



Introducing Young Unemployed to the “Sobering Reality of Work”: ‘Cooling Out’ in Active Labour Market Policies

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Introducing Young Unemployed to the “Sobering Reality of Work”: ‘Cooling Out’ in Active Labour Market Policies

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Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit konzentriert sich auf 'cooling out' in der aktiven Arbeitsmarktpolitik, eine Praxis, die in Verbindung zum neoliberalen Aktivierungsparadigma steht und berufliche Ambitionen senkt um einen raschen Übergang in ein reguläres Arbeitsverhältnis sicherzustellen. Anhand von ExpertInneninterviews untersuche ich institutionelle Muster verschiedener Ebenen und die persönlichen Erfahrungen von TeilnehmerInnen im Wiener Trainingsprogramm 'Beyond the past' (anonymisiert). Dieses bietet befristete Arbeitsplätze für junge Arbeitslose mit dem Ziel, jene zu aktivieren – Vorbereitung für und Übergang zum ersten Arbeitsmarkt. Es ist ein perfektes Beispiel für eine hierarchische Implementierung, institutionelle Kooperation und das Zusammenspiel von politischen Schlüsselakteuren in Wien. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Strukturen auf den ersten Blick zwar sehr hierarchisch erscheinen, aber interaktive Prozesse auf allen Ebenen vorhanden sind und die lokalen Organisationen beträchtlichen Freiraum bei der endgültigen Umsetzung haben. Die ExpertInnen in den Institutionen stützen sich unhinterfragt auf 'cooling out' als notwendige Praxis der Arbeitsmarktintegration. Dennoch wird Rücksicht auf individuelle Präferenzen genommen. Die interviewten TeilnehmerInnen scheinen sich über die aktiven und passiven Formen von institutionalisiertem 'cooling out' nicht bewusst zu sein. Die abweichenden Sichtweisen von ExpertInnen und jungen Erwachsenen unterstreichen die Wichtigkeit einer subjektiven Perspektive auf 'cooling out'.

Schlüsselwörter

Cooling out, Aktivierung, Aktive Arbeitsmarktpolitik, Institutionen des Arbeitsmarktes, Übergänge von Jugendlichen

Abstract

This paper focuses on 'cooling out' in active labour market policies, a practice that lowers occupational aspirations aiming at a quick transition into regular employment and is tied to the neoliberal Activation paradigm. Using expert interviews, I investigate institutional patterns on multiple scales including individual experience of participants within the Viennese training program 'Beyond the past' (anonymized). This program offers transitional workplaces for young unemployed with the aim to activate them – prepare them for, and transfer them to the first labour market. In this regard, it is a perfect example of top-down policy integration, institutional cooperation and the interplay of Vienna's regional labour market actors. The results indicate that the program is embedded in a quite hierarchical institutional structure, yet interactive processes are present on all levels and the local organisations has considerable discretion concerning the final implementation. Institutional experts rely unquestionably on 'cooling out' as necessary to achieve labour market integration. However, they still consider individual occupational preferences. The interviewed participants do not seem to be aware of the passive and active forms of institutionalised 'cooling out'. Those diverging views of experts and young adults emphasize the importance of a subjective perspective on 'cooling out.'

Keywords

Cooling out, Activation, Active labour market policy, Labour market institutions, Youth transition

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, a change took in European governance paradigms took place. The welfare states started to transform under the pressure of the neoliberalist dogma, leading to the emergence of Activation policies. Although they take different forms in different countries, the general trend of less public service and more self-responsibility is present across Europe. Active labour market policies (ALMP) are among the most affected political areas. As Bothfeld and Betzelt (2011) argue, Activation is not only about reorganizing labour. It is the very foundation of welfare state provisions, which is at stake.

In this paper, I address this issue by focusing on '*cooling out*', a specific practice that lowers occupational aspirations described by Goffmann (1952; 1962), Clark (1960), Walther (2003; 2015; 2017), Carroll et al. (2016) and many more, which, I venture to argue, is part of the Activation paradigm. Steiber et al. (2017) stressed that over-hasty integration in low-quality jobs that does not represent the person's wishes bears a negative effect on the subjective employability, especially for young unemployed under the age of 25. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness and avoid lasting devaluation of potential workforce. My goal is to understand how '*cooling out*' is institutionally shaped, how it actually works and how experts as well as participants experience it. In order to integrate my findings into a bigger picture, I try to comprehend the connection between '*cooling out*' and the Activation paradigm by analysing state of the art literature.

