

**An alternative approach for
studying public policy. - The
case of municipal
implementation of active
labour market policy in
Denmark**

*by Thomas Bredgaard,
Lene Dalsgaard and
Flemming Larsen*

ISSN 1396-3503
2003:4

Thomas Bredgaard, Lene Dalsgaard & Flemming Larsen:

An alternative approach for studying public policy - The case of municipal implementation of active labour market policy in Denmark

Copyright: The authors

Department of Economics, Politics and Public Administration
Aalborg University
Fibigerstræde 1
DK-9220 Aalborg Øst

Tel. +45 96358200

ISSN: 1396-3511
2003:4

Print: Uni.Print, Aalborg University

An alternative approach for studying public policy

- The case of municipal implementation of active labour market policy in Denmark

by

Thomas Bredgaard (thomas@socsci.auc.dk),

Lene Dalsgaard (lenedals@socsci.auc.dk),

Flemming Larsen (flemlar@socsci.auc.dk)

*Aalborg University, Centre for Labour Market Research (CARMA)
Fibigerstræde 1, DK-9220 Aalborg, Denmark*

Abstract

Different types of policies are affected by different contextual conditions and carry with them different possibilities for implementation. Studies of implementation processes must therefore take as its point of departure the context attached to specific policies. In this article we present an alternative approach for how to analyse the implementation of public policies characterized by high politics and a 'wicked' problem structure (e.g. active labour market policies, curative social care, housing policies for the homeless and educational policies providing equal advancement of different socio-economic groups). In addition we develop an analytical perspective in which evaluation of implementation processes can both assist political decision-making and contribute to public discourse. The aim of our approach is to identify implemented policy content (actual policy outcome¹) by evaluating different kinds of indicators. The process involves identifying dominant policy arguments, constructing analytical dimensions of possible developments in policy content and characterising implemented policy along these dimensions.² The policy content may then be contrasted with different types of evaluation criteria, also including higher order criteria. The application of the model is illustrated by a case of implementation of municipal labour market policy in Denmark.³

Contents

<i>1. Introduction.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>2. An analytical approach for studying the implementation process.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>3. Applying the approach: the case of municipal activation policy in Denmark</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>4. Conclusions</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>29</i>

1. Introduction

The implementation literature has often been marked by disappointment over the current lack of a consistent and general theory of implementation and the lack of cumulative progress in implementation studies (cf. Hill and Hupe 2002; John 1998; Lester and Googin 1998; O'Toole 1986). There are at least three explanations for this pessimistic assessment of the future of implementation research:

First, the strong focus on developing general theory and analytical models on implementation seem in a paradoxical way to have neglected the Laswellian call for contextuality (Lasswell 1956, 1970) and the obvious fact that different policies imply different types of implementation (cf. Matland 1995). General implementation theories and models will therefore run into methodological problems of validity as they neglect and thereby disconnect contextual conditions and policy characteristics. In our view general theories and models are not possible and that the state of art in implementation studies should not be judged according to this criterion. Instead we argue that what is needed is approaches that is able to differentiate between types of policies.

Second, seminal pieces of scholarly work on implementation sprang out of disillusion with the lacking or insufficient outcomes of even the best-planned policies and pessimism about what governments can do (e.g. Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Mazmaniman and Sabatier 1983) and could rightfully be called 'pathological misery research' (Rothstein 1998). In measuring implementation 'success' from single-programme case studies by comparing achievements with official expectations, numerous 'implementation failures' were reported often without emphasising the specific, contextual conditions and complexity affecting the particular implementation process. Implementation 'gaps' and implementation 'deficits' were explained with reference the internal dynamics of the process like wasted resources, unforeseen side-effects, unclear political objectives, inappropriate organisational forms etc. However, the character of the specific problem in question and the existence of ideological differences as well as political interests were not paid much attention. Moreover, the selection of policies to investigate may also be biased as the literature demonstrate a marked preference for studying programmes that are the most difficult to implement (that requires a decentralised implementation structure and represent a high level of ambition in relation to human processing of target-groups). Thus, implementation research aiming at finding out 'what went wrong' would miss the point. A more realistic goal of research would be 'what happened'⁴, i.e. charting out the complexities of the implemented policy content. A 'gap' between political objectives and implemented policy outcomes are a natural consequence of these types of policies and the aim must instead be to collect knowledge on realised policy outcome. Subsequent assessment of implemented policy outcome must then be complemented with other equally valid evaluation criteria than explicit policy objectives.

This lead us to the third explanation of the current state of affairs in implementation research, i.e. how to assess and evaluate the implementation process. There is disagreement in the literature on whether assessments of the outcome of the implementation process – that to a certain extent will always be normative – should be separated from or integrated in the empirical analysis. And what role the researcher

should take in this respect; contribute to political problems solutions or contribute to public discourse? We argue that these roles are not mutually exclusive since different roles and approaches can be handled at the same time. We apply an interpretative approach, i.e. an acknowledgement that the application of different ‘lenses’ and perspectives will emphasise different causal explanations for and consequences of the implementation process (cf. Allison 1971; Elmore 1978; Morgan 1986; Parsons 1995). We also suggest using normative based evaluation criteria like appropriateness of public policies and to contribute to public discourse. We nonetheless attempt to separate empirical analysis from normative judgements by first conducting an empirical analysis of implemented policy outcome and then holding this outcome up against different normative evaluation criteria.

In what follows we develop our analytical approach that will contribute to shed light on some of the ‘blind spots’ in the implementation literature emphasised above. Two questions are especially pertinent:

- 1) How do we contextually analyse implementation processes of public policies characterised by a ‘wicked’ problem structure, intense political conflict, high level of ambition for change of target group behaviour when these policies are also implemented in a decentralised structure with numerous actors involved?
- 2) How do we evaluate implementation processes that both assist political decision-making processes and contribute to public discourse?

2. An analytical approach for studying the implementation process

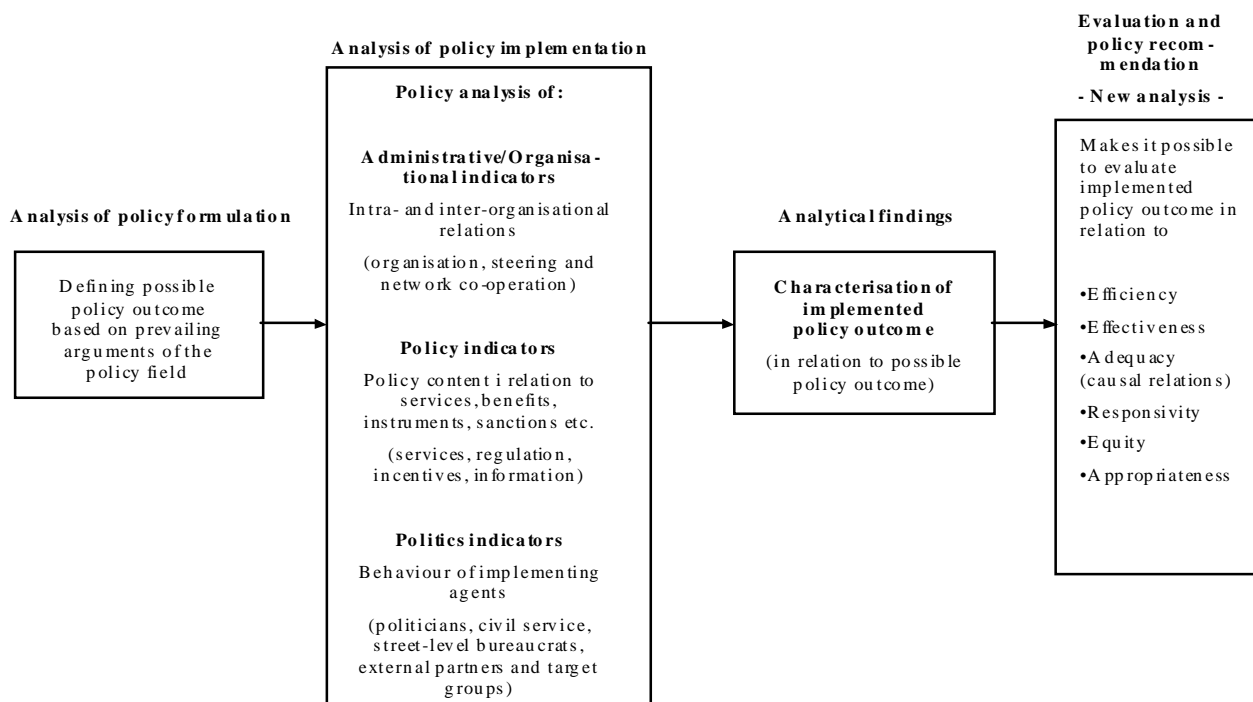
Reflecting upon the limitations and problems inherent in traditional studies of implementation processes, we propose an analytical approach that focuses on identifying the policy content realized in the implementation, where one operates with an analytical understanding of interdependence between policy content, politics and administration/organisation. An underlying assumption is a rejection of the alleged universal applicability of general models of policy and implementation processes. We claim – as exemplified by the case of implementation of municipal activation policies in the next section – that the approach must be adaptable to and developed in close association with the relevant context. Different types of policies and organisations produce different conditions for implementation, which need to be taken into account. Application of general analytical models is not suited to the variation in structures, processes and policy content that exist among different political systems and sectors. Policy developments are intimately related to the context in which they emerge. *“For implementation theory and research this means that contextualisation is important: Implementation is always connected to specific policies as particular responses to specific problems in society”* (Hill and Hupe 2002, 5). An analysis of implemented policy content must therefore also take into account the context in which policy develops and in which it is implemented.

