

## Opinion on the PhD dissertation

**Esien Eddy Bruno: Young Third-country Immigrant's Tradition to Work and Activation Policies in Austria, Finland, and Czech Republic. Dissertation Thesis. Prague, Charles University, 2021, 196 pp.**

### Theme and goal of dissertation

The topic of the study is highly relevant. For his dissertation, the author chose one of the key themes of the current implementation of labour market activation policies in European countries. A practical problem of the study is the lack of support and facilitation of activation of specific population groups (social and cultural minorities, the disabled, the long-term unemployed) in the labour market provided by the activation programmes of the current European Employment Strategy. The author articulates the problem fairly accurately as the increasing difficulty of transitioning members of those at-risk groups from social benefits to "any job" in the labour market by means of specific activation schemes, the structural context and institutional framework of which combine these programmes with "economic commitments", new values and social responsibility for them. The topicality of the problem can also be expressed by the question: can the path to more or less stable work and employment of these people be effectively supported and facilitated under the existing structural conditions and the resulting institutional tools of activation policy? Alternatively, is it necessary to formulate new support objectives for these individuals and new institutional tools to assist activation through work?

Esien begins to study the topic with a research question: "How does young third-country immigrants' transition from welfare to all types of work take place in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic and what is the role of their employment services in work-related activation programmes implementation to smooth this process?" It adheres to the ideas underlying the current European Employment Strategy and does not take into account either the national perspective or the interests of specific stakeholder groups or the wider public. In conceptual terms, it treats the implementation of activation programs more normatively as the prevailing top-down process. Such an approach to analysing the implementation of activation policy is, of course, possible and, in many ways, justified. I comment only on the fact that the author does not discuss it in the text, but merely accepts it.

### Overall Evaluation

**In my opinion, the author answered the research question sufficiently.** The study has a broadly consistent structure, based on a transparently described specific theoretical framework, the work uses standard methods of data collection and analysis. The central area of research design is comparative analysis, which relies on triangulation through the involvement of different research methods and data sources. The results relate to the central focus of the study, which is the relationship and role between the key players in the provision of labour market activation policy: government and public and private (including non-profit sector) intermediation agencies and employment services for the selected target group. The qualitative research strategy serves to clarify the different organisational and institutional arrangements of implementation structures in selected countries. The study contains arguments from 16 expert stats that originated in the processing of empirical data. These texts illustrate thematic integrity.

**I note that the study achieves the standard for a dissertation in Public and Social policy. I recommend oral defense. Despite the overall positive assessment at work, I find some logical gaps and debate issues. I'll describe some in the following paragraphs.**

### **1. Incomplete theoretical analysis of the implementation process**

In the introduction to the doctoral thesis, the author defines the subject of his research as the arrangement of the activation policy implementation process. It further specifies and studies this subject in terms of four sub-questions of research. Exactly what the implementation process is, however, is not further explained in the study. Nor is the author concerned with describing or comparing the different models of the implementation process. A number of such models have been created over the past decades. It is not just ideally typical top-down or bottom-up models, but complex and mixed models, in particular. For the dissertation topic, model of implementation as policy development is interesting. The concept of political evaluation and development has been developed classically by authors E. Ostrom or M. Patton. *(Q1) Therefore, I ask the author to clarify what the word "activation policy implementation" means to him specifically, or how it differs from the process of formulating and shaping activation policy.*

### **2. Methodological ambiguity of thematic content analysis (TA)**

The 'thematic content analysis' procedure is not described in the methodological section. The inclusion of that method raises some questions. There are numerous variants of TA. In its classic version, TA is a qualitatively interpretative method. It is suitable for describing the differences in relevance structures of messages from communication partners during conversation. It makes it possible to distinguish the subjective meanings from respondents in a research conversation. However, such research goals are not, in my view, what this dissertation study is about. *(Q2) I ask the author to explain the function of thematic analysis in his research in the thesis defense. (Q3) Then to describe what he understands by the term "theme" as a result of thematic analysis.*

### **3. Adequacy of sample for data analyses**

I appreciate the diverse choice of respondent to collect data through interviews and questionnaires. These informants operate in different positions in the implementation structure of activation policy. I also evaluate positively the use of different data sources for secondary analysis and different methods of data collection. The criteria for the selection of organizations involved in research remain unclear to me. The author on p.161 writes that: 'The cities were selected because the local units of government and private employment service agencies working there in the areas of employment-related activation measures could be representative and suitable of other similar local public and private employment agencies in Austria, Finland, and Czech Republic...'. *(Q4) I would ask Eddy in his defence to clarify the criteria of this representativeness and suitability for the selected countries as a whole."*

The author goes on to list selection criteria that relate to the range of experience and information that the staff of the selected organizations have about specific activation programmes and services for young immigrants. His arguments are understandable in terms of quality of data collection and analysis. After reading a research study, I became convinced that these criteria related to the quality of the research process were dominant for selection. *(Q5) So the ultimate question arises, does the research data really represent the implementation of activation policies for hard-to-locate young immigrants in the countries studied? Or whether case studies represent the relatively most advanced forms of activation policy implementation for the selected target group in the countries studied.*