The investigative nature of my objectives demands a qualitative approach. Therefore, a case study is the basis of this research: 'Beyond the past', an active labour market program for young recipients of minimum income (Mindestsicherung) in the City of Vienna. It is indirectly part of initiatives listed in the Viennese governmental agreement signed in 2015, which is again based on the regional, national and European lifelong learning strategies (Die Sozialpartner 2007; Stadt Wien 2015; Pot and Kazepov 2016; Stadt Wien 2016). The program is especially interesting as it stands out in its size of funding, number of participants and its remarkable practical approach. The database consists of multiple semi-structured interviews with experts and young participants, which were conducted in the course of Young AduLLLT, a comparative research project with 15 partner institutions in 9 EU member states funded by Horizon 2020. Practically, it investigates current Lifelong

Learning (LLL) policies for young adults in Europe, using a wide-ranging mixed methods approach.¹

In a first step, I explain the practice of *'cooling out'* and the Activation paradigm and examine their connection. Even though both are well-known concepts apparently no one linked them. In a second step, I describe the program's framework, looking briefly at the history of origin, followed by a more detailed picture of the institutional structure and interaction with young individuals. Thirdly, I focus on the most important empirical findings that result from the analysis of the interviews. In conclusion, I summarise central points of the research in the context of my research interest.

Theoretical concept of 'cooling out'

The concept of *'cooling out'* aspirations finds its origin in Goffman (1952; 1962) who described it with reference to victimization in the context of confidence tricks and to the education system. In the latter context, he focused on the handling of disappointed expectations and the interwoven hierarchy between clients (the ones who are affected by *'cooling out'*) and operators (actors who produce the effect) (Clark 1960). A general definition of the practice has been given by Walther (2003; 2015) who understands it as lowering expectations on career perspectives of so-called *"disadvantaged young"* to find integration in the labour market and further into society itself. According to Walther (2015), unrealistic occupational aspirations are often produced within peer groups rather than with reference to the economic reality. Furthermore in an earlier paper (Walther and Stauber 2007), he ascribes it to the process of *'heating up'* during education and through society itself – indoctrinating the tale of infinite possibilities.

An interesting contribution has been made by Clark (1960) who investigated *'cooling out'* in the US high education system in the 60ies. He argued that political culture (especially democracy) and society itself heated up aspirations to a point, where failure is inevitable for many in the given system. In order to avoid frustration, the system created a procedure of *"slow-killing of the lingering hopes"* (Clark 1960, no. 574). This soft *'cooling out'*

¹ <http://www.young-adults.eu/>

approach aimed at raising the students' (clients) self-awareness of their situation by manipulating compulsory consultation and noticeable exam pressure. However, the institutions of higher education (especially Junior Colleges) not only tried to get rid of weak students, they fostered a transition to lower-threshold education or directly to the labour market by valuing existing skills (Clark 1960). Although, this example refers to the higher education system, many parallels can be drawn to active labour market policies since the 'cooling out'-effects and possible solutions are very similar, as Walther (2003; 2015) has shown. He differentiates between soft end and hard end approaches. Whereas the first hints to subject-oriented and participatory youth policies, the second hints to demand-driven, liberal-economic labour market policies. Welfare policies, on the other hand, appear to be the intermediation between the two extremes.

Walther argues in the same direction as Clark, but he refers to the labour market stating that failure is part of the system, although the democratic idea says that everyone can do/learn/become everything. Individuals need to accept the fact that lower work positions are more adequate to their capacities, since there are not enough "well-recognised social positions that provide a reasonable life" (Walther 2003, no. 191). Therefore, it is not the mere search for labour market integration which is at stake; it is in fact "a societal struggle for recognition" (Walther 2015, no. 38). To ease this struggle, the state tries to kick off a process of coping by establishing gate-keepers (e.g. public employment service and public departments), who actively cool out aspirations and force young adults in standardised life-courses. While doing this, a central focus lies on the deficits of individuals rather than on their strengths. Furthermore, he states that also families take over a gate-keeper position as they put pressure on their young (paradigmatic indoctrination) to adopt their career perspectives according to 'realistic' options.

A main point of Walther's critique concerning the acting of the state is the over-institutionalisation of individual life courses in formal education and support structures, which does not consider the real living situations of young adults. On the one hand, individuals are forced to take responsibility; on the other, they are put into a passive role within paternalistic policy programs. A similar kind of discrepancy has been discussed by other scholars too (e.g. (Atzmüller and Knecht 2017; Atzmüller, Krenn and Papouschek 2012; Penz and Sauer 2016; Segal 2006).

