

# Working on emotions in volunteer programs

The experiences of welfare clients engaged in compulsory volunteer work in the Netherlands

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## *Abstract*

In recent years, the Dutch local governments have increasingly activated unemployed citizens through volunteer work. Activation policy joins ‘active’ citizens and ‘activated’ citizens together in a voluntary setting. In the context of activation policy volunteer work is considered a stepping stone towards employment, a remedy to social exclusion, a contribution to social cohesion, and even a chance to address psychosocial problems. This paper distinguishes between three key objectives of volunteering by welfare clients: employability, empowerment and responsabilisation. These goals have to be reached through changing welfare clients’ behaviour, but in rather different directions. The three goals of activation are explained, outlined with policy examples and empirically tested against the experiences of 25 welfare clients in four different municipalities in the Netherlands involved in volunteer work. It is argued that another goal is involved in activation through volunteer work, which to date has received no attention in academic research or policy, but certainly deserves attention from academics, policy makers and professionals.

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## **1. Introduction: welfare clients volunteering in an activate welfare state**

In recent years, the Dutch local governments have increasingly activated unemployed citizens through volunteer work. Activation policy joins 'active' citizens and 'activated' citizens together in a voluntary setting. In the context of activation policy volunteer work is considered a stepping stone towards employment, a remedy to social exclusion, a contribution to social cohesion, and even a chance to address psychosocial problems. The activation of unemployed citizens takes place against the backdrop of a transition towards a new welfare architecture. During the last two decades, the Dutch welfare state gradually acquired more and more characteristics of an 'active' or 'activating' welfare state, in the areas of social support as well as social assistance. Like in other countries, the Dutch government has tightened eligibility requirements, reduced benefits, introduced user-pay principles and privatized certain services. In addition to these financially driven measures, they have promoted a new way of thinking about welfare, centered on personal and community relationships. Notions of voluntary effort, social capital and communitarianism are prominent. In essence, these directions have brought about a new welfare, built on community, social responsibility and voluntary activity, standing against an 'old' welfare which emphasized society, citizenship rights and statutory provision (Rose, 1999; Walters 2000).

In short, the development towards an active welfare state represents a number of shifts. The shift of rights, such as rights to employment, training and reintegration, to the obligation to participate in general and be involved in paid employment in particular. According to the French sociologist Rosanvallon (2000) the right to social utility replaces the right to a benefit. The welfare state as we know until recently would no longer provide adequate solutions to structural problems because it strengthens and thereby maintains social exclusion (Rosanvallon, 2000). A second shift is occurring from passively receiving welfare to actively earning your benefit. The welfare state would often take the form of a passive distribution machine, acting only after the harm has already been done. Finally, a shift is taking place from collective responsibility to individual responsibility. From a society in which we were collectively responsible for providing basic living standards for those without work, to a situation in which every individual has a responsibility to enroll in the labor market as quickly as possible.

The emphasis on individual responsibility and active participation results in activation policy seeking to influence citizens' behavior through individualized measures. The problem is sought on the supply side and the client is thus a key consideration in the focus of intervention. Welfare assistance clients participating in volunteer work are at the center of the

different shifts in the welfare state. The activation of unemployed citizens through volunteering is what Newman calls the condensate of new power relations within the activating welfare state (Newman, 2007). Focusing on activation of welfare clients by engaging them in volunteer work sheds light on different effects of the transition to an activating welfare state on citizens.

### *1.1 Research question and methods*

The important questions related to the shifts in the changing welfare state are: first, to what extent an active attitude of citizens can be evoked by government and which instruments are suitable to do so, second, how and under which circumstances a transitioning welfare state affects citizens' conceptions of their rights and duties and third, what the emphasis on individual responsibility means for the experience of participation by citizens? The main purpose of activation is changing the behavior of welfare clients and to change behavior attention needs to be paid to emotions, while emotions are often a precursor to action. The transition to an active welfare also leaves traces in the emotional life of people through policy and professionals, both carrying out a vision on the rights, responsibilities and duties of citizens. To gain insight into how volunteer work shapes the conduct of welfare clients, attention is paid to their emotions. The central question of this article is therefore:

*How does the shift to an active welfare state affect the conceptions and emotions regarding rights, duties and responsibilities of welfare clients involved in volunteer work?*

In an ongoing study on activation of assistance clients that serves as the basis of this article twenty-five welfare clients engaged in volunteer work in four different municipalities are interviewed. The interviews focused on their experiences with volunteer work, their experiences with they are engaged in as a volunteer and the interaction with other volunteers. Their notions of responsibility have also been extensively discussed to determine their values and beliefs regarding their rights and responsibilities. Welfare clients not only determine where their priorities lie themselves, they are also held accountable for their responsibilities by professionals and their social environment. Therefore, they also answered questions about their experiences with social services. They reflected on at their placement procedure, how they were treated by case managers and the degree of coercion or choice they experienced in the process. In addition, respondents talked about their personal goals, with special attention to what they want to learn and what they think is expected of them. Finally welfare clients' self-perceptions were discussed during the interviews. They talked about how they see themselves in comparison with the past and in comparison with others.

The sample consists of twenty-five citizens in four different cities in the Netherlands with different but comparable volunteer programmes for unemployed citizens. The citizens cannot be considered representative of all unemployed citizens; however, an attempt is made to select a diverse range of policies with regard to the degree of obligation. The research sites are selected on the degree to which local policies enforce welfare clients to participate in volunteer programs. This criterion varies across municipalities from obligation on the penalty of benefit cuts, to encouraging, exciting, and enticing them.