It also means that we prioritise explaining ‘what happens-and why’ over the task of affecting ‘what happens’ and ‘whether implementers comply with legislation’ (cf. Ripley and Franklin 1982, 10). Our argument is that perfect implementation is

unattainable (Hogwood and Gunn 1984, p198) and that implementation deficits will always occur. That is, we operate with an understanding of implementation-deficits as natural. Our approach acknowledges that in an analytical sense, implementation follows political decision-making, but that policy formation to a great extent also takes place in the implementation phase. Furthermore, it is a special characteristic of this approach that it takes its point of departure in empirical analysis as a background for subsequent normative judgement and evaluation.

The primary aim of our approach is thus to map out the implemented policy content. This is accomplished by, first, identifying prevailing policy arguments dealing with certain problems within the chosen policy field or policy. This identification process may often involve a historical-institutional perspective on decision-making processes. Presuming that the implementation process is flexible and that variation within the field is great, the aim is to find dimensions of possible policy outcome along which the analysis of implementation processes can be structured⁵. The second step is to carry out an empirical analysis of the implementation process by studying different types of indicators (administrative/organisational, policy and politics) of how the policy in question has evolved. In a third phase, these analytical findings on implemented policy outcome are compared to prevailing policy arguments identified in the first step. Finally, this comparison may be used for different types of normative judgement and evaluation. Different types of evaluation criteria may be applied in this final phase and thus explicitly assist both political decision-making processes and contribute to public discourse. The four phases are illustrated in the model below

Figure 1. An analytical approach for analysing implementation processes:



This analytical approach was originally developed in order to analyse implementation of activation policies in Danish municipalities (cf. Larsen et. al 2001; Bredgaard et. al 2002). However, we suggest that it might be applicable to a broader field of policies and policy evaluation. It seems particularly suitable for analysing implementation of public welfare-policies (e.g. active labour market policies, curative social care, housing policies for the homeless and educational policies providing equal advancement of different socio-economic groups). Such public policies seek to influence behaviour (human-processing) in a dynamic process. However, they operate in a context where the state of knowledge about what works is uncertain (uncertain and unclear policy theory) and where there exist great variations in the fields (cf. Rothstein 1998, 73ff.). Compared to the regulation of static conditions it is generally agreed that these policies are the most complicated to implement. Another element characterising these policies is that the problem structure is often ‘wicked’ (Harmon and Mayer 1986)⁶ and that political conflicts abound, often leading to policies with strong symbolic and legitimising elements (Edelman 1971, 1977).

To present more of the underlying assumptions and the use of the analytical perspective, we begin by describing our understanding of the policy formulation process in which possible policy outcome is identified in relation to predominant policy arguments.

Analysis of policy formation - defining possible policy-alternatives based on prevailing arguments

The implementation perspective focuses on what happens *after* policy formulation and decisions. It presumes that there is ‘something’ to implement and carry out. This dividing line between policy formulation and policy implementation, however, is not identical to the dividing line between politics and administration. Implementation is not just a new or different label for public administration, it is in itself a phase in which policies are substantially defined and changed: “*policy is made as it is being administered and administered as it is being made*” (Anderson 1975, 79). Implementation is thus an important element in the political decision-making process and a continuation of the political process. Nevertheless, we must stress that the implementation process is a specific political process that needs to be kept analytically separate from policy formulation processes. Implementation takes place in another political arena and under different conditions. This ‘something’ that must be implemented often consists of political decisions – or at least explicit political intentions – that legitimise a given policy and defines a central part of the framework for implementation. Political intentions and administrative guidelines have a more or less rationalised core of notions about problems and methods of problem solution. Depending on the character of these notions, there are wide or narrow frames for interpreting implementation processes concerning what should be the ‘correct’ and ‘rational’ content of policy. Also frames around actors and implementing agents are set and they define the important and legitimate actors in the process and what type of knowledge and information that should count as expertise. By implication there does not exist a total free choice of actions in the implementation process.

In identifying the dynamics of implemented policy content, the implementation perspective may seem rather inadequate. Basically ‘something’ needs to be implemented, but this ‘something’ is analytically difficult to define. The conventional ‘top down’ approach to this problem is to begin with governmental programs, executive orders and official announcements. The characterisation of policy content will then contrast explicit policy objectives with actual policy outcome, often concluding that there is substantial disagreement due to implementation failure or wrong design. The conventional approach to analysing implementation of these types of public policies, however, reveals a number of analytical limitations. The most important limitation is that the **policy objectives themselves are seldom clear**, which makes it difficult to match their degree of realisation with an implementation outcome. The ambiguity and complexity of political objectives arises from a number of dynamics in the political decision-making process, which are worth mentioning:

- (1) Political decision-makers *do not always know what they want*. They may not know the final goal and intention of their efforts, or the political decision-making process may compel them to negotiate their way around to a compromise in order to achieve a consensus. Both situations provide the opportunity for several interpretations of the actual goals and content of a policy.
- (2) The problem situation may be unclear and difficult to structure, a chronic feature of most public welfare policies. Political decision-makers *do not know what to do* due

to lacking or insufficient knowledge about the type and causes of the problem at hand or insufficient knowledge on which types of public programs might alleviate these problems, i.e. they lack a clear and consistent policy theory (Rothstein 1998, 74). This is often the situation when it comes to solving 'wicked problems'. They are not clearly defined and difficult to isolate from other problems. This complexity is often a fundamental condition in implementation and needs to be addressed in the process of policy analysis.

- (3) The complexity and ambiguity of political objectives also stem from the *high level of political ambitions of intervention*. To adapt policies to local and individual circumstances requires wide latitude for action on the part of implementing agents. It then becomes a question of designing public policies so that implementing agents may accommodate uncertainty and the need for flexibility in the operational field (Rothstein 1998, 76) and which can respond to problems that vary among locations, that are dynamic and difficult to solve (Dalsgaard and Lassen 1997). From this perspective, unclear objectives and uncertain causal theories become an advantage in implementation, in so far as interventions can be flexibly adjusted to specific individual and local conditions. There is an additional aspect of unclear and ambiguous objectives, in that potential conflict and resistance from implementing agents may be reduced. Even if political decision-makers know what they want and how to do it, it might be a deliberate political strategy to formulate vague and unclear objectives in order *to avoid opposition* (Offerdal 2000). A traditional evaluation of explicit policy objectives would then miss the point.
- (4) Numerous programmes and policies can have explicit objectives and intentions that take on a *symbolic and legitimising* character. The most important motive for launching new policies should then be found elsewhere than in ambitions to solve specific problems. Political decision-makers might want to demonstrate resolve in an area where they are in reality powerless or where the costs of actually addressing the problem are considered too high. This implies that we cannot automatically assume a rational and intentional relationship between prevailing policy arguments and policy processes.

In mapping out the policy content of such public policies, several factors make it inadequate to focus on the gap between formulated policy objectives and their extent of realisation. We therefore find the traditional 'top down' approach to implementation and evaluation studies inadequate. It tends to ignore or rationalise the ambiguities and complexities of the policy process stemming from wicked problems, unclear policy theories, high level of policy ambition, political conflicts and the legitimising function of politics. All these conditions are integral elements of the policy process that cannot and should not be assumed away. On the contrary, they are starting points by which we compare and evaluate policy arguments.