The Activation Paradigm

The Activation paradigm has developed from a neoclassical economic approach and spread across Europe in the 1990s. It is still a dominant stream in political debates and provides an accustomed view of socio-economic thinking. The very basis is the idea of individuals as utility maximizers – homo economicus, which enables the policy makers to demand self-responsibility from its citizens and transforms the social state. Main drivers are the EU and the OECD, who strongly influence the discourse and exert pressure on countries to react (Betzelt and Bothfeld 2011). However, the debate and consequently the realised policies vary over time and among different countries (Iacono 2017), partially due to their welfare background, as Bonoli (2012) has shown. Austria with its conservative welfare history is generally considered a state with a low degree of Activation as one can see in the literature around the *Varieties of Capitalism*-approach (Allen 2006; Hancké 2009; Soskice and Hall 2001). Nevertheless, in recent decades policy reforms were implemented which, at least partially, changed the previous course (Ludwig-Mayerhofer and Wroblewski 2004; Fritsch, Teitzer and Verwiebe 2014).

The Activation paradigm found entrance in many policy fields (e.g. health care - (Hibbard and Greene 2013) or social policies - (van Berkel and Borghi 2008)); however, the focus of this paper lies on the labour market. There, its main features are:

“the priority given to paid work as primary access to social participation, the flexibilization of the regular employment relationship, the introduction of new labour promotion instruments, which are mainly oriented at ‘target groups’, and the restraint of social security provision [...]” (Betzelt and Bothfeld 2011, no. 5).

As a result of essentializing paid employment for being socially included, established mechanisms of social security begin to shift in a more liberal direction, which even intensifies material deprivation, social exclusion and segmentation (Eleveld 2017). Betzelt und Bothfeld (2011) show the paradox of Activation in labour market policies. On the one hand, the dependence on paid work increases; on the other hand, the quality of employment decreases, evident in growing precarious conditions and an exacerbating fear of job loss and with that loss of social status.

A keyword in the discussion around Activation is '*transition*'. It refers to a phase of moving from one economic but also social status to another, which can take place at any time in life. However, a very institutionalised transition is the one from the education system to the labour market. Since all young people in Austria have to go through that phase, '*cooling out*' appear to be a necessary part of the structure. In recent years direct trajectories get more and more replaced by indirect ones which increases pressure (e.g. constantly changing jobs, precarious work conditions and educational programs as reconciliation) (Walther 2003).

Looking at the essence of Activation, '*cooling out*' seems to be inevitable to create a cost-efficient transition to employment wherever labour force supply does not fit market demands. This means that it fosters the matching of open positions and available workers, but only the latter must make concessions. If the state follows this neoliberal trend, it puts economic demands before the needs of working-class citizens. This would further act against a balance between capital and labour. Even if a government follows a soft approach, the unemployed are, at least to some degree, forced to cool out and reorient their life according to market needs. Of course, a transition to employment without violating individual occupational aspirations seems to be a rational goal for all involved actors, no matter the system; however, if this is not possible in the given economic environment, '*cooling out*' emerges as necessary strategy to close the gap and with that reduce unemployment spells.

Therefore, I hypothesise that '*cooling out*' is a practice, which is essential to efficiently achieve the goals of Activation policies; Improve matching, serve market demands and reduce social expenditure. However, one must pay close attention since it is seldom called by its name.

Data and method

The empirical base of the case study are eight interviews (each about one hour), which have been conducted in mid-2017 for the Young AduLLLt research project: five structured interviews with narrative elements with young adults who participated in '*Beyond the past*' at that time and three semi-structured interviews with experts, one directly from the executing institution, one from the municipal department and one regional expert

from the public employment service (PES). The variation of experts allows me to gain insight in multiple, mutually connected levels (Helsper et al. 2010) and with that see the web of institutions, which influences the life course of young adults in various ways (Kazepov 2010). The structure of the interviews with the participants is adjusted to their biographical trajectory (life course) in the education, support and employment system and their experience within related institutions like schools and active labour market measures. The interviews with the experts focus on the institutional structure of *'Beyond the past'* including its history, participants, future perspectives and factors of success. The content of the interviews provides a rich and wide source of information, which enables me to present detailed results.