By varying on the obligatory nature of activation policy it is possible to be specific about the effect of obligation on the participation of citizens and the perception and feelings associated with participation. Previous research has shown that the compulsory nature of activation policy – including volunteer work – is an important determinant of intentions to engage in volunteer work in the future (Fuller, 2008, Stukas, 1999). Other scholars feel that this largely depends on choice and participation of welfare clients in determining the work to be performed (Levy, 2006, Knijn and Van Berkel, 2003).

The assumptions of municipalities in determining welfare clients and their volunteer activities are important to take in consideration while selecting respondents. Municipalities roughly distinguish two types of activation measures that include volunteering: *volunteering as a goal* and *volunteering as a means*; volunteering as a goal in itself and volunteering as a means to reach employment. Clients are assigned to these projects based on what municipalities call their ‘distance to the labour market’. The ontological assumptions are based on various criteria, which may indicate the presence or absence of skills and the presence of impediments. The competencies and obstacles together indicate a welfare client’s distance from the labour market. Besides the obstacles and skills for a number municipalities the self-image, behaviour and social isolation of benefit recipients are important determinants. Often, people with a significant distance from the labour market are eligible for activation through volunteering. People who lack skills needed to participate in the labour market are eligible for *volunteering as a means*. People who are hampered in their social participation by physical limitations or psychiatric complaints end up in a *volunteering as a goal* program. *Volunteering as a means* is targeted at welfare clients who are not (yet) working, but are considered capable to contribute to society in other ways. *Volunteering as a goal* is generally designed to assist clients who can not participate because they are hindered by low self-esteem, social isolation or lack of skills and training, work experience and language skills.

The tension between loyalty to volunteer organizations and remaining available for paid work is probably manifested in *volunteering as a means* programs, while participants are

expected to find work easier. *Volunteering as a goal programs* might offer chances for integral policy, while people that are selected for these programs on criteria such as loneliness, impairment and psychiatric symptoms. There citizens from both the *volunteering as a goal* and the *volunteering as a means* programs are selected. A Dutch policymaker presented an aptly image of the two programs: *volunteering as a goal* starts off with drinking coffee, *volunteering as a means* with serving coffee. Whether drinking coffee can still be regarded as volunteer work, is doubtful. Therefore the definition of volunteer work needs to be pinned down clearly.

The definition of volunteering has been subject of debate between many scholars up until today. The definition used in Dutch policy reads: ‘Volunteer work is performed in a somewhat organized context, without obligation and or pay executed for others or the society’ (SZW 2005: art.1). The subject of this research actually shows that this definition is under some pressure, because the voluntary nature is changing. Besides, nowadays more volunteers get a fee for their services, they work in increasingly unorganized contexts and there has been greater consideration of volunteering in one’s own interest.

The definition of volunteering contains a number of dimensions that are possible selection criteria for the respondents of this research: the obligatory nature of measures, the level of payment, the organizational level, and the types activities. First of all, the obligatory nature varies between municipalities and therefore it serves as a criterion for the selection of research sites. Second, the level of pay is fixed for my respondents, as they are volunteering in return for income assistance. Some municipalities provide premium, but these are the same for everyone. The third dimension is the organizational level of the context a welfare client is participating in. This is an important criterion, because the chances of enhancing one’s social network depends on the level of organisation in which they operate. As for the fourth dimension, the type of activities and the subject benefiting from it (other citizens, the association, the neighbourhood, or society), the criterion that activities are not solely in the interest of the welfare client. All forms of participation aiming at more than just the interest of the welfare client can be considered volunteer work.

## **2. Policy: citizens at the intersection of two laws on activation**

The Social Support Act (WMO) that was introduced in 2007 underpins the Dutch government’s aspiration to encourage all citizens’ active participation in society. An emphasis on participation, an empowering civil society, and community relationships, together with

devolution of social policies are basic elements in this social innovation. In short, the WMO reflects social developments and governmental ambitions of promoting 'active citizenship'.

With the WMO the national government instructs local authorities to support and facilitate citizens who are active as volunteers in various ways. Besides breaking down barriers in laws and regulations, local governments need to map out the volunteer community, improve the quality of local policies, and search for new volunteers. Especially the latter assignment requires local authorities to come up with creative ways to make volunteering more attractive. Several municipalities introduced awards for volunteers to stimulate citizens to commit themselves to volunteer work. Attracting new volunteers is a difficult task while 'new' volunteers would be less willing to commit themselves to tasks over longer periods of time and more from self-interest reasoning.

Since welfare clients are probably available for shorter periods of time and participating in voluntary activities can be attuned to their own interest, it is not surprising that the government in its quest for new volunteers turn towards them. The Work and Assistance Act (WWB) contributes to this by describing reintegration as 'activities that contribute to social activation'. Since the introduction of the WWB there has been a gradual increase in activating unemployed citizens by engaging them in volunteer work. The central position occupied by social participation in the WMO and the revaluation of it within the WWB creates an intersection where the two laws meet. From a WWB-perspective volunteering offers welfare clients a chance to stay active during unemployment. Volunteering operates as a shock absorber for the labor market, similar to how informal care is a shock absorber for the welfare state (Hochschild, 2003). From a WMO-perspective welfare clients can be seen as a reserve army of volunteers to supplement the shortfall. In addition, information from social welfare services on the possible need for care of clients can be utilized to offer the necessary support. Hence, the expectations of activation of welfare clients through volunteer work are high.

Municipalities describe the interfaces of the WMO and the WWB in different policy documents like bills on social support and labor market policy. Analysis of policy documents of twelve major municipalities shows that policymakers see opportunities and possibilities for linking the two laws, but they define the objectives of this connection in general terms. The general trend in connecting the WMO and the WWB in local government policy is that volunteering is seen as a stepping stone. Not surprisingly, since in local policy volunteering is on the lower rungs of the 'reintegration ladder'. The next step differs between municipalities and often depends on different characteristics of the welfare client. Municipalities describe

volunteer work as a stepping stone to paid work, a step towards rehabilitation or a prelude to participation. Paid work is in all municipalities at the top of the ladder, but some local governments consider this a possibility to all its citizens, while the other takes into account how busy it is at the top of the ladder or climbing capabilities of its citizens.