That brings us to the first step in the model (cf. figure 1 above), i.e. identifying prevailing policy arguments and problem definitions. Policy objectives and intentions should not be ignored, of course, but they need to be supplemented with other equally relevant sources. Different (and sometimes opposing) notions of problem character and magnitude, causal relations, preferred programmes and instruments can often be

identified and are influenced by ideology and actor interests. Prevailing policy arguments and problem definitions may also emanate from actors other than elected politicians (e.g. the social partners, powerful interest organisations, the media, etc.). The task of the policy analyst is to ‘wash out’ the different policy arguments and problem definitions by studying agenda-setting and policy formulation processes. We may then begin the implementation analysis (which we exemplify in the next section with the case of municipal labour market policy in Denmark) to be followed by a characterisation of the implemented policy content.

Why map out the implemented policy-content?

It is necessary and relevant to provide a characterisation of the implemented policy for three reasons. First, establishing a relationship between policy choices and policy outcomes presupposes a characterisation of implemented policy. This is necessary in order to avoid logical fallacies equating input (political causalities, explicit objectives and decisions) with outcome (policy outcome and impact). Otherwise, we fall into the trap of much conventional implementation research by only unmasking implementation gaps, implementation deficits and implementation failures (cf. Hill and Hupe 2002, Rothstein 1998, 62). By characterising implemented policy we also avoid generalising ‘best practice’ from apparently successful implementation not necessarily related to explicit policy objectives. Second, characterisation of implemented policy content may be an important source of information for political decision-makers and may contribute to public discourse. Knowledge of implemented policy content is often more important than narrow changes of legislation and explicit government policy objectives. Third, an ambition to explore and map out implemented policy surpasses traditional questions posed in the implementation literature, i.e. whether or not the researcher or analyst considers normative judgement to be separate from or integrated in the empirical analysis (Hill and Hupe 2002, 10). In our approach, we conduct an inquiry in which empirical analysis has an exploratory character. Only subsequently empirical findings can be held up against normative judgements and evaluation.

The evaluation perspective

Our approach thereby improves possibilities for making research decisions explicit and for justifying epistemological stances when conducting implementation research, which has exactly been the critique of interpretative views on implementation that tend to confuse normative judgements and empirical findings (cf. Hill and Hupe 2002). We should stress that normative judgements are not illegitimate or unscientific; on the contrary, they are an essential element of implementation analysis. However, the benefits of moving from empirical findings on implemented policy content towards evaluation based on explicit normative criteria are obvious. The normative perspective is linked up to implemented policy and not to the policy goals or arguments. This generates an additional benefit (in our experiences) in the form of better possibilities to subsequently enter into dialogue with politicians and stakeholders regarding the results. Depending on the criteria one selects in the final analysis (cf. figure 1), the evaluation perspective may include both first-order and second-order evaluation (Fischer 1995). ‘First order’ evaluation includes two research questions: (1) does the program empirically fulfil its explicit objectives? And (2) are political objectives relevant to the

problem situation? In 'second order' evaluation the perspective is widened to include societal evaluation criteria, i.e. (1) whether the political objectives have instrumental value for society? And (2) whether fundamental ideals organising the accepted societal order gives a basis for legitimate solutions to opposing views and interests? In moving from empirical findings to normative judgement, it becomes possible to identify what happened (which objectives were achieved) and why (the causal connections) and thereby connect the respective advantages of implementation and evaluation analysis.

3. Applying the approach: the case of municipal activation policy in Denmark

A case of implementation of municipal activation policy in Denmark can illustrate how our approach can be applied for empirical use. We begin by identifying prevailing policy arguments for the introduction of the 'active-line' in municipal labour market policy. Acknowledging the complexity and ambiguity of activation policy makes it necessary to construct analytical dimensions for municipal implementation of policy content.⁷

Identifying prevailing policy arguments for the 'active-line' (step 1)

Labour market policy discussions in Denmark in the late 1980s and early 1990s were framed around the question of 'structural problems' and especially the negative consequences of passive and generous welfare state support (Ministry of Labour 1989; Zeuthen Commission 1992; Social Commission 1993). In 1990, the Ministry of Social Affairs introduced the 'active-line' or 'activation' as a new policy concept in unemployment policy (i.e., the quid-pro-quo principle). Activation was inspired by workfare-principles (Katz 1989; Mead 1992) in so far as disciplining policy elements were accorded higher priority; unemployed persons were now required to participate in active programmes in order to maintain benefits. It was, nonetheless, workfare in a special Danish variant, by which the unemployed were also re-qualified (human capital rather than work-first approach) and were granted certain rights (i.e. empowerment rather than punishment) (Larsen 2002; Torfing 1999, 2000). The level of ambition of labour market policy was clearly raised. The 'active-line' was extended throughout the 1990s and now covers each and every unemployed person despite individual problem characteristics: Everyone must be active! We have identified four prevailing policy arguments for this 'active-line':

- (1) *Reduction of passive expenses for income support*: Ever increasing social expenditures were seen as being in conflict with the tax-paying willingness of the hard-working population. Expenditures could be reduced by both social disciplining strategies (tougher availability criteria, quid-pro-quo, reduced unemployment benefit period etc.) and by social integration strategies (e.g. re-integration into the ordinary labour market by human capital investments and individual action plans).
- (2) *Political consensus on the structural problems of the labour market*: Worries were mounting that allocation problems in matching labour supply and demand would cause inflation, wage drift and diminish international competitiveness further

aggravating macro-economic problems. This argument led to the formulation of two main problem definitions and solutions. First, a neo-classical inspired approach emphasising economic incentives to make 'work pay' (OECD 1994, 1995; Pedersen and Smith 1995; Smith 1998; Jensen 1999). Remedies to solve the problem involves greater wage spread (e.g. lower introduction wages), lower benefit levels or reduced length of the unemployment benefit period, work-for-benefits, stricter availability and mobility criteria and tougher sanctions. We label this approach the 'social disciplining strategy'.⁸ Second, the interventionist approach defines the unemployment problem as one of insufficient human and social capital. This strategy aims at re-qualifying and socially integrating the unemployed by flexible, needs-oriented activation and individual action plans. The role of the public sector is to find societal solutions to individual problems and not to reduce society's role. Hence, the social integration strategy sustains the traditions of the universal welfare state while attempting to activate and reorient interventions towards the ordinary labour market.

- (3) Avoiding *paternalism and clientelism* in encounters between individual unemployed and the unemployment system. This policy argument combines various elements: the assumption that the responsibilities of civil networks (family, neighbours and friends) disappear as public state responsibilities for the fate of the individual increases (state colonisation); that the individual is deprived of individual responsibility (paternalism); and the claim that the availability of generous public welfare support in itself leads to increased consumption hereof (welfare dependency and clientelism). Demanding the unemployed person's participation in activation in return for unemployment benefits (quid-pro-quo) and stressing the individual's obligations, as a help-to-self-help became the proposed political solutions towards these problems.
- (4) Finally, increasing attention was given to the *link between social problems and labour market participation*. Political decision-makers realised that lack of labour market attachment not only implies economic losses for the individual but also has severe social consequences for the individual and the society. Work is now increasingly seen as a panacea to problems of social exclusion, isolation and a whole range of other social and individual problems.

Traditional state-driven and unconditional unemployment policies could not do the trick any longer. Problems emerged especially with those unemployed who deliberately 'misused' the passive welfare support system to lead an alternative life outside the labour market (lacking work commitment) and with those long-term unemployed, who after several years outside the labour market, had lost their qualifications (work ability and availability). Interpretations of the magnitude and character of these problems differed with ideological and political convictions, of course, but almost everyone could agree upon the solution: Active labour market policy and activation!

These four policy arguments illustrate the ambiguity and complexity of the 'active-line'. The attempt to shift from passive and (largely) unconditional welfare provision towards active and interventionist employment policy thus contains numerous and also partly opposing political intentions and policy objectives. Taking into account the fact that

implementation of policy objectives occurs in a decentralised implementation process makes it relevant to study various implemented policy contents. We therefore need to construct a range of analytical dimensions that can capture the diversity of ways in which policies are implemented by municipal authorities.

