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Problems of the Welfare State as an Employer: Assuring the Availability and Commitment of Street-Level Bureaucrats. A Literature Review

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1 Introduction: Democratic Service Provision from a Workforce Perspective

The notion of the Welfare Service State (WSS) refers to a welfare state trend which has been discussed for some time already (Badura & Gross, 1976), but which is still ambiguous concerning its democratic implications. While the traditional welfare state mainly deployed monetary transfers, the WSS complements this with a strong emphasis on services. This brings both new hopes and new threats: services may be a more effective form of intervention than monetary payments to achieve certain aims of social policy, and they may also mean an "increased attentiveness towards the uniqueness and the particular life forms of individual citizens" (Symposium Outline).[1] In contrast, services might just as well unduly interfere with personal freedom and autonomy of the welfare state's client: as Wohlfarth (2020) critically highlights in this issue, personalized welfare services are "pedagogical, 'people changing' actions" that impact "competencies, behaviors, attitudes and other dispositions of people." Services are less neutral with respect to individual ways of life than the (passive) cash transfers of the traditional welfare state.

Much of the current debate on the WSS seems to focus on consequences for clients, as does the present article, but only indirectly: it looks to the other side of the service relationship, to the social workers, care workers, teachers, etc. who carry the welfare state (Vogel, 2017). Clients do not experience the welfare states' formal rules, its paper reality, but rather "street-level bureaucrats'" concrete actions: this is one of the most important messages of Michael Lipsky's (2010, