

1 Activation policies and the Nordic welfare states

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The amount of literature devoted to analysing ‘activation’ continues to grow, and while activation policy can be analysed along many different dimensions – legal, political, social, cultural and economic – the connections between the different dimensions and discourses are seldom made (Kananen, forthcoming). Typically, legal arguments consider contracts, the nature of rights and/or obligations, political arguments often consider the behaviour of parties and pressure groups, or the social politics relating to gender, class, oppression and social control, and related are the social arguments that turn to concerns about social citizenship and social cohesion; while cultural interpretations open up new frameworks for thinking about identity, change, and the borders of the national welfare states. Finally, the economic arguments tend to focus on ‘incentives’ and ‘moral hazards’, and the economic ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ of activation schemes for society as a whole. It is now timely to reflect on the latest developments and directions in ‘activation’ policy in the Nordic welfare states, ten years on from the Great Recession that arguably triggered a new third wave of ALMP reforms across the advanced societies according to Lødemel and Gubrium (2014), the first and second waves being the early-1990s and early-2000s respectively. In order to shed new light on welfare state restructuring and social change, this panel welcomes theoretical and empirical studies of active labour market policies and their effects in the Nordic welfare states, we invite contributions that focus on or span the different spheres and dimensions broadly conceived as: legal, social, cultural and economic.