Analytical dimensions in the analysis of policy content

Our frame of reference for constructing analytical dimensions is the policy intentions and objectives identified in the four policy arguments above and not the actual policy implementation process. Within the 'active-line', we distinguish between the strategies of social disciplining and social integration, in so far as they reflect opposing problem and policy definitions. The *disciplining strategy* defines the problem of unemployment as an individual problem of inadequate economic incentives to 'make work pay' because of generous welfare state support. Generosity creates welfare dependency and problems of work commitment and motivation. Reintegration into the labour market is ensured by demanding work in return for benefits, stressing individual obligations for economic self-sufficiency and applying tough sanctions in case of non-compliance. The social *integration strategy* defines the unemployment problem as a result of lacking or insufficient qualifications and competencies. Needs-oriented activation will ensure a match between individual needs and motivation on the one hand and local labour market requirements on the other. The final objective is nonetheless the same as in the disciplining strategy, i.e. economic self-sufficiency via labour market integration. Only in the 'passive-line', which has been de-legitimised and partially abandoned, there are no demands in return for social assistance benefits, since the objective is not labour market integration but rather social security and equality. The last strategy we label the social *compensation strategy*.

Figure 2. Analytical dimensions: Policy alternatives and strategies

	Active-line		<i>Passive-line</i>
	Social disciplining	Social integration	Social compensation
Problem	Insufficient economic incentives to take and seek jobs	Insufficient competencies and qualifications to achieve a job	Insufficient income support
Instruments	Work obligations and demands	Needs-oriented (re)qualification	Income compensation
Incentives for behavioural change	Extrinsic motivation (sanctions)	Intrinsic motivation (help-to-self-help)	None
Orientation of problem solution	Ordinary labour market	Ordinary labour market and social orientation	Social orientation
Welfare state contract	Conditional (work obligation) “Something-for-something”	Conditional (employability) “Something-for-something”	Unconditional in relation to work obligation and employability “Something-for-nothing”
Partial objective	Work first	Improve employability	Improve life quality
Final objective	Self-sufficiency		Social security and equality

The underlying assumption of the figure is that a general movement in line with official policy objectives can be identified in municipal implementation. This would imply a shift from universal and partly unconditional social compensation towards the active-line and especially with increasing elements of compulsion, sanctions and demands, i.e. from welfare towards workfare (cf. e.g. Jessop 1993; Torfing 1999, 2000; Peck 2002). In practice, the strategies are not necessarily contradictory, nor even mutually exclusive. Disciplining elements such as the work obligation and restrictive sanctions can coexist with social integration through needs-oriented activation. In the empirical implementation analysis following below, our foremost objective is to study the balancing of the social disciplining and social integrative strategies in the concrete local implementation of policy objectives and intentions. Thereby it is possible to identify the implemented policy content.

Indicators for the analysis of implemented policy content (step 2)

As indicated in figure 1, we operate with different types of indicators in order to describe the implemented policy content. These are administrative/organisational, policy and politics indicators, which we assume are interdependent.

In the case of **administrative or organisational indicators**, our assumption is that choices of policy-alternatives and strategies influence perceptions of the operative conditions, measures and instruments applied. The means of organising the effort is therefore seen as linked to the development of the policy content. For instance, our

analysis assumes that a local activation policy with a high level of ambition for policy adoption in which problem solutions are seen as adaptable and individualised would imply broad policy frames and wide possibilities for local priorities and discretion in implementation processes. A social disciplining strategy, on the other hand, would imply stricter policy frameworks and more standardised implementation.

Within these frames, there is room for different types of municipal policy formulation and implementation processes. The types of municipal activation policies can be distinguished as to whether the problem character is perceived as dynamic or static (Perrow 1986; Rothstein 1998, 79). Dynamic conditions call for a perception of tasks as varied and instruments as adaptable, while a perception of conditions as static, points to tasks as uniform and instruments as standardized

Figure 3. Perceptions of problem character, tasks and instruments.

	Static problem character	Dynamic problem character
Operative tasks	Uniform	Varied
Instruments	Standardised	Adaptable

The dimensions of policy content and perceptions of operative conditions must then be empirically compared to specific policy and implementation processes. This would imply that a perception of operative measures and instruments as requiring adaptability and flexibility would drive policy content towards the socially integrative strategy and vice versa.

However, the converse may also be true; that existing intra- and inter-organisational relations can in themselves influence policy developments during implementation. It is thus an important point that new policies seldom are implemented in new organisational structures. In the case of activation, the policy shifts towards more interventionist, active policies are implemented within existing municipal organisational structures that have a more traditional welfare orientation (i.e. by focusing on solving the individuals social problems, rather than stressing the importance of work or activation). And general administrative policy developments can also influence local municipal organisation, and thereby policy developments. Here we have focused especially on the fact that municipal organisation is being challenged by New Public Management (NPM) reforms: decentralisation, management-by-objectives, contracting out, competition within government, consumer orientation, etc. Public authorities are expected to compete and co-operate with other private, public and non-profit organisations involved in the same tasks (Mosley and Sol 2001). In intra-organisational terms, it means a distinction between traditional and modern organisation

Figure 4. Municipal principles of organisation

	Traditional organisation	Modern organisation
Principle of political control	Regulations and case management	Management-by-objectives
Principle of accountability	Professional norms Input orientation	Performance results and control Output orientation
Preferred qualifications of staff	General competencies	Specialised competencies

In inter-organisational terms our analysis focus on whether especially private enterprises are involved in municipal labour market policy (market orientation) and the nature of network and co-operation with other external partners (e.g. the social partners, the public employment service, educational institutions). We assume that tendencies toward municipal adoption of modern forms of organisation will push the policy in the direction of social disciplining, while more traditional organisations correspond to social integration.

We deal with indicators, i.e. operationalised indications of the categories in the analytical schema presented above. The various dimensions listed above show how intra- and inter-organisational ideas may be linked to a specific policy outcome. These ideas may be viewed as normative frameworks of orientation for the various actors in the implementation process. However, the extent to which they are converted to actual behaviour depends on the interaction of actors and the various understandings of the problem and possibilities for solution that develop.

The second set of indicators, i.e. **politics-indicators**, can thus capture the conflict-laden processes whereby participating actors in different arenas seek to affect organisation, decisions and policy content. In these processes, municipal respondents are asked to identify the significant actors and role-expectations linked to them with reference to a specific policy outcome. This is already indicated above. However, it is more difficult to cut across the municipalities and capture the dynamics that lie behind specific choices of action and problem understandings. Here local variations are important; for instance, earlier traditions and experiences with building up relations of cooperation with external parties, strategic considerations among individual actors, the presence of a dialogue-oriented or conflict-oriented culture of interactions, etc. The importance of actor behaviour and actors' interaction in policy formation is best explored with a point of departure in the individual municipality.

Some elements of actor behaviour may be traced in general, however. In this context we will confine ourselves to indicators concerning the interaction between the political and administrative level and the relations of administration to external cooperating partners, especially private firms. The former concern the kind of political attention and concern given to activation policy; the priority of activation policy on the general municipal policy agenda and the dimensions of activation policy, which are of special interest to politicians.

The final set of indicators are **policy-indicators**, which concern the more direct goals and policy formation in relation to the analytical dimensions of policy-alternatives and strategies (cf. figure 2). Among the key indicators are the kind of understandings that the municipalities have of the problems, the level and character of activation, the applied instruments, the use of demands and sanctions and the use of solutions targeting the individual needs of the unemployed. We expect to find a correlation between social disciplining and a problem understanding emphasising that the unemployed person's only problem is the lack of work. The unemployment problem is then interpreted as a lack of will or incentive on the part of the unemployed individual. An understanding of the unemployed person as being incapable of taking a job would conversely point towards the socially integrative strategy (or social compensation strategy). The same goes for the application of instruments. Use of activation as a work test and public employment projects indicate a socially disciplining strategy, while re-qualification measures adapted to individual needs and individual action plans indicate a socially integrative strategy.

Description of these policy indicators is a key part of our implementation analysis and requires good statistical data. Our study is based primarily on a countrywide survey. Respondents were heads of municipal civil service departments responsible for the activation and labour market area. The response rate was 72%. These data have been supplemented with data from the Danish national bureau of statistics. Comprehensive qualitative case studies were moreover carried out in five selected municipalities. This article is, however, primarily based upon the first set of data.

Empirical findings

It is not possible to provide an exhaustive description of the empirical results (cf. Larsen et. al 2001), but some of the most essential findings will be highlighted here. We begin with **the policy-indicators**. An important finding is how the municipalities balance their main labour market policy objectives.

Table 1. Taking into account that activation is needs oriented and therefore may require different solutions in each individual case, which general objectives of activation do your municipality then find to be the most important?

	Average
Respect for the wishes and self-motivation of the individual unemployed	2,6
Activation must be used as an (re)qualification instrument by use of education	2,8
Demands on individual unemployed must be made and sanctions used in case of non-participation or absenteeism from activation	3,1
Activation must be a work-trial	3,5
The life quality of the individual must be enhanced	4,3
Local enterprises must be provided with labour	4,8

Note: The respondent (i.e. administrative leaders of the activation/labour market departments of each municipality) was asked to prioritise each of the six objectives on a scale from 1-6 (1 as the most important and 6 as the least important objective). n=178-179.