Based on academic literature and policy analysis of Dutch local activation policy three key objectives of volunteering by welfare clients can be distinguished: employability, empowerment and responsabilisation. These goals have to be reached through changing individual behaviour, but in rather different directions. In the following sections, the three goals of activation are explained, outlined with policy examples and empirically tested against the experiences of welfare clients involved in volunteer work. I argue that another goal is involved in activation through volunteer work, which to date has received no attention in academic research or policy, but certainly deserves attention from academics, policy makers and professionals. In the last section, this fourth goal, that I call self-rehabilitation, is discussed and some ways to deal with self-rehabilitation are put forward.

### **3. Responsibilisation: a thin line between encouraging and discouraging**

Responsibility in the context of activation through volunteer work deserves special attention. The different responsibilities at play here can be traced back to various forms of responsabilisation (Garland, 2000). First of all, responsabilisation of welfare clients takes place as the active welfare state makes them responsible for their own integration on the labor market. Citizens are encouraged to let go of expectations that the state will provide and protect them in ways that welfare states promised. Instead, citizens will take greater degrees of responsibility for their own reintegration. Responsibilisation in this sense is in line with the ideas of the British psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple. He accuses the welfare state of creating and maintaining the lack of responsibility of marginalised groups in society (Dalrymple 2004). They are abdicating their responsibility to the welfare state by invoking unnecessary (professional) help and should be encouraged to solve their own problems. Dalrymple's critique on social workers is that they support welfare clients in their perceived powerlessness to do something about their situation by answering every individual crisis with new rights and services. Social workers' fear of being paternalistic withholds welfare clients from developing the competencies to make use of their rights and the services that are already provided (Swierstra and Tonkens, 2005).

Second, activating welfare clients takes place in the midst of responsabilisation of the volunteer sector in general. Volunteer organizations are increasingly made responsible for

dealing with particular social problems, by improving people's welfare and community well-being. Consequently, the voluntary sector is seen as the ideal site where responsabilisation is used to mould 'responsible citizens' (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). At the same time, the state appeals to citizens' responsibility to be active in building and sustaining society, particularly on a local level, by stressing the importance of volunteering and informal care, and developing programs to increase the number of people who perform these tasks, as well as programs to support those who already perform them to prevent fall-out.

The responsible citizen is thus not only charged with individual responsibility for their own reintegration on the labour market and well-being in general; they are also implicated in other strategies for 'governing the social' (Newman and Clarke 2009). As a result, welfare clients are the subjects of responsabilisation in two different directions. These two ways of responsabilisation may negatively interact with each other. Once welfare clients are made personally responsible for their own reintegration on the labor market, while being expected to accept responsibility as a volunteer, this might lead to possible conflicts of loyalty. For example if during the volunteer activities the opportunity arises to start at a paid job. Similarly, responsabilisation of volunteer organizations might lead to welfare clients feeling deprived of taking responsibility for the common good. For instance when social services decide to make the volunteer work a welfare client is already engaged in part of their reintegration program.

The question regarding responsabilisation is what notions of responsibility exist in Dutch activation policy and to what responsibilities local policy appeals. The responsibility that is most emphatically addressed by local policy makers is for welfare clients to find paid work. This responsibility prevails in almost all municipalities that activate their unemployed citizens through volunteer work. The responsibility to find work even crosses the responsibilities welfare clients have as volunteers in a number of municipalities. Local authorities consider volunteering a reintegration tool and have a large say in determining the suitability of volunteering to reintegrate: "This instrument can be deployed after examination has shown that the welfare client has no perspective, or in the (medium) long run a realistic perspective on regular work and deployment of the instrument is desirable.", according to the municipality of Utrecht. Local authorities let welfare clients participate like they have in mind instead of letting welfare clients decide for themselves how to make a useful contribution in the public domain. This is also reflected in the "formalization" of volunteer activities by a number of welfare clients who are volunteering. Until recently it was illegal in many municipalities for welfare clients to volunteer. Municipalities not only have dropped that ban,

in some municipalities it is now even rewarded with a premium. However, this premium is only provided when the performed tasks as a volunteer contribute to reducing the distance to the labor market which is to be decided by local authorities. Thus, the moment a welfare client takes responsibility for a public cause, the municipality takes over the appreciation of the usefulness of a welfare client's activities.

Dutch local policy on activation through volunteer work frames volunteer work by welfare clients as a mutual obligation. It generally centers on the responsibility of welfare clients to do something in return for their benefit. This message is explicitly and implicitly defined. For example Rotterdam unambiguously emphasizes: "*Under the guise of 'quid pro quo' Rotterdam asks its customers for something in return for their benefit.*" Municipalities make clear that the main responsibility for welfare clients is to find paid work, but those that recognize paid work is not attainable for every individual focus on 'sustained participation'. The large half of local policy focuses on participation in society in general. However, in most of these municipalities participation alone is not enough. A number of local governments call for 'a contribution to society' or 'involvement in the community'. These municipalities define volunteering as a further orientation and completion of welfare clients' contribution to society. Some municipalities frame responsabilisation as making up for a lack of responsibility when they appeal to welfare clients' current use to society. By stating that 'volunteering will lead to a useful pastime', policymakers indirectly refer to the usefulness of their current daytime activities. Responsibilities associated with the contribution that welfare clients make by working as a volunteer are not elaborated on in local activation policy. That means that either the emphasis is intentionally not placed on these responsibilities or that consideration of the responsibilities is left to the case managers. Hence, the emphasis on individual responsibility for integration on the labor market and the mutual obligation to make a contribution to society are clearly identified in activation policy, but the specific responsibilities that come with voluntary engagement are largely neglected.

