefore does not guarantee the provision of social services throughout the country. These are mostly provided and regulated at the regional and local level, even if local social services are partly financed by the national Social Assistance Fund. A national-level representative of the Italian municipalities explained: “At the territorial level, economic support and care services are guaranteed by the municipalities, although in a fragmented and diversified manner, also depending on the capacity and size of the various municipalities.” NGOs, institutions related to the social partners, private foundations, the Catholic church and also individual citizens play an important role. Since 2000, the local programming plans (*piano di zona*) have increased the involvement of local non-institutional actors in both policy programming and

Table 4. The organisation of active inclusion in Sweden, Germany and Italy.

	Minimum income provision	ALMPs		Social services		
	Vertical coordination, decentralisation	Vertical coordination, decentralisation	Horizontal coordination of actors and activities	Vertical coordination, decentralisation	Horizontal coordination of actors and activities	Selectivity of active inclusion
Sweden	High level of decentralisation, general national framework with a high level of discretion for social workers	Dual structure of national and municipal activation (weak coordination)	Primacy of municipal activation programmes, limited role of non-public providers	National framework for universal services	No direct link but universal access to social services. Overall, dominance of public providers	Low (universal access to employment and social services)
Germany	Nationally defined legal right (limited by sanction regime at the local level)	National responsibility locally implemented (with the exception of some municipalities), monitoring process	Organisational integration of MIS and ALMP in one-stop shops, marketisation of training offers by private providers	High local autonomy of service provision, often by welfare associations	Rather weak links between ALMP and social services due to low-skilled personal advisers and limited instruments. Crucial role of FWAs	Medium (Creaming and parking)
Italy	No national MIS, but SC/ NSC in 12 larger cities. Heterogeneous income support benefits provided at regional and/or local level	Lack of coordination between provincial and municipal competences	Fragmented activation, implementation gaps concerning activation measures	Lack of national binding criteria for social services; lack of coordination between administrative levels, leading to regional variation	Fragmented, heterogeneous provision of services. No full territorial coverage of single point of access. Third-sector organisation as relevant providers	High (differentiated coverage with high territorial variation)

service delivery, strengthening the position of mostly not-for-profit third-sector actors. Regional discrepancies are again very strong regarding both expenditures and the supply of services and benefits. A representative of the National Association of Social Workers assessed: “The system of social services is highly fragmented in Italy, each municipality can decide in which direction to act and which organizational structure to develop.” A single point of access to social services (*segretariato sociale*) that can act as a standardised gate-keeper does not exist: In many municipalities, especially in the South, the only services targeted to poor people are provided by non-profits and charitable associations.

To sum up, the absence of a national MIS leads to enormous regional variations in Italy, although pilot projects such as the (new) SC have been introduced in 12 larger cities. Activation policies are fragmented and inefficient, also due to a weak coordination between municipality-based social assistance services and provincial-based PESs. Several types of local actors are involved in the provision of social services. These services lack national binding requirements/criteria and sometimes single points of access. In a comparative perspective, the Italian system of active inclusion is still rather fragmented, residual, heterogeneous and uncoordinated. As a result, people at risk of poverty run the risk of being often excluded from active inclusion policies; the possibilities to restore their agency are seriously limited.

In conclusion, the above findings point to huge differences between the three country cases. Social assistance in Sweden is most universalistic, thus reflecting the concept of active inclusion to the highest degree, although the Swedish system is also highly decentralised, which leads to different patterns and intensities of cooperation between public and private providers at the local level. Despite a dual structure of national and municipal activation, municipal ALMPs are well developed. There is no direct link to quality services, but these are universally accessible via other channels. Universal access is thus a successful alternative to the integration of social and employment services via single organisational gateways. By contrast, the transfer-based German system focuses on the activation of social assistance recipients, administered by Jobcentres designed as one-stop shops and in 75% of the cases as joint ventures of a municipality and the national FEA. However, the link to social services – locally provided by public–private actors – is weak, especially due to frictions and organisational demarcations between different actors at different administrative levels. The monitoring processes of the FEA, both internal and vis-à-vis private providers oriented towards efficiency and effectiveness, foster “creaming and parking” effects which limit seriously the possibilities to restore the agency of the poor. In Italy, finally, the absence of a nationally regulated MIS and a generally weak coordination between different administrative levels lead to enormous regional variations. However, due to local and provincial initiatives and foundations, some (mostly Northern and Central Italian) regions succeed in offering integrated forms of social inclusion policies, even if the limited coordinating role of the national level coupled with the low horizontal coordination of ALMPs and social services excludes people at risk of poverty from fully fledged active inclusion opportunities (Table 4).