The findings are surprising when compared to the dominant public discourse, which strongly emphasise strengthening labour market orientation of municipal social policy

and attempts to install more disciplining elements in legislation. The ranking of objective shows that municipalities tend to be more oriented towards social integration as measured by the high ranking of self-motivation of the unemployed and re-qualification. The social disciplining strategy (measured as demands/sanctions and activation as a work-trial) is seen as less important, though not wholly unimportant, as indicated by the fact that the passive-strategy (measured as enhancing life quality) is judged as least important. Activation is thereby not perceived as an unconditional public benefit, but the ranking of average responses, nonetheless, indicates that 'softer' objectives are more important than the 'tougher' objectives of the disciplining strategy.

Despite the proclaimed Danish job-miracle of the late 1990s (Cox 1998; Madsen 1999; Torfing 1999, 2000) the numbers of social security recipients have been stagnant throughout the economic upswing and the character of problems of the target group for municipal activation may even have worsened. Municipal activation departments are therefore currently faced with a target group that, both quantitatively and qualitatively, has increased the complexity, workload and responsibility of local authorities.⁹ Thus, an explanation for the higher ranking of 'socially integrative' over 'socially disciplining' objectives may reflect perceptions that the problems of the target group are not compatible with too strong disciplining elements. On average, municipalities do not perceive social disciplining as a strategy to reintegrate greater numbers of social assistance recipients on the labour market, which is also indicated by the low ranking given to 'securing labour supply for local enterprises'. This may be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the fact that a high proportion of the current number of social assistance recipients are not employable or available for the ordinary labour market, nor will they become so in the immediate future.

Two additional observations underscore the interpretation that the immediate labour market availability of the target group is seen as problematic. First, despite considerable improvements in employment opportunities during the late 1990s, only a moderate decline in the total number of recipients of social assistance has been recorded. Second, the municipal representatives in the survey present their target groups as 'weak' in so far as 62% of current recipients of social assistance are assessed as having 'problems besides unemployment' (e.g. social, physical and health problems). The reaction of municipalities to the complex problem structure of the target group is to point towards social integration strategies rather than social disciplining strategies. These findings on problem definitions and general objectives also correspond to the actual policies and measures being implemented by the municipalities.

Observing the instruments used by the municipalities to activate the target group, it is clear that instruments targeting the least employable and least available on the labour market are the most commonly applied (such as individual job-training and municipal employment projects). The use of educational offers is being virtually phased out at the moment. Ordinary job training is also used to a limited extent. The implication is that the private sector share of job training is reduced substantially.

Examination of the data in more detail reveals major differences as to who, how much and how fast the unemployed are activated. The municipalities report that on average 58% of the social assistance recipients were in activation at the time of data collection.

However, the register data of the Danish National Bureau of Statistics, which are probably more reliable than self-assessments, shows that only 33% of recipients were in activation in year 2000. Regardless of method of measurement, the explanation of the respondents for why one- to two-thirds of every social assistance recipient was not in activation is remarkable

Table 2. What is the importance of the following explanations for the fact that some groups of social assistance recipient are currently not being activated? (average)

It is pointless to activate some groups of unemployed (they cannot be reached)	2,9
They unemployed abstain from activation projects	3,2
Their case management is dragging on because of the workload	3,3
We do not have offers that match the given target group	3,4
The municipality lack economic resources to give relevant offers	3,8
The unemployed reject activation	4,0
The municipality lack formal qualifications to give relevant offers	4,0

Note: Response categories: (1) very high importance, (2) high importance, (3) some importance, (4) less important and (5) no importance. n=190-194.

The most frequent explanation given for non-activation is that activation is perceived as pointless for certain groups. They cannot be reached! This finding shows that there is a large group of unemployed for whom activation is not seen as a relevant or meaningful option. It may be an indication that there has emerged a gap between legislative and political intentions on the one side and the composition of the target group of unemployed on the other side. The municipal reaction to this gap is to ‘free’ a proportion of the unemployed from the ‘burden’ of activation.

The correspondence between local policies, measures and the problem character of the target group is reflected in the fact that young and ‘employable’ persons whose only problem is unemployment are activated first. It may of course also reflect ‘creaming’ in so far as the strongest unemployed are prioritised in order to achieve better and quicker results. It is also the ‘most employable’ who are sanctioned most severely, which is also the legislative intention.

The empirical findings on **the administrative/organisational indicators** support this portrait of municipal implementation going in the direction of social integration: In general there are only few major organisational changes, where we had an assumption that a shift in the direction of NPM-style organisational forms would correspond with the socially disciplining strategy. Concerning shifting public responsibilities for municipal activation towards the private sector, the findings of the study are surprising, in so far as municipalities still consider activation as a ‘pure’ public responsibility. Hence, only 3% of municipalities currently use contracting-out (in open tenders) and only 5% are planning to do so. Compared to the intentions of political decision-makers and the persistent media-debate, it must be interpreted as a relatively low level.

NPM-inspired developments in administration policy have nonetheless spread to municipal authorities and spilled over into the labour market policy area. In relation to accountability-processes and control, however, fundamental changes cannot be observed. Even if there is a new focus on target formulation, supervision and evaluation

of output, the operational consequences of such new systems at the field level, observable in related municipal policy areas, do not seem to have had the same effect in the area of activation policy. There is still a large element of street-level autonomy and discretion in the implementation of activation policies. This is probably due to the special character of the policy field in which problem identification among municipalities still varies and the choice of activation instruments must correspond to individual and local circumstances. Activation is a dynamic-interventionist policy type (cf. Rothstein 1998) and will therefore be exceptionally difficult to standardise. Skilled street-level caseworkers, moreover, strongly resist breaking down performance measures to the individual level.

The complex problems of the target group are reflected in the organisation of municipal activation. Caseworkers continue to enjoy a relatively high degree of autonomy and discretion in deciding which measures correspond to individual demands and requirements. Our empirical data point towards a 'traditional' organisation of municipal activation characterised by limited standardisation and high street-level autonomy. Municipalities still organise daily work routines according to broadly defined professional competencies and orientations in which the general knowledge and experiences of individual caseworkers is the key factor in identifying solutions to specific problem situation. The traditional work organisation, what in the social policy discourses of the 1970s would be labelled 'holistic and individualised work organisation', still permeates municipal activation. Despite public discussions about reducing the discretionary powers of caseworkers and introducing new types of occupational groups in municipal activation (allegedly more knowledgeable about the realities of the ordinary labour market), the composition of personnel remains dominated by academically trained social workers and caseworkers with on the job training ('socialrådgivere' and 'socialformidlere'). New types of occupational groups, however, are in some municipalities hired to take charge of contacts with private enterprises. The only exception to the rule that caseworkers enjoy autonomy in daily activities is in areas with major economic consequences for the municipalities.

In sum, modern organisational principles and models have not yet led to fundamental changes or 'revolutions' in internal organisation of municipal activation departments. Of course our survey suffers from the methodological limitation that it presents only a cross-sectional image of the situation in April 2001 and does not allow us to describe historical changes. Our data could also be interpreted as indication of developments being set gradually in motion compared to previous organisational practices. Nevertheless, our qualitative case studies also seem to confirm that fundamental changes have not occurred.

There thus seems to be accordance between the policy and administrative/organisational indicators. It becomes increasingly difficult to standardise organisation and work routines and to identify measurable objectives as policy shifts towards the social integration approach (or even exemption from activation). Discretion and professional decision-making autonomy appear to be more viable methods of work organisation. In this respect, internal organisation reflects problem definitions and the policy content of municipal authorities. It does not imply 'status quo' in internal organisation but, rather, that the changes are incremental and step-wise and take into account traditional

orientations and the character of the target group. However, more fundamental changes can possibly be detected in the external organisation of municipal authorities.

The active-line (with self-sufficiency as the end goal) and reorientation towards the ordinary labour market has clearly affected perceptions of the inter-organisational relationships of municipal activation departments. The aim, on the one hand, is to reintegrate the proportionally lower share of 'immediately employable' on the ordinary labour market and, on the other hand, to prevent further exclusion from the labour market. The dominant municipal activity is clearly to target social integration towards the ordinary labour market. By implication, there is a strong orientation in nearly every municipality towards greater involvement of private enterprises in activation. Political and administrative decisions are taken, initiatives towards the private sector are implemented, and groups of employees are hired to cater for the contact with private enterprises. The greater focus on involvement of private enterprises is also reflected in the fact that municipalities in general find that the influence of employers' associations in municipal activation activities should be improved.