The extent to which the responsibilities local policymakers call for are taken up by welfare clients, whether or not required to volunteer, is best interpreted by Hochschild's concept of framing rules (Hochschild, 2003). Framing rules refer to the rules according to which we ascribe definitions or meanings to situations (1979: 566). Hochschild discerns three sorts of framing rules: moral, pragmatic and historical (2003: 116). Pragmatic framing rules, rules that refer to what is currently available, are expressed most often by welfare clients participating in volunteer work. For example by those who rather make a contribution to society than constantly have to apply for jobs. They blame repeatedly being turned down by

employers to the availability of jobs and experience sending out letters every week as demoralizing. The chance to give something back to society is consequently perceived as a relief. Simon (59) experiences him receiving a benefit as an exchange relationship between himself and a currently working citizen: “Another has to get up at seven in the morning, well if I get up at half past nine, it is okay as well. Yeah well, I have a lot less to spend, but I think yes, [...] this has its advantages and that has some drawbacks, I think just it’s all just very fairly distributed.” Hereby Simon applies a pragmatic framing rule to his situation, by referring to what is currently available to him and others, which makes him experience different emotions like resignation.

The examples above show that a pragmatic approach to their situation lead respondents to experience certain emotions, like relief or resignation, which can be best explained by Hochschild concept of feeling rules (Hochschild, 2003). Feeling rules are the social guidelines that direct how we want to try to feel (2003: 97) and they define what we imagine we should and shouldn’t feel and would like to feel over a range of circumstances (2003: 82). Simon for instance expresses a feeling rule while he balances his rights and duties and concludes “it’s a fair demand from society. I don’t say it is, but I feel it this way. I believe that society can ask something in return, even though I started working when I was fifteen.” Simon in this case uses moral framing rules, while he refers to his notions of what is morally right. By distinguishing between what he considers the facts and his feelings Simon also expresses a feeling rule. He specifically refers to what he considers his rights and duties and rationalizes his situation on what he *feels* is fair, at the same time knowingly aware of him reflecting on his own emotions.

Henk (61) disagrees with Simon and experiences very different feelings, because he feels that he has done his duty in the past and now feels entitled to a benefit. “This is not the way it was presented to us at the time. [...] What I needed to pay as an employer [...] Now I’m in these circumstances and they say ‘we don’t do that anymore, politics have decided differently. So there is still resentment down to my toes.” By referring to some time in history, Henk applies a historical framing rule to his situation. This framing rule follows from his history as an employer and his own experience as a welfare client. He interprets his situation as unfair by stating that past generations were fortunate that he as an employer paid for their welfare and today he is worse off. He allows himself to feel destitute since policy changed in his disadvantage. In this way he deems his feeling of resentment morally appropriate (Hochschild, 2003: 82). Still, it is not clear what leads Simon to use moral framing rules to ascribe meaning to his situation and why Henk turns to an historical framing rule.

Even though Hochschild does describe how a person's framing of a situation can lead to different emotions, the link between framing rules and the broad concepts she uses, like gender ideologies or commercialization, remains too vague to use in empirical analysis. The question is therefore what the bigger concepts are by which the framing rules of welfare clients are framed. A possible answer is that they are framed by the concept of 'citizenship regime'. Jenson and Phillips (1996) define a citizenship regime as the institutional arrangements, rules and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims-making by citizens. One of the key dimensions of a citizenship regime is the formal recognition of citizens' rights and responsibilities. These rights and responsibilities (or obligations) range from the civic to the political, social and cultural and may be individual or collective. By using the concept of citizenship regime to frame the moral, historical and pragmatic framing rules Simon uses it turns out his conception of what is morally right is based on his communitarian way of thinking about people's responsibility in general. He perceives a lack of responsibility in society as a whole. He voluntarily works at a museum once a week and looks back with nostalgia to the past: "I'd like it if perhaps more people would take responsibility rather than coercion. [...] The selfishness that caught up with us recently, fills me with disappointment." Henk on the other hand supports the liberal perspective of claiming your right to benefit when needed. He is forced to work on a project and for him this raises the image of a welfare client in the 1930s, "who had to stab the peat all day, they were away from home for a week." This makes him cynical about the government calling for the responsibility to contribute to society. "Look how well we care for the people, together, live together, participate together, together this and that."

The government's messages to be involved in the community or contribute to society do indeed get through to people on welfare who volunteer. In general the respondents agree with policy makers that welfare clients are responsible to give something back to society and they believe this applies to them as well. However, it makes much difference whether people *feel* compelled by social services to do volunteer work. Henk's main objection to the activation project he is engaged in is still the fact that he is compelled to co-operate. In Simon's case his assessment of his situation is largely due to the way his case manager frames society's demand. This 'demand' is more like a request in his case, since he is allowed to determine the number of hours he works at the museum himself and he admits this is of great importance to him. The compulsory nature of activation policy is eventually constituted on street-level (Lipsky, 1980), in the interaction between welfare clients and their case managers.

From the narratives of respondents it appears that the way case managers frame their clients' responsibility affects how welfare clients experience their responsibilities. Trees (48) remembers her case manager asking her: "Are you actually volunteering?" At that time I wasn't thinking about that, I wasn't ready yet. 'Well,' she said, 'then I'll check on you next year to see if you've found anything. The word 'check', that alone is enough. [...] Then there is something immediately wrong.'" The case manager in this example uses a moral framing rule thereby presenting volunteer work as a duty instead of a responsibility. The former leaves little room for initiative, where the latter appeals to a sense of awareness of the welfare client, which arouse different emotions on the side of the welfare client. This respondent is actually very much aware of her responsibility to contribute to society, but she applies pragmatic framing rules to her situation and is convinced that her current state does not allow her to take responsibility. Only by the time she does not feel helpless anymore, she considers herself able to help someone else. Until then a sense of impotence is dominating, such as Trees describes: "At some point there may be nothing left you care for anymore and if then you are expected to do something for someone else.. I still have a certain morality thinking "Well, what can you do for someone else, dear?"