Concerning the method of analysis, I had to deal with two issues. Firstly, not all interviewees were able to speak German perfectly. Therefore, it was not possible to apply hermeneutic methods aiming at latent meanings. Secondly, I needed a method which could be used for a sizeable amount of material (about 150 pages of transcript in total). Keeping those two requirements in mind, I chose to use content analysis (Kuckartz 2009)

Case description

'Beyond the past' offers transitional employment for a period of 12 months for 200 young adults (age 18–24 years) who obtain social subsidies (Mindestsicherung). It evolved out of pre-existing strategies with the intention to counteract the growing number of unemployed and dependent young in Vienna. Official aims are to provide a regular, meaningful job and to integrate the participants in the first labour market (3 months after the program 25% of the participants should be in employment). The financing is split between three actors: 45% by the EFS (European Social Fund represented or rather nationally managed by the WAFF (Vienna Employment Promotion Fund), and 55% by the Region of Vienna, represented by the MA40 (Municipal Department for Social Affairs), and by the PES (public employment service). The total budget amounts to 5 Million Euros for the funding period October 2016 to September 2018. Remarkably, the European Union does not want to engage in any kind of designing/shaping the measure, although it is financially involved.

In spring 2016, the MA40 and WAFF drafted and published the call for the realization of *'Beyond the past'* directed towards socio-economic companies. In the end, two companies were selected. Both provide 100 seats for training and educating young adults with their staff of skilled manual teachers and social caregivers (Pot and Kazepov 2016; Waff 2016). The official start of *'Beyond the past'* was October 1st, 2016. However, the organisations needed preparation time to increase their capacities and find appropriate participants.²

The procedure of *'Beyond the past'* starts in the PES. Consultants who support and stimulate unemployed in finding labour or further education decide whether the program might fit the clients' profile³ and register the client for the program. The next step is a job interview with a staff member of the social provider, followed by signing a work contract, if both sides think the program suits. Additionally, they negotiate a mutual agreement on worktime and supporting measures like German or IT courses, which are partially provided by the PES. The first eight weeks are a preparation phase in which the participants get acquainted with the different fields of work. Afterwards, the professionals evaluate the participants' performance so far and extend the work contract for a period of 10 months including an extension of work hours from 16h a week to 24h/28h. The idea behind the part-time employment is to give the participants time and therefore the opportunity to engage in active search for regular jobs or to take further education. Like in the first labour market, it is possible for the young adults to hand in one's notice or to be given notice if they violate basic rules (e.g. constant attendance). Throughout the course of the project, the young adults get support from professional staff on private and work-related matters like application writing. After the course or if the participants find a job on the first labour market, the social provider offers post-care for 3 months after leave to ensure a smooth transition. The participants' wage lies slightly above the social subsidies they got before, but increases once they extend their working hours. The tasks are allocated individually and align with the young adults' competences. However, everyone starts on

² Referring to information provided by an expert, it is a lengthy and complex process to find fitting participants. PES-consultants, who send their unemployed clients to projects and courses, work with a diffuse, 25 pages long Excel table of all available measures. Therefore, it takes some time for them to get information about new projects. In order to speed up this process, it is common, that the projects offer presentations and guided tours for consultants.

³ The MA40, who pays welfare benefits, sends information of their recipients to the PES on a monthly basis. The reason for this data transfer is to give the PES consultants more information on the unemployed client and with that provide a better matching of person and measure.

the basic level (line production). It is possible for them to be entrusted with higher tasks and more responsibility (e.g. as foreman/woman) over time. As I will show later, the participants experience this system as positive and motivating, which changes their mainly negative perception of labour. The social provider plans its work schedule realistically and thereby mimics a simple production firm. It cooperates with companies by matching participants with open positions (*'outplacement'*) and taking over tasks⁴ like assembling, packing or unpacking products. According to the project guidelines, the social provider should at least be able to pay 20% of its own costs through taking over official sales orders.