Conflicts of interest, however, are still alive as seen in the motives that municipal administrators are giving the social partners for involving themselves in co-operation on active social policy. Municipal respondents have difficulties identifying the 'ownership' of social partners towards social policies; motivations for co-operation are more related to narrow organisational interests. The municipal respondents assess the employers' associations to be motivated predominantly by concerns for maintaining and retaining persons already in employment (i.e. internal social responsibility) and by measures related to raising the supply of labour. Labour unions are said to be motivated for co-operation by the opportunity to retain members already in ordinary employment. Converted into policy programmes, prevention of workplace exclusion and actively retaining employees who risk exclusion (internal social responsibility) seems favourable fields for cooperation. Finding common interests for measures to achieve social integration of social assistance recipients outside the labour market seems more difficult (external social responsibility). However, when these motives are seen in the light of our analysis of target group characteristics and favoured objectives for activation, it should be noted that it seems to be in the field of social integration that municipalities may be most in need of integrated co-operation with social partners.

In sum, our data indicate that municipal activation policy should still be described as a predominantly local government responsibility despite municipal attempts to intensify cooperation with especially the social partners. Social integration of target groups on the ordinary labour market remains the overriding objective of municipal activation departments, and conflicts of interests with the social partners can still be identified.

The implemented policy-content (step 3)

Summing up the findings from the analysis of the indicators, we can now move to the third step in the approach and characterize the implemented policy content. Our general conclusions about the implemented policy content are summarised in the figure below

Figure 5. The implemented ‘active-line’

<i>Active-line</i>			<i>Passive-line</i>
Social disciplining	Social Integration	Non-participation in activation	Social compensation
Labour market available and immediately employable	Available for activation and employable in longer-term perspective	‘Unreachable’ within the active-line	Pre-pensioners
→ ←	← →	←	

The dominant political discourse in Denmark reflected in a number of legislative and administrative initiatives focus on social disciplining measures. However, in municipal implementation the disciplining policy elements are toned down. This is illustrated in the figure by reducing the width of the column ‘social disciplining’ (compare to figure 2). In dealing with those persons assessed to be immediately available to the labour market, however, municipalities are pushing hard with social disciplining strategies (work first, activation as work test and strict sanctions). For the remaining – and much larger – target group, social integration is used. Municipal authorities, finally, assess that a high share of the least employable cannot be reached within the ‘active-line’ as long as self-sufficiency is the end goal. This is illustrated in the figure by the group of ‘unreachable’ falling outside the grey area of the ‘active-line’.

Evaluation (step 4)

As indicated in the analytical approach (figure 1), the characterisation of policy content can finally be applied to evaluation. We thus compare empirical findings of the implementation analysis with more normative judgement based on different evaluation criteria.

Evaluation has traditionally meant being able to provide policy advice to political decision-makers. This understanding has led Scandinavia’s leading evaluation researcher, Evert Vedung, to restrict evaluation to only occupying itself with the implementation process (even though he prefers terms other than implementation). Vedung (1991) argue that it is problematic to evaluate the decision-making process that the analyst must subsequently be a policy advisor to. In contrast we evaluate all parts of the policy-making process and view the advisor role as significantly broader. The argument for doing so is, first, that if policy analysis shall approach its original ambitions of becoming ‘the policy science of democracy’ (Lasswell 1951), i.e. create knowledge for improvement of democratic practice, then the subject of analysis must include all aspects of the political process. Second, if policy analysis shall become more than a technocratic instrument for the political elite, then the advisory role must be defined in relation to a broader groups of stakeholders and the general public.

Thus our approach is more in line with post-positivist evaluation research (e.g., Fischer 1995), in using different lenses (or evaluation criteria) covering what Fischer calls ‘first order’ to ‘second order’ evaluation, cf. the above mentioned questions being posed. Critics have suggested that such a perspective and analytical approach to evaluation

presents a formidable challenge to the researcher. The approach nonetheless point towards discussions of a new role definition for evaluation, which should not be easily abandoned. First, the standard of evaluation is no longer only a question of whether political objectives have been realised in implementation, but equally important whether the stated political objectives are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in themselves. Second, research findings are not only addressed to authoritative decision-makers but to the general public. In the literature about different perspectives of evaluation these are sometimes seen as conflicting. We do not take the same view. It is the explicit use of more perspectives, which makes it possible to differentiate knowledge from the evaluation according to the ‘stakeholders’ one wants to enter into a dialogue with. The evaluation criteria we utilise below are efficiency, effectiveness, adequacy (causal relations), responsiveness, equity and appropriateness (Dunn 1995, 282ff.). In this respect we move from ‘first-order’ to ‘second-order’ evaluation by applying different lenses to the empirical findings of the study.

Evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness

Efficiency and effectiveness are closely related to technical and economic rationality. Effectiveness refers to whether a given alternative results in the achievement of a valued outcome (often measured in terms of products or services), whereas efficiency refers to the amount or level of inputs required to produce a given level of effectiveness (often measured in terms of monetary costs). In our study of municipal activation policies in Denmark, the characterisation of the policy content was not evaluated on the basis of policy effectiveness and efficiency. Our limited database prevented us from making such as assessment, due to lack of individual participant data. Nevertheless, it is still fruitful to apply the perspective of efficiency and effectiveness to our findings. What kind of evaluation results would this entail?

The conclusion would undoubtedly be quite negative. In summary form, the municipalities do not seem to fulfil their legislative obligations to activate all those who are unemployed. This is also the case with the disciplining elements of the legislation. Here the municipalities must be assessed as being ‘too soft’. There are also limited short-term effects in relation to objectives of improving employment and self-sufficiency of the target groups. The fact that the target group has numerous problems besides unemployment seems irrelevant in this respect. In this evaluation perspective municipal activation is too expensive and inefficient. Such findings based on technical and economic rationality undoubtedly has the greatest impact on the dominant political decision-makers and mirrors the findings of especially economic research (cf. Danish Economic Council 2002; Calmfors 1994; Martin 2000).

Evaluation of adequacy

The criterion of ‘adequacy’ specifies expectations about the strength of a relationship between policy alternatives and valued outcomes, and it is in this sense that the criteria is applied here.¹⁰ In our analysis, policy alternatives are presented around social disciplining and social integration. Social disciplining, as mentioned, is the dominant political discourse in Denmark in legislative and administrative initiatives. However, this strategy is relevant for only a limited proportion of the unemployed. The discrepancy is clearly reflected in municipal implementation in which disciplining policy elements are toned down. Apparently, the disciplining strategy does not match a

high proportion of the target group. The group of 'weak' unemployed (with least employability and/or limited labour market availability) can probably not be pushed onto the ordinary labour market using enforcement measures and sanctions. As a policy instrument, this 'stick' is only effective towards a minority of the currently unemployed. Social integration seems to be a more adequate policy alternative, with more individualised measures and instruments in greater harmony with the capacities and needs of the individual unemployed and in which self-motivation is a driving mechanism. Recognition of this fact is one of the cornerstones of the current processes of implementation of activation in the municipalities. Nevertheless, even social integration seems to have its limits. There is a large group of unemployed for which activation is neither relevant nor effective. This may be an indication that Danish activation policy has reached a threshold in which official policy objectives do not meet the characteristics of the target group. Available instruments in the 'active-line' are all targeted towards gaining ordinary employment and self-sufficiency but apparently not targeted towards the needs of this target group. The municipal reaction to the discrepancy is to exempt a proportion of the unemployed from the 'burden' of activation. But this strategy also becomes a problem, in any case if one uses another 'lens' and goes further to the next evaluation criterion.

Evaluation of responsiveness

'Responsiveness' refers to the extent to which a policy satisfies the needs, preferences, or values of particular groups. Responsiveness entails a relationship to the actual needs of groups that are supposed to benefit from a policy. In this evaluation perspective, one would compare our findings to actual (micro) studies of the target groups' reactions and experiences of the interventions. We have not done this,¹¹ but there are nevertheless numerous indications that the various strategies of the municipalities correspond to the capacities and problems of the target groups. And with this evaluation criterion, the interventions can be assessed in a more positive light. There is much evidence to indicate that the municipalities to a great extent structure their interventions according to the target groups with whom they are dealing, rather than slavishly implementing the legally mandated political objectives around a more disciplining line. Here the municipalities assess that the 'stick' is of no use in returning large proportions of the target groups to the ordinary labour market. Instead, they emphasise social integration measures, which seem more in accord with the real needs of the target groups. However, there is a still large segment of the target group for which this strategy has no relevance. And here the evaluation reveals a more negative result in relation to the responsiveness criterion, since alternative interventions are not offered. This groups outside the active-line is in effect abandoned as a ever increasing gap emerge between the official intentions of the 'active-line' and the realities on the ground.