Hence, the ways in which case managers frame the responsibility of their clients is an important determinant for taking up responsibility. The interaction between client and case manager can significantly reduce or enhance the chances of success of responsabilisation. The main problem respondents have with mandatory activation is that social services frame their responsibility to give back to society as a duty. Duties often come with penalties for evasion of the duty, while for avoiding responsibilities you usually have yourself to blame. Welfare clients are not inclined to point to others, they start by looking for causes and solutions in their own life, but they also like to keep this quest their own hands. Compulsion raises negative connotations and is often associated with less awareness of the circumstances of clients, while clients want to be respected in their motivation to contribute to society. The image they develop about what they are doing and the extent to which their personal lives are considered have a great impact on the experience of volunteering and the emotions that go with it.

#### **4. Empowerment: from receiving to giving help**

Academic literature dealing with empowerment to date finds it difficult to reach consensus on the definition of empowerment, as well as the ways and means of reaching it (Macdonald &

Macdonald, 1999). The term ‘empowerment’ relates both to the process and to the outcome (Staples, 1990; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). In general, empowerment is seen as a process of passage from a state of helplessness to a state of better control of one’s life, fate, and surroundings (Rappaport, 1985; Wieck, 1983). I argue that empowerment relates to different processes and outcomes depending on citizenship perspectives. The three perspectives on citizenship also appeal to different internal and external sources. In a communitarian understanding the process of empowerment refers to enabling citizens to become self-reliant in order to contribute to their community. The outcome is eventually a situation in which people are released from cycles of poverty (Newman and Clarke 2009). There is agreement in the academic literature on empowerment that it stems from many sources, both internal and external. The internal component relates to a psychological point of view, a belief, or a feeling that the individual is capable of making decisions and solving his or her problems and dilemmas. In communitarian thinking enabling citizens mainly means appealing to internal sources of citizens by strengthening their belief they are able to help one another. Republican and liberal notions of empowerment are mostly about strengthening citizens in their *relationship with the state* and therefore particularly appeal to external sources. The external component is made up of information, qualifications, and skills allowing the individual to take action (Parsons, 1991; Simon, 1994).. In a republican sense the outcome of empowerment should be reflexive and critically aware citizens who are engaged in decisions concerning welfare provision. Hence, engaging citizens in the process of deliberation becomes a way of empowering them, mostly by external sources like information and deliberative skills. A liberal view on the outcome of empowerment tends to mean freeing individuals from the dead hand of bureaucratic administration and professional paternalism. This objective is reached through enabling them to define their own needs, by providing them with external sources like the information to choose (Newman and Clarke 2009). Choice is the means to empower individuals in their encounters with public services – especially those who had been relatively disadvantaged in ‘producer-driven’ services.

	<b>Communitarian</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Liberal</b>
<b>Goal</b>	Developing self-reliance for individual and community benefit	Create reflexive citizens	Freeing from bureaucracy and paternalism of public services
<b>Means</b>	Release from cycles of poverty	Engage citizens in decision-making	Enabling to define own needs
<b>Skills</b>	Civic skills	Deliberative skills	Economical skills

**Table 1.** Empowerment: goals, means and skills in three citizenship regimes

The WMO is an exemplary result of different perspectives on empowerment conflicting each other. The government underpinned the introduction of the WMO, asserting that it no longer fits with increased empowerment of the modern citizen (RMO 2002: 7), based on the liberal assumption that citizens are more than before able to articulate their demands. In this way empowerment is associated with the increased wealth and education of citizens. Paradoxically, the *contourennota WMO* states that the empowerment of citizens has gone too far. The empowered citizen is claiming his rights, especially in the health care sector, instead of taking responsibility for solving individual and social problems (VWS 2004: 3). Empowerment is thus criticised from a communitarian as well as a liberal perspective. This analysis has resulted in liberal-communitarian answer, which entails implications for the conception of participation on the side of the *empowered*, as well as the *empowering* citizen.

Particularly liberal and communitarian perspectives on empowerment are reflected in local activation policy. Policymakers seek to make passive recipients of benefits, into self-reliant, self-reflective and active citizens. One of the municipalities applies the general rule “providing a benefit should lead to empowerment and participation”. However, empowerment plays a modest role as an objective of volunteering by welfare clients in Dutch local activation policy. Empowerment objectives are mainly reflected in activation policies regarding the most vulnerable welfare clients, like the homeless clients. Local activation policy aims particularly for increasing individual self-reliance of marginal groups of citizens. In order to do so municipalities vary in relation to the resources they want to tap into to empower welfare clients. Some municipalities aim for internal sources and rely on the unused qualities of welfare recipients. They want to “stimulate self-reliance based on individual responsibility and capabilities.” Other municipalities turn to external sources and try to provide welfare clients with the abilities to be self-reliant. They expect for instance that clients “by building self-confidence and self esteem will participate in public life again”. To some extent republican objectives of empowerment also exist in local activation policy on volunteering. A few local authorities want to teach welfare clients critical assets through volunteer work. Reflexivity of critical awareness is sometimes seen as a precondition for functioning in a paid job: “If someone, without any further coaching, is able to in a structured and meaningful way to conduct in social activities *and* is capable to think about the future (What do I want? What can I do? What do I need to reach this?) is ready for the next step.” However, policy puts little emphasis on empowering components in the social worker–client relationship or in the interaction between welfare clients and other volunteers.

