

Call for Papers ESPAnet NL-VL Farwell Conference of Prof. Dr. Trudie Knijn

‘Justice in Social Policy and Social Work in the Low Countries’

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Abstract for the Parallel Stream Session A: Stream A.3: Poverty as a matter of justice.

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Better chances on the Job Market Thanks to the Employment Services? - Employment Services as a redistributor of Opportunities and Chances.

Long-term unemployment, a well-known problem across the world, concerns not only those without a job but the entire society and affects the core of a welfare state. Particularly at risk are people with multiple impediments that prevent a successful job placement. In Germany, long-term unemployed did not benefit from the prospering labor market in the same extent like short term unemployed. Especially if accompanied by other impediments such as low-level education, poor health, 50+, immigrant status, motherhood or engagement in care for other relatives. In view of the German change in paradigm toward the activating welfare state and the outstanding economic developments from 2010 onward and the fall in the unemployment rate that accompanied this, the impression cannot be avoided that the unemployed can or should be activated with ease, almost like flicking a switch. But one thing is certain, employment services cannot create jobs on the first labor market, it can only impart or reorganize labor market opportunities and chances. In this connection, those who struggle when it comes to the process of providing their own manpower are offered the kind of support intended to enable them to re-integrate. But almost 2/3 of all welfare recipients in Germany have multiple impediments, which hinder a successful transition from welfare receipt back to sustainable and sufficient employment. The panel survey “Labour market and social security” (PASS; ~15,000 respondents in ~10,000 households), carried out by the Institute of Employment Research (IAB), shows that it is highly unlikely that they will get back to work. However, unlikely does not mean impossible.

In a sequential-explanatory mixed-method study, the very scarce “success stories” of unlikely transitions from long-term unemployment to work were explored by qualitative interviews with a focus on biography, accompanied by qualitative network techniques in order to get a more detailed insight into relevant actors involved in the processes which promote the transition from welfare receipt to employment. We came to understand that certain biographical resources like informal skills and resilience, combined with contextual factors rather than formal job-placement procedures according to activation policies, influence sustainable transitions. Small and medium-sized enterprises with low formal access barriers are more open to offer job opportunities to a wider variety of applicants than large companies are. Employment services do have a strong positive impact on heightening qualification levels but struggle in offering appropriate support to translate these skills into an individual attractive application profile and strategy. It came to our attention that at some extent the formal processes of activation which intend to heighten the chances for labor market integration have unintended negative

effects on this goal. Especially sanctions which are facilitated as a tool for gaining high system compliance regarding processes of employment services have a strong negative impact on fragile living circumstances and diminish chances for labor market integration.