Evaluation of equity

The criterion of 'equity' is closely related to legal and social rationality, and refers to the distribution of effects and efforts among different groups in society. With this perspective we begin moving from the specific program to broader social and political values (higher-order criteria). Equity refers to a policy where effects or efforts are fairly or justly distributed.¹² In this perspective, it becomes problematic when a municipality exempts a proportion of the unemployed from the 'burden' of activation. This is not only a violation of official policy objectives. It also seems to require a political

discussion on whether and how this group should be included in the traditional quid pro quo work obligation. The municipalities can select one of two strategies. The first strategy is to activate the group (primarily by individual job training or municipal employment projects) knowing that the probability of success is very limited and that individuals may experience (yet another) personal defeat. The second strategy is to accept the fact that not each and every unemployed can or should participate in activation in return for benefits. That strategy may however mask the legitimate needs and demands of this group for another type of targeted social intervention than activation.

A cause for concern in this perspective is thus the relatively large group of unemployed whom the municipalities have placed outside the activation policy. The key questions must be: What is the solution for this group? How 'passive' is this unofficial 'passive-line'? Does exemption from activation imply that these persons are compensated only via unconditional transfer income, or are more traditional social policy measures being applied (e.g., professional counselling, medical, psychological, physical treatment, etc.)? Is the alternative for this group - in the 'twilight zone' between the officially sanctioned active and passive lines - only to gain eligibility to enter the pre-pension scheme, or is it necessary to develop new types of (empowerment) instruments, which do not necessarily have economic self-sufficiency as their ultimate goal?

Evaluation of appropriateness

'Appropriateness' refers to the value or worth of a program's objectives and to the tenability of the assumptions underlying these objectives. While all other criteria take objectives for granted, the criterion of appropriateness asks whether these criteria are the proper ones for society. To answer this question, the analyst must consider all criteria together and seek to identify the societal values that the program builds upon (Dunn 1995; Fischer 1995). The criterion of appropriateness is therefore also necessarily open-ended, since by definition it is not intended to go beyond any set of existing criteria.

In Denmark, there is a general legitimacy surrounding activation as an instrument to ensure an adequate supply of jobs, and as a means of ensuring a higher degree of welfare to the unemployed individual. There is also a broad acceptance of activation (and sanctions) as a means of increasing the individual's incentive to seek work, simultaneously with a concern to increase the individual unemployed person's qualifications. The intervention must be of the kind that the individual can and will be able to work. In recent years, however, there has occurred a distortion toward applying activation to increasing the individual's incentives to seek work rather than focusing on the lack of qualifications. And here policymakers can show themselves to be entirely out of step with the reality in which the intervention must be implemented. This is what our implementation analysis reveals. And therefore, it is perhaps not so surprising that several official evaluations find high costs of activation and a lack of immediate results. The question, then, is which political consequences should be drawn from this? The most recent answers have been a reduction of activation inputs (especially the qualification elements from the social integration strategy) and even more emphasis on the disciplining elements. As a result, however, even more groups might not be covered by the legitimised 'active-line' and loose contact to the labour market. Instead, there

seems to be need for policy developments that more appropriately corresponds to the needs of the target group. And it seems not only to concern lack of will among the unemployed, but even more the question of job-related and personal (re-)qualification within a social integration strategy.

In addition, there is the question of the large group of unemployed who are legally subject to activation, but whom the municipalities do not regard as worth the activation effort. This group finds itself in a vacuum, judged too healthy to qualify for disability pensions, but not sufficient qualified for an activation effort. On the basis of fairness considerations alone, this is entirely unacceptable.

4. Conclusions

We have presented an alternative approach to the analysis of implementation processes and suggested subsequent alternative forms of evaluation. The model has been presented by an implementation study of activation policy in the Danish municipalities. In our view there is a great need for empirically founded implementation studies followed by more normatively founded evaluation. Especially in relation to the latter, there seems to be a need for a greater range of evaluation criteria than those most frequently employed, where focus is on goal fulfilment in relation to narrow understandings of effectiveness and efficiency. This is clearly illustrated in the case of activation policy.

Moreover, it is our impression that the approach presented here has relevance beyond this study of active labour market policy. Particularly in relation to public policies targeting ‘wicked’ problems (i.e. probably the majority of policy problems and certainly the most important problems) and where the level of ambitions for change of target group behaviour is high (i.e. human processing policies). In these cases causal knowledge will often be uncertain or even unavailable, and this calls for ‘opening up’ evaluation strategies in order to cover a wide range of evaluation perspectives. Different lenses produce different knowledge and that is to acknowledge for both policy-makers, different ‘stakeholders’ and the public in general that learning, experimentation and evaluation are important elements of the implementation process. Choosing a single perspective will miss this point. This frame of understanding would also correspond better to the increasing tendency towards implementation of public policies in intra- and inter-organisational networks where a multitude of different central and local as well as public and private organisations have a stake in policy implementation.

References

- Albrekt, C.L. (2002): 'Policy paradigms and cross-national policy (mis)learning from the Danish employment miracle', *Journal of European Public Policy*, **9**(5), 715-735.
- Allison, G.T. (1971): *The essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban missile crisis*, Boston, Mass: Little Brown.
- Anderson, J.E. (1975): *Public policy-making*, New York: Praeger.
- Bredgaard, T., N. Abildgaard, L. Dalsgaard and F. Larsen (2002): 'Kommunal aktivering: Hvordan implementeres store forventninger fra Christiansborg i de danske kommuner' *Tidsskrift for Arbejdsliv*, **4**(2), 45-61.
- Calmfors, L. (1994): 'Active labour market policy and unemployment – A framework for the analysis of crucial design features' *OECD Economic Studies*, No. 22, Spring 1994, 8-42.
- Cox, R.H. (1998): 'From safety net to trampoline: labour market activation in the Netherlands and Denmark', *Governance*, **11**(4), 397-415.
- Dalsgaard, L. and M. Lassen (1997): 'Politikdannelse og brugere – kvalitetsvurderinger på hjemmehjælps- og aktiveringsområdet' in Gundelach, P., H. Jørgensen and K.K. Klausen, eds.: *Det lokale – decentral politik og forvaltning*, Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, 205-235.
- Danish Economic Council (2002): *Dansk Økonomi Efterår 2002*, Copenhagen: Det Økonomiske Råd.
- Dunn, W.N. (1995): *Public policy analysis: An introduction*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall (2nd Ed.).
- Edelman, M. (1971): *Politics as symbolic action – mass arousal and quiescence*, New York: Academic Press.
- Edelman, M. (1977): *Political languages. Words that succeed and policies that fail*, New York: Academic Press.
- Elmore, R. (1978): 'Organizational models of social program implementation', *Public Policy*, **26**, 185-228.
- Fischer, F. (1995): *Evaluating public policy*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers.
- Hansen, H. (2001): *Arbejde, aktivering og arbejdsløshed – integration i det hele liv*, København: Samfundslitteratur.
- Harmon M.M. & Mayer R.T. (1986): *Organization theory for public administration*, Boston and Toronto, Little, Brown and Company.
- Hill, M. & P. Hupe (2002): *Implementing public policy: Governance in theory and in practice*, London: Sage.
- Hjern, B. (1982): Implementation research: The link gone missing, *Journal of Public Policy*, **2**(3), 301-308.
- Hjern, B & D.O. Porter (1981): Implementation structures: A new unit of administrative analysis, *Organization Studies*, **2**(3), 211-227.
- Hjern, B. & C. Hull (1982): Implementation research as empirical constitutionalism, in B. Hjern & C. Hull, eds. *Implementation beyond hierarchy*.