The interviews indicate that participation in volunteer work contributes to the empowerment of welfare clients mostly by tapping into internal sources. It makes respondents rediscover capabilities they already possessed, but forgot they had. The majority of respondents regain a sense of self-esteem. Especially 'being part of something' and 'being allowed to be somewhere' are positive experiences that contribute to their self-esteem. Trees (48) is working for an evangelical campaign and she explains: "you feel needed, like doing something meaningful, that's very nice." She tells how she often felt useless in the past which lead her to feel depressed at times. The application of an historical framing rule leads Trees to experience positive feelings, like pride and happiness, of course partly due to the work itself, but also as a result of comparing her current situation with the time she did not volunteer yet. Making themselves useful provide respondents with the acknowledgement that they still matter. This recognition comes not only from welfare clients themselves, but also requires confirmation by others. That is why feedback and the proper supervision are essential to empower welfare clients engaged in volunteer work. Ingrid (48), who reads to kids at a primary school, says: "Then I called the person who trained me a couple of times and asked 'Gosh, I don't get much feedback from teachers' and 'Am I still useful to them? Because I get the feeling I am not being of much value anymore'." This example shows that the liberal perspective of the self-sufficient welfare client participating in volunteer work is not valid in every case, but that some welfare clients still need a certain degree of paternalism.

It is not self-reliance as such that empowers welfare clients, but the fact that they are able to help others makes them feel more self-reliant and empowered. Helping others has a positive effect on all respondents. The feeling not to be dependent, but in a position to help others takes away a feeling of powerlessness. This is consistent with the conclusion of Rappaport (1987) that giving help has to be part of the experience of receiving help in order to have an empowering effect. When people who need help find out that they are able to help others, they believe to have more power to help themselves. Esther (26) compares her supervision of mentally disabled people when horseback riding with the time she was a regular visitor of the social service: "You see, there they wanted to help me, but now I'm helping them." Here again an historical framing rule is used to describe the development a welfare client has made due to participating in volunteer work. But for Esther the application of this rule induces a proud feeling of independence contrary to a dependent position she was ashamed of. The same holds for positive experience of helping that are transferred to the daily lives of welfare clients. Ingrid (48) tells how she helped a neighbor with a request for financial support: "Before, I would fear people and close the door, but now I can help."

Welfare clients who volunteer also help each other. Lesley (50) tells about an agreement he made with some of his fellow volunteers to join a colleague on a visit to the social service to solve a dispute with her case manager. Another helped someone in his project to find a new unpaid job through a friend. For some respondents helping others also makes them more reflexive and leads them to apply pragmatic framing rules to their own situation. Seeing how the bad living conditions of others are, makes them place their own misery in perspective.

The desire to be autonomous is also transferred to their experiences with social services. If case managers do not contribute to their personal goals respondents take matters into their own hands. Esther explains: “If you leave it up to what the service has to offer, it can be real disappointing, because then you remain dependent. Then you're not in control and if you are in control, you experience a lot of freedom, I think.” Here Esther uses a moral framing rule while she deems being dependent inferior to being in control. She also attaches the emotion of disappointment to dependence. Thereby she clearly expresses a liberal perspective on empowerment, of defining your own needs instead of letting others decide for you, that dominates some of the other interviews as well. The quote also echoes Lee's (1994) perspective on empowerment as an autonomous process, which is not transferable from one person to another. For this reason, the professional can encourage the process and allow it to develop, but he or she does not cause it (Lee, 1994).

What is clear is that welfare clients do not need to be self-reliant to make a contribution to the community or want to be free of paternalistic case managers. They develop a true sense of independence by helping others. They want to be involved in deciding on the measures to be taken because it makes them feel more in control over their own lives.

### **5. Employability: actively hoping for paid work**

Besides empowerment and responsabilisation, a third concept related to activation through volunteer work is employability. There has been a general drift in the employability agenda which represents the transition towards the active welfare state. The employability agenda is increasingly directed towards a more conditional, selective and work-orientated benefits system (Peck and Theodore, 2000). As mentioned before, activation policy in general is moving towards more individualized interventions and behaviour change strategies. The question is then what behaviour should be displayed by individuals. In general unemployed citizens were at first required to demonstrate their ‘availability for work’, then to show evidence of ‘actively seeking work’, and nowadays they must actively participate in activation programs. Since unemployed people in general are all required to participate in activation

programs, employment opportunities will depend on the behavior they exhibit during their volunteer work.

Differences in the definition of employability, will lead to different perspectives on the localization of the problem ('unemployability') and different ideas about the ways in which volunteer work will increase the employability of welfare clients. The general shift in the active welfare from collective responsibility towards individual responsibility has resulted in the individual being the centre of intervention in activation policy. Academic literature often describes employability in terms of the skills that are needed to find or conduct in paid work. Welfare recipients are considered to be likely to have a range of shortcomings, not only in their training, but also in their willingness to participate or their personality. A definition of employability centering on skills together with a shift from rights and entitlements provided by the state towards responsibility, productivity and performance of the individual, results in people being themselves responsible to acquire the skills that are needed to find or conduct in paid work and perform in a way that increases their attractiveness on the labour market. The role of the state is limited to creating equal opportunities for worker-citizens. In this view the individual is seen as an independent, competitive being rather than as a social being. It appeals to a semantic register based on individual freedom, personal choice, self-fulfilment and initiative. Individualisation has also shifted the problem to the moral side of the question (Serrano Pascual 2007). The assumption made is that passivity will generate dependency and an abdication of individual responsibility by citizens. Consequently, interventions are focused on individuals' motivation and desire to work and the lack thereof is presented as an individual problem.