5. Conclusion

Active inclusion strategies are based on a combination of sufficient income provision, ALMPs and broad access to quality services. They rely on a concept of poverty that focuses not only on a lack of resources and material deprivation, but also on the loss of status and agency caused by poverty and social exclusion. Combating poverty therefore requires restoring the agency of the poor – especially by providing them with the support required for a better integration into work and society. Three different national patterns of poverty and exclusion in Europe were analysed in detail in the paper: The Swedish case

characterised by high inclusion and the German and Italian cases characterised by higher proportions of persistent poverty and long-term unemployment. These different patterns were first explained by different funding regimes: The Swedish comprehensive inclusion regime is characterised by high levels of minimum income support, activation and social services; the redistributive inclusion regime of Germany is characterised by a lower level of social and family services and Italy's minimum inclusion regime is less advanced on all three dimensions. However, spending indicators cannot fully explain the effective inclusion or exclusion of disadvantaged groups, as is shown by the comparable long-term and persistent poverty rates in Italy and Germany in spite of completely different expenditure patterns. Therefore it is necessary to take also into account the organisational structures to understand these outcomes. In the analysis earlier in the paper, several factors proved to be particularly important for the more or less successful inclusion of the poor: In a highly decentralised system such as the Swedish one, universally accessible social and employment services and the additional local provision of income assistance and employment services contribute to a successful fight against persistent poverty and long-term unemployment. In contrast, "creaming and parking" effects in Germany reduce the chances of mitigating poverty, even if the one-stop shops integrating competences in the fields of social and employment policies set a procedural "good practice" example. Finally, in Italy, The fragmented and heterogeneous provision of social benefits and services and the lack of coordination with ALMPs explain the Italian policy outcomes, which could however be even worse given the overall lack of a coordinated national strategy for active inclusion. In addition, it must be considered that these policy designs are not static but constantly changing. Activation policies in Sweden are currently moving towards a greater emphasis on incentives and work-first approaches (Bengtsson, 2014). A similar trend can also be observed in Germany, where labour market instruments have been rearranged and tightened in order to increase their effectiveness and efficiency (Kaltenborn, 2011). In Italy, the introduction of the SC and the NSC as pilot projects is an example of an ongoing experimentation in the field of minimum income protection. Overall, this paper contributes to the debate on the financial and organisational prerequisites of a successful anti-poverty and activation strategy aiming at restoring the agency of the most disadvantaged groups.

Acknowledgements

We thank especially Tim Goedemé, Daniel Clegg and Deborah Rice for their suggestions and critique on this contribution.

Funding

This work was written in the context of the European Commission 7th Framework Programme project "Combating Poverty in Europe: Re-organising Active Inclusion through Participatory and Integrated Modes of Multilevel Governance" supported by the European Union [Grant Agreement no. 290488].

Notes

1. Activation policies are characterised by a "broad range of policies and measures targeted at people receiving public income support or in danger of becoming permanently excluded from the labour market [in order...] to assist the target group to enter or re-enter the labour market" (Drøpping, Hvinden, & Vik, 1999, p. 134).
2. An indicator of a significant proportion of such a "hard core" would be a high proportion of persistent poverty. EUROSTAT defines persistent poverty as the percentage of the population living

in households with an equivalised disposable income below 60% of the national median after social transfers in the current year and at least two out of the three preceding years.

3. Frazer and Marlier (2013, p. 90) show that the policy design and implementation of active inclusion policies for those who can work differ significantly in the three countries: While Sweden is characterised by a comprehensive policy design and integrated implementation, Germany is in an intermediary position and Italy in a weak position.
4. In a very thoughtful comment to the authors (9 September 2013), Tim Goedemé highlights the consequences of this definition:

(If) someone has very few resources and would qualify for social assistance but does not take up the benefit (and prefers to starve rather than to be supported), she cannot be considered to be poor, as she is not dependent on social assistance. Similarly, you seem to imply that if there were no social assistance at all, there would be no poor.

Although Simmel (1965, p. 138) refers not only to institutionalised forms of social assistance but also to all forms of assistance, Goedemé's interpretation is close to the conclusion Simmel draws himself:

[Until the acceptance of assistance] poverty is individual suffering, without social consequences (...) no one is socially poor until he has been assisted (...) The poor, as a sociological category, are not those who suffer specific deficiencies and deprivations, but those who receive assistance or should receive it according to social norms.

However, the last phrase shows that Simmel would accept the claim of Goedemé and Rottiers (2011, p. 82) that "all starving people can be considered as poor", since they *should* receive assistance.

5. The reports on which these analyses are based have been written by the authors of this paper and Ilaria Madama, Matteo Jessoula (both University of Milan, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Milan, Italy), Anna Angelin, Håkan Johansson and Max Koch (all three Lund University, School of Social Work, Lund, Sweden).

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