Looking at the bigger picture of 'Beyond the past' from a scientific perspective, it appears that the measure follows the general trend of ALMPs in Europe. In the documents and the interview material related to case program, hierarchical structures are quite present, although much liberty and with that responsibility, lies on the local level. The EU provides funding without direct conditions. Its directives have to be implemented by the nation state, which in the Austrian case influences the way the funding is spent. The region bases its ALMPs on national strategy papers, but adapts them to their economic and social conditions. Regional institutions like the PES or municipal departments interact with each other and directly with politicians and national agents. Furthermore, they set the tone for the executing organisations by providing project guidelines. Short-term contracts (one year), which are prolonged if the results are satisfying, ensure control. The organisations, however, are still quite flexible in implementing the program and therefore stand in close contact with the regional institutions. Referring to the interviews with the young adults, it becomes evident that they are not fully aware of the complex structure behind 'Beyond the past'. Their only way of providing input is through street-level staff (social providers) and consultants in regional institutions (PES), which also act as gatekeepers.⁵ Beyond that, they are in a rather passive role.

⁴ E.g. A well-known sugar confectionery company gave the task of unpacking tonnes of imperfect products to reuse the raw material. Furthermore, a kitchen utensils producer commissions the social provider to assemble and pack their goods.

⁵ By that I mean their function of distributing unemployed to programmes and therefore, determining their future life-course.

Empirical Results

The empirical results section ought to provide a general view of experts on ALMP and specifically *'Beyond the past'*. Furthermore, it focuses on matters that are related to *'cooling out'* including the institutional perception of young adults and the participants' introspection. I consider experts as spokespersons of their institution. Words in bold within the paragraphs are supposed to give a structure and highlight main themes.

Institutional Experts

According to the institutional experts, a **change of paradigm** took place in the last years. Although, it is not expressed directly, a shift towards activation is meant. It becomes evident by the fact that the MA40 and the PES stopped paying money to cover the costs of unemployed people without demands. Now they act on the assumption that it is financially more rational for all involved to invest and foster an integration in the first labour market.

"Because some years ago we moved from simply taking care of the people, paying them money and yes, but financially it makes more sense for all involved, [...] if the PES takes some money and invests it and occupies the people that they make it to the first labour market sometime." (I_E_AT_V_1, 24)

Therefore, the public institutions foster the **activation** of unemployed, which means integration in the labour market and with that financial independence. Economic needs and personal desires are considered being central factors. The first is formulated in a mutual exchange with the social partners, the second through direct interaction with clients. Furthermore, there key-organisations like the PES, WAFF, municipal agencies and NGOs cooperate in various ways to improve the quality of policies and raise efficiency.

The experts identified two main reasons for youth unemployment in Vienna. Firstly, they named **lack of education**, which in many cases relates to social heritage (heredity of education). This is especially present in families with migration background. The PES's expert blames the education system for not properly counteracting those deficits, which burdens this task on the PES: *"[...] the PES is the biggest repair workshop for what the education system has messed up [...]"* (6_I_E_AT_V_3, 21).

Secondly, the experts pinpoint **lack of motivation** as a further reason of unemployment, which should not only be seen as mere laziness. Moreover, they identify a different view on labour in the younger generation, making them less likely to accept old patterns of behaviour. Full-time employment and additional hours are considered less important than leisure-time and self-fulfilment.

The institutions seem to be aware of the demographic diversification of their **target group**, which leads to a growing complexity in demands and required offers. In addition, the interviewees highlight the problem of reaching young adults that have been raised in households with low educational affinity and now feel no pressure from their environment to be active in the labour market after compulsory schooling. Since financial incentives are not stimulating enough, the MA40 aims at showing young recipients of social subsidies a different “*meaning of life*” (I_E_AT_V_1, 52) by introducing them to a culture of work. Underneath lies the assumption, that they don’t live in the “*sobering reality of work*” (I_E_AT_V_1, 66) and misinterpret their own qualifications and the opportunities the market holds for them. This pattern of reasoning proposes ‘*cooling out*’ as solution for an efficient transition to the first labour market. The experts presume that ‘*Beyond the past*’ provides such a disillusion or, in other words, a cooling out of occupational aspirations, which they see as positive. In essence, it is about showing the participants **perspectives** on viable futures of their lives and making them realise what they could achieve and how. To achieve these aims, the project applies consultation and the distribution of work based on personal capacities. Referring to the experts, motivation and self-esteem are essential. Both suffer under the consequences of unemployment and recover due to stable and meaningful employment in the project. Especially incentives like promotions, relocations to desired jobs and subsidised trainings appear to be very positive stimuli.

Furthermore, the relatively simple tasks that the young adults ought to execute aim at giving them the opportunity to think about their life and to raise **self-awareness**. The entire work situation is intended to be less comfortable and protected than in other programs. This fosters motivation and introduces the participants to real work conditions in an early phase. The social provider expert emphasized that personal wishes and desires of young adults are considered as much as possible in personal consultation. However, the opportunities and possibilities given by the market and own capacities have to be kept

in mind. First, participants need to learn to **accept reality** before they can turn to realistic life perspectives.