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) argue for a broader definition of employability, a definition that recognizes the importance of factors on both the supply and demand side. In addition to skills this definition includes personal circumstances and various external factors, like the availability of jobs. These characteristics together determine jobseekers' chances of finding a job and their position on the labor market. Following this perspective, interventions might also be directed to making people capable of taking responsibility for their own welfare, both in the social and the economic sense, by for instance helping them with drug or alcohol problems. This view on employability laments the liberal assumption of a universal model of 'rational economic man' whereby people take individualistic, cost-benefit type decisions about how to maximize their own personal gain (Barlow and Duncan 2000). From this perspective, changing the financial structure of costs and benefits, and the legal structure of rights and duties, will not make people modify their social behavior in the desired

direction. Here the assumption is that people do not act like the rational economic man in making decisions about their moral economy. Interventions directed at the individual can also be turned towards affecting external factors of employability, by making people capable to stand up for themselves and addressing for instance discrimination on the labour market. In this way, labour market activation is seen as a means of overcoming social exclusion – that is, marginal groups of citizens are both reconnected to the wider economy and polity, and given access to opportunities, that, it is hoped, help address cycles of poverty and exclusion (Lister 2002, Rosanvallon 2000).

Dutch local activation policy clearly puts the emphasis on the supply side as a focus for intervention. For the large part local authorities present completion of the shortcomings of welfare clients as an individual responsibility. However, some policy makers also recognize their lack of control over the demand side, which leads them to look for think of other answers to ‘unemployability’. The municipality of Utrecht, for example, recognizes that “the labor market perspective is not only dependent on a person’s circumstances. A changing labor market also changes the labor market perspective”, which leads policy makers to admit employability is partly their responsibility.

By focusing on the supply side and the shortcomings of welfare clients, municipalities put emphasis on developing skills among participants without profoundly explicating the capabilities a welfare client should acquire by doing volunteer work. Divosa, the association of municipal managers in the field of work, income and participation, asks: “If employees get the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills, why should welfare clients be deprived of that opportunity?”. Local policies only mention a few skills that welfare clients should develop by doing volunteer work. Picking up their work rhythm is one of the competencies that several municipalities explicitly refer to. The municipality of Zaanstad states in its plans that “voluntary engagement contributes to building skills and promoting the work rhythm.” Working together with colleagues is also mentioned in various documents. Amsterdam has recently started measuring the development of skills by participants. Policy makers assume that “people in a trajectory as a volunteer gain the skills to eventually be able to work”.

In practice, developing skills is not always given priority according to most respondents. In their interaction with case manager competence development is hardly mentioned. Ria (46), for example, wonders: “Where am I going to focus on? Because that’s something I learned, I have to focus on something or else I will never get a job. [...] I expect help with this really, but I’m not getting any.” Ria applies a moral framing rule to her situation (a good employee is an employee who knows what she wants) which leads her to

seek for a solution in the way she approaches the labor market. But at the same time she experiences the disadvantages of her case manager considering it her own responsibility. Consequently, welfare clients themselves come up with different ideas about the impact of volunteering on their employment prospects. Instead of developing competencies respondents expect more from the impression volunteering will make on potential future employers. They cherish the hope that volunteering will look good on their CV. Bert (41) from Leeuwarden, who volunteers as a supervisor for a group of mentally handicapped people, noticed that this is what he really wants. For years he worked as a forklift driver in warehouses, but now he finds complacency in caring for others and he wants to go through with this. Once he is applying for a paid job, he hopes it will help him to be hired. A woman who would like to work with disabled children and now gains experience with helping other at the Victim Foundation sees her volunteer work more as an opportunity to expand her network than as a chance to acquire skills, even though this has not paid off yet. Instead of offering her a chance to take additional courses, her case manager recommended an application training, where she actually was told not to put all her activities on her CV because too many activities might give employers the impression she is not a loyal employee. Sometimes skill development is not an issue because respondents participate in volunteer work that resembles a job they have had in the past. For one respondent who is involved in conducting surveys among single unemployed men this is a logical continuation of the work he previously did for commercial organizations.

Besides the fact that competence development is not prioritized, respondents do not feel like they are acquiring new skills. They find their tasks as volunteers often too simple to increase their chances on the labor market or they do not learn what they want to learn. Henk (59) recalls a conversation with his supervisor: “Do you feel you are learning something here?” No, I feel like I’m learning other people something. You’re not learning me anything; this is a complete waste of my time.” Henk allows himself to feel frustrated about his supervisor’s question, while he is one of the older participants in the project and he feels that developing skills is not his first priority. Instead he wants to be appreciated for his educative role in the group. Pragmatic framing rules lead a number of respondents to believe that education would more likely lead to paid employment. Chien (40), a Chinese woman who works at an elderly day care centre, would prefer a language course, instead of learning the Dutch language in interaction with the senior citizens, as her manager presents to her. The people she nurses often do not understand her, so she stopped talking to them because quite often they are ill or coping with hearing loss. So the lack of opportunity to practice the language and her desire to be educated lead Chien to feel discouraged. Policy intentions to

learn participants a work rhythm through volunteer work is not working either, because most clients are volunteering just a few hours a week.

Some respondents also use pragmatic framing rules when estimating how volunteering will increase their chances at reintegrating on the labor market. They consider external factors, like availability of jobs or money, to be the main determinant for their employability. Simon (58) works in a museum and he still hopes to continue his work there a couple of years. He lost faith in a change in his situation. “I would really love to find a regular job at a museum again. It doesn’t even have to be a special one, just your average museum. But in this sector paid jobs are scarce after all. Many museums are working with volunteers so that’s very unfortunate for me.” Some respondents cherish the hope they can join the volunteer organization they work at as a paid employee. However, they often understand that the organization will not be able to pay them or they acknowledge it will cost the organization more than it yields. “Once I heard them talking about appointing me to take over some tasks from Peter and Ans, to unburden them. But of course it won’t happen, while then they will have to pay me, instead of getting money for me. That’s quite a difference, so that won’t fly.”