- Hogwood, B.W. & L.A. Gunn (1984): *Policy analysis for the real world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jensen B. (1999): *Kan det betale sig at arbejde? Danskernes arbejdsudbud i 90'ernes velfærdsstat*, København, Spektrum og Rockwoolfonden.
- Jessop, B. (1993): 'Towards a Schumpeterian workfare state? Remarks on post-fordist political economy', *Studies in Political Economy*, **40**, 7-39.
- John, P. (1998): *Analysing public policy*, London: Pinter.
- Katz M.B. (1989): *The undeserving poor - from the war on poverty to the war on welfare*, New York, Pantheon Books.
- Koning, J. de and H. Mosley (2001): *Labour market policy and unemployment – Impact and process evaluations in selected European countries*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Larsen F., Abildgaard N., Bredgaard T. & Dalsgaard L. (2001): *Kommunal aktivering - mellem disciplinering og integration*, Aalborg, Aalborg Universitetsforlag.
- Larsen F. (2002): Labour market policy, in H. Jørgensen: *Consensus, cooperation and conflict: The policy-making process in Denmark*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1951): 'The policy orientation' in D. Lerner and H.D. Lasswell, eds. *The policy sciences*, Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1956): *The decision process: Seven categories of functional analysis*, College Park: University of Maryland.
- Lasswell, H.D. (1970): 'The emerging conception of the policy sciences', *Policy Sciences*, **1**(1), 3-14.
- Lester, J.P. and M.L. Googin (1998): 'Back to the future: The rediscovery of implementation studies', *Policy Currents*, **8**(3), 1-9.
- Lipsky, Michael (1980): *Street-level bureaucracy*, New York: Russel Sage Foundation.
- Lødemel I. & Trickey H. (2001) (red.): *Offer you can't refuse - Workfare in international perspective*, Bristol, Policy Press.
- Madsen, P.K. (1999): *Flexibility, security and labour market success*, Geneva: ILO.
- Martin, J.P. (2000): 'What works among active labour market policies: Evidence from OECD countries' experiences' *OECD Economic Studies*, No. 30, 2000/1, 80-111.
- Matland, R. (1995): 'Synthesizing the implementation literature: The ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation', *Journal of public administration research and theory*, **5**(2), 145-174.
- Mazmanian, D. and P. Sabatier (1983): *Implementation and public policy*, Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co.
- Mead L.M. (1992): *The new politics of poverty - the nonworking poor in America*, New York, BasicBooks.
- Ministry of Labour (1989): *Hvidbog om arbejdsmarkedets strukturproblemer*, København, Arbejdsministeriet.
- Ministry of Labour (2000): *Effekter af aktiveringsindsatsen*, København, Arbejdsministeriet.

- Morgan, G. (1986): *Images of organization*, Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage.
- Mosley, H. & E. Sol (2001): 'Process evaluation of active labour market policies and trends in implementation regimes' in J. de Koning & H. Mosley (2001): *Labour market policy and unemployment – Impact and process evaluations in selected European countries*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- OECD (1994): *The OECD Jobs Study: evidence and explanations*, Vol. I and II, Paris: OECD.
- OECD (1995): *The OECD Jobs Study: Taxation, employment and unemployment*, Paris, OECD.
- Offerdal A. (2000): Iverksettingsteori - resultatene blir sjelden som planlagt, og det kan være en fordel?, in Baldersheim H. & Rose L.E, eds.: *Det kommunale laboratorium - Teoretiske perspektiver på lokal politik og organisering*, Bergen, Fagbokforlaget.
- O'Toole, L.J. Jr. (1986): 'Policy recommendations for multi-actor implementation: An assessment of the field', *Journal of public policy*, 6(2), 181-210.
- Parsons, W. (1995): *Public policy*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997): *Realistic Evaluation*, London: Sage publications
- Peck, J. (2002): *Workfare states*, New York: Guildford.
- Pedersen P.J. & Smith N. (1995): Kan det betale sig at arbejde? i Mogensen G.V. (red.): *Hvad driver værket*, København, Rockwoolfondens Forskningsenhed.
- Perrow, C. (1986): *Complex organizations: A critical essay*, New York: Random House.
- Pressman, J.L. and A. Wildavsky (1973): *Implementation*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ripley, R and Franklin, G (1982): *Bureaucracy and policy implementation*, Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press.
- Rothstein, B. (1998): *Just institutions matter – The moral and political logic of the universal welfare state*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith N. (1998) ed.: *Arbejde, incitament og ledighed*, Aarhus, Aarhus Universitetsforlag og Rockwool Fondens Forskningsenhed.
- Social Commission (1992): *Uden arbejde - overførselsindkomst til midtergruppen*, København, Socialkommissionen.
- Torfin J. (1999): Welfare with workfare: Recent reforms of the Danish welfare state, i *Journal of European Social Policy*, 9, 1, 5-28.
- Torfin J. (2000): *Towards a Schumpeterian workfare postnational regime? A framework for analysing the changing face of Danish labour market policy*, Aalborg: CARMA.
- Vedung E. (1991): *Utvärdering i politik och förvaltning*, Lund, Studentlitteratur.
- Winter S. (1994): *Implementering og effektivitet*, Aarhus, Systime.
- Wolman, H. (1980): 'The determinants of program success and failure' *Journal of Public Policy*, 1.
- Zeuthen Commission (1992): *Rapport fra udredningsudvalget om arbejdsmarkedets strukturproblemer*, København, Udredningsudvalget.

Endnotes

¹ In the literature there are different uses of the notion 'outcome'. Our understanding refers to observed consequences of policy actions. It also means that something follow after outcome, e.g. policy performance in relation to assessing the degree to which a given policy outcome contributes to the attainment of desired values. Others use 'output' or 'outcome' to denote such a distinction.

² This part is often categorized under 'studies of policy content' (Hogwood and Gunn 1984, p. 29).

³ The case on municipal implementation of labour market policy originates from our project 'The role of local authorities in active labour market policy' (Kommunerne i arbejdsmarkedspolitikken). The project is financed by the Danish Research Council under the auspices of the Center for Labour Market Research (CARMA) at Aalborg University, Denmark.

⁴ In stressing the importance of studying what happens, we are in line with the 'bottom up' perspective in implementation research, i.e. the actual behaviour and actions of implementing agents and organisations in the policy field is essentially more important than official political objectives and intentions (cf. Lipsky 1980; Hjern and Porter 1981; Hjern 1982, Hjern and Hull 1982). Our essential reservation concerning the 'bottom up' perspective is, however, that in studying actual behavior and actions at the bottom of the implementation structure one also needs to consider how the official and explicit goals influence the actions and operations of the organizations and actors in charge of implementing the policy.

⁵ In choosing these dimensions for investigation we build upon prior knowledge or 'theory' of the specific circumstances of the delivery of human processing programmes. In the sense our approach is 'theory driven' (Pawson and Tilley 1997 p.25ff)

⁶ 'Wicked problems' cannot be clearly defined and are difficult to separate them from other problems. The goals for their solutions are ill defined and due to this there are no clear criterion for the optimal solution. There will only be a 'best' solution and this 'best' solution will always be a normative one.

⁷ A few contextual remarks on labour market policy and the role of the Danish municipalities may be in order. Danish central-local relations are among the most decentralised in the western world both in terms of expenditures and service delivery. Constitutionally, municipalities have a high degree of autonomy from central authorities. The popularly elected municipal councils may write out their own taxes to finance local welfare services. Since 1978, municipalities have also obtained a central position in labour market policy. Municipalities are responsible for different types of employment and activation measures and for paying out income transfers to unemployed without unemployment insurance. They even participate in activation of unemployed with insurance, even if the public employment service has the final responsibility for these measures.

⁸ However, reductions of benefit levels were not politically feasible in the early 1990s.

⁹ Denmark experienced from 1995-2001, according to some observes, an employment miracle, as official unemployment rates more than halved, as youth unemployment virtually disappeared and long-term unemployment fell dramatically. At the same time inflation rates remained comparatively low and economic growth high. However, the improving labour market situation primarily benefited persons in the public employment service system, the majority of which were readily available for the ordinary labour market. The majority of those unemployed not benefiting from the economic upswing are located in the social security system and are characterised as having 'problems besides unemployment' (e.g. social, physical or health problems).

¹⁰ And not (as with Dunn 1995) to only assess costs in relation to effectiveness. We evaluate the adequacy of the implemented active-line relation to the problem situation.

¹¹ Subjective effect measurements of participant satisfaction with activation have generally shown a surprisingly high level of satisfaction with the quality and effects of activation offers (cf. e.g. Hansen 2001), which seem contradictory to the pessimistic employment effects found in micro-effect and variation evaluations (cf. Danish Economic Council 2002; Albrecht 2002)

¹² This evaluation criterion is (like the criterion of 'appropriateness') in no way unambiguous, as there will be competing conceptions of justice or fairness and the appropriate basis of distributing resources in society. A more extensive discussion of this issue, however, lies beyond the framework of this article (see Dunn 1995).