"[...] the jobs we offer are simple [...] which should convince people to think about what they really want to do later on. We don't want our employees (participants) [...] to have a job here that makes them absolutely happy, because that is pointless [...]" (I_E_AT_V_5, 23).

According to the experts, theoretical education does not work as well as **practical employment skills** in integrating vulnerable young in the labour market. Thus, *'Beyond the past'* is closely connected to the economy in terms of similar procedures of work and co-operation with firms. Step-by-step the participants should learn values related to work, structure and stability to ease the transition and prevent them from discontinuing. Important are a low-threshold (reduced worktime) at the beginning, positive stimuli/incentives (more money, higher positions) to foster motivation and assist during the transition period (application and post-care by social workers). A key term in the project is sustainability, which is partly given through one of its goals namely transferring as many participants as possible to the first labour market for a period of at least 3 months.

"[...] our intermediate goal is [...] that the people get to know, learn to accept and be able to move within the normal conditions of the Austrian Labour market." (I_E_AT_V_5, 15)

Traces of the **activation paradigm** can be found in the approach of the PES and MA40, indicated by the labour market policies they pursue. However, the core idea of balance between personal satisfaction and economic needs contradicts the assumption that cooling out of occupational aspirations is a direct aim. It is more adequate to speak of a **light (mitigated) form of 'cooling out'** that the institutions intend. This means that independent employment is still quite central, even though personal wishes are considered with the intention to foster sustainable integration. The provider also supports further education, which partially contradicts the *'cooling out'* pattern of direct inclusion in the labour market.

"[...] we want people to stay in a job long-term that means we gain nothing if we pass them quickly on to menial work. Those are the first ones that lose the job and yes, the people should also have a fulfilled work-life" (6_I_E_AT_V_3, 27).

To summarize: the approaches and views on the overall issue vary partially between the experts. Whereas the MA40 and PES tend to find harsher words, the social provider tries to perform a balancing act between young adults' aspirations and the given circumstances on the labour market.

Young adults as participants

All interviewed young adults already experienced **effects of 'cooling out'** in contact with the labour market. Some told about having fewer chances, since their previously received apprenticeship certificate is considered less prestigious compared to higher education. Others argued in the opposite direction, saying that they were hardly able to set foot on the labour market due to the lack of practical work-experience in higher schools. In most cases, personal matters like becoming a single parent, long illness, migration/asylum seeking, dropping out of school or an early termination as reaction to an unsatisfying work-environment mark a break in the young adults working life.

"And yes, there I had a short hole-phase; I fell in a hole and could also not really get out for some month. [...] But at some point I also have realized, it's pointless to stand still now. [...] I have to go on and yes I simply lowered my expectations, simply yes" (I_Y_AT_V_6, 47).

The way back turns out to be difficult and frustrating, especially when they do not get the job they desired. As a result, most of the interviewees found themselves in irregular, unpleasant jobs, which they consider as the only option to avoid unemployment. In the cases of the interviewed, those jobs did not boost their chances in the labour market and did not lead to long-term contracts. As a reaction, the young adults sought **further education**, which in all cases has been provided by the PES. However, only two interviewees considered the courses as helpful; one refugee benefited from the German language courses and another participant, who already had an apprenticeship certificate, attended training that added on to his already gained knowledge. The others report of compulsory courses, which they experienced as mere occupation with no further use. The young adults suffer under the feeling of disoriented life course, which do not appear to be 'normal', if they compare themselves to friends in different (more stable) situations. This adds on to the *"struggle of societal inclusion"* described by Walter (2015).

“Well it is a social, a social descent, if you’re just not part of, of the norm-society[...]. But that you’re one of those, that, you hear and read of them, yes, the Austrian unemployed youth. That’s the box, in which you are put automatically” (I_Y_AT_V_6, 83).