## **6. Volunteering as a way of self-rehabilitation**

The policy objectives local authorities have with the activation of welfare clients through volunteering are only sparsely achieved. First, people cherish the hope, but do not feel that their employment opportunities are increasing or they are learning the competencies that will increase their chances on the labor market. Second, the experiences of helping vulnerable citizens do evoke a sense of self-worth, but volunteering does not lead to more self-reliant welfare clients. Third, welfare clients do agree they have the responsibility to contribute to society, but the way social services invokes their responsibility is discouraging them. However, respondents in general are quite happy to volunteer. The interviews indicate that something else is going on. Volunteering affects welfare clients in a different way than policymakers have in mind.

In the lives of many respondents things went wrong, certain affairs failed, and activities remained unfinished. These respondents use volunteering to restore their ‘violated life stories’. In other words, they use volunteer work to rehabilitate themselves. Jan (45), for example, had a café in the center with a large terrace in the sun and when the municipality decided to build a museum, a shadow fell over his terrace and he went bankrupt. Nowadays he is ordering at a dining for the homeless. For Jan his activities offer him a chance to

rehabilitate himself, because through the appreciation his current colleagues have for his experience as a bar owner, he retrieves some of the respect he earned in the past. Simon (59) was fired after furiously shouting at a visitor as a museum attendant. Now he works as a volunteer at another museum and every day he feels like taking a little revenge on his former employer. For Simon volunteering at the museum is a chance to regain a sense of self-worth. Volunteering helps him to show his former employer in retrospect he was wrong in dismissing him. Esther (26) could not flourish in school and she had difficulty choosing the right education. For Esther volunteering is a way to make amends: “After a certain age, after a certain consciousness you can choose. And then you can really look back and think 'I didn't choose back then, now I can make up for it.'”

The social service does not always contribute to the rehabilitation of welfare clients. First of all because targets make case managers work in an overly pragmatic way. Esther explains: “They have a certain goal, they are employed to get something done as quickly as possible, but it's actually more important to find out what people really want, for example people who ended up on the wrong track. People like me.”

A second reason that social services do not contribute to self-rehabilitation is that case managers pay little attention to a welfare client's reasons for not taking his or her responsibility to work or volunteer in the past. Ingrid (42) felt like her case manager deprived her of her responsibility: “like they said 'you won't be able to do it yourself, because you don't', like 'that's why we are now doing it for you', [ ...] 'because you haven't done it all this time, so you're probably not capable of doing it yourself.' But they never asked me why. [...] I do have my reasons, you know.” Welfare clients' personal reasons often come with feelings that withhold them from fully embracing their responsibilities. Feelings of shame and pride play a major role in the lives of welfare clients and these emotions will have an impact on the experience of volunteering. Some respondents take the feeling of being condemned for receiving a benefit to the volunteer organization they work at. “You are constantly confronted with people who do not have the problems you have. That's very painful to me; it's constantly painful, constant-ly painful. I don't know, it feels like a stain, like a stigma; 'I have a benefit'.” Therefore it is important to not just trust on the healing power of volunteering, but also pay attention to feelings that are in the way of empowerment, employability and responsabilisation. Trees has experienced that many people expect progression too quickly: “They say: 'But if you get it this and that you're happy, right? Then it's okay, right?' No, there is a range of negative emotions that have accumulated, that need some attention first. [...] They should be solved first, before thinking of prospects.” Case managers need to

consider the coherence of welfare clients' problems, the obstinacy of their problems, and the emotions that come with them.

For welfare clients it is important that case managers respect their work experience and take it into consideration when selecting a proper activity. Their desire for self-rehabilitation explains why welfare clients want to have a say in the placement procedure. It makes a big difference to them whether their case manager grabs a folder full of activities and selects something for them or hands the folder to the client and lets him or her select an activity. People want to recognize the usefulness of volunteering themselves. The arbitrary nature of selecting an activity makes some clients feel abused to reach a case manager's targets. Henk recalls: "So my case manager was nosing about the intranet pages and found that this might be something for me, because his boss had been instructed to select this many people. Then he picked me for this project. Well fine." This corresponds with previous research on the effects of the professional-client relationship on welfare clients. The majority of authors agree it is important that the client's own ideas about the possible actions and initiatives for improving his or her situation are taken into consideration. A professional-client relationship characterized by reciprocity and partnership is considered the most effective to realize improvement (Breton, 1994; Cox, 2002; Gutierrez, 1990; Simon, 1994; Wilson, 1995).

## **7. Conclusion**

Mandatory volunteering sounds odd to most people. It is after all a *contraditio in terminis*. However, volunteering has never been possible without any obligations. It is driven by moral obligations and agreements, commitment and loyalty. Being obligated to volunteer in itself is not the problem for many people. If you ask welfare clients for their opinion, they answer they will gladly accept the responsibility to volunteer, but also that volunteering should come from the heart and commitment can not be enforced.

The key to successful activation policy is to connect volunteer activities to a welfare client's past, goals, perceptions, wishes and dreams. Welfare clients are motivated to contribute to society, even when their contribution is framed as a mutual obligation. People prefer helping someone else over being helped. The trick is to hit the right chord to motivate welfare clients. Provide them with a voice in what the compensation for their benefit should be. Then there is real reciprocity in the professional-client-relationship. After all, welfare clients are not giving something back to their case managers, but to society. Social services should aim for a relationship characterized by trust rather than by control. Someone in a

dependent position will experience control as distrust and will respond with distrust. Mutual distrust is not a fertile ground for responsabilisation. When there is mutual trust, case managers can find out what actually moves a welfare client and what it takes to get them moving.

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