All interviewees consider the *‘Beyond the past’* project as a relatively ordinary employment situation. When talking about it, they only use words like work or job to describe it. However, most of them are aware that their work-output is not the main goal and they are not employed in the first labour market. For some young adults this leads to an ambivalent relationship to the program. On the one hand, they are proud that they finally found employment; on the other hand, they feel ashamed of relying on subsidised projects. The interviews revealed that the positive aspects predominate and lead to a growth of self-esteem, especially if the participants acquire a promotion like head secretary, receptionist or foreman/woman. All interviewees emphasize that the stable work-time environment as the biggest asset, which for them lead to mental and social stability. They report on falling into a negative daily grind during the phase of unemployment, making them passive and lazy. Furthermore, the young adults consider their chances on the labour market higher, if they are already in employment. This assumption is supported by a frequent flow of participants from the project to regular employment. As a result, they are more active in their job search and more motivated to attend further education (e.g. retake their A-levels).

“But I thought, yes, instead of just sitting at home and doing nothing and doing whatever, I come here. Because, first because of getting up early, that’s great. Because if I find a job, I will already be in that rhythm” (Y_AT_V_8, 213).

Some participants formulate critique on the project. Those in the production sector complain about monotonous work routine. Others mention that they barely get the chance to speak to social workers, even though they were promised at the start. Apart from that, they wish for more counselling interviews regarding applications, writing CVs, etc. This contradicts the statement of one participant who says that you always get help with those things if you ask for it.

‘Beyond the past’ triggered an **effect of rising motivation** concerning the writing of applications and the participation in further education, seemingly without forcing the young

adults into undesired situations. This can be ascribed to a gain in self-esteem, which appear to be the result of a structured, employment-like occupation. Therefore, no traces of *'cooling out'* originating from the project can be found among the interviewees, even though they had experiences with it throughout their life. The activation paradigm, however, is still present, but in a more enabling than enforcing form.

Conclusion

'Beyond the past' is an active labour market policy that aims at improving employability of young unemployed. It considers given economic frames and political objectives formulated in various agreements and other official documents provided by European, national and regional actors. Although, the policy's structure looks quite hierarchical, interactive processes are present at all levels and the local organisations hold much liberty in the final implementation.

Regional institutions that are involved in the program are aware of the growing demographic diversity of unemployed juveniles and aim at developing their services accordingly. This can be witnessed by looking at the newly appearing target group of low educated and unemployed young recipients of social subsidies which should be supported by *'Beyond the past'*. In general, further education and training seems to be the institutions' main solution for a successful integration in the labour market, which is pictured as prime objective. The interviewed experts do not seem to reflect or question the underlying activation logic (at least not openly). They emphasised that some young adults are no realistic perspective on the *"sobering reality of work"*. Subsequently, one must disillusion them to enable an integration in the labour market. Although, it was not specifically said, the experts propose *'cooling out'* as a necessary step to raise awareness of the young adult's own situation. This should be done orally through direct consultation and physically through relatively monotonous work routines that show them what they are capable of and give them the opportunity to become acquainted with and to think about work life.

The interviewed participants experience the program as very positive and as ordinary work compared to *"the other"* occupational courses offered by the PES. For them *'Beyond the past'* provides structure and meaning, which boost self-esteem that has been lost during the phase of unemployment (pressure through societal exclusion). This is visible in a

rising motivation concerning further education and the writing of applications. The goals named by the organisation's expert, growing self-esteem and making plans for the future, seems to be reached at least for the interviewed young adults.

Considering all interviews, it appears to be most reasonable to conclude that *'Beyond the past'* relies upon a light version of *'cooling out'* or soft end approach as Walter (2003) puts it. For the interviewed experts it is an essential part of the program's concept. They see the cooling out of occupational aspirations as unavoidable for some young unemployed. However, individual wishes and desires are especially acknowledged by the social providers, which mitigates and prevents a harsh transition to the labour market. This fits into the overall narrative of Activation in Austria. The economic pressure and the focus on self-responsibility are evident, but eased by social and sustainable considerations. In the way the experts frame and speak about certain issues different views become visible, although their general approach is similar. The social providers take a social, compromise-oriented position and the public institutions a rather demanding one. Looking at the interviews with the young adults, no signs of lowered professional aspirations could be traced back to *'Beyond the past'*. The participants experienced it in one or the other way, but before entering the program. They did not seem to be aware of the passive and active forms of institutionalised *'cooling out'*, which are essential pillars of the policy as described by the experts. However, the interviews with the young adults mark a specific point in time. A longitude approach might reveal a different and more reflected opinion on *'Beyond the past'*. Even though experts and young adults have the same positive impression of the program, my results indicate that their perceptions of *'cooling out'* diverge. As they experience it differently, it is indispensable for an integral investigation to include subjective perspectives of all involved actors – clients as well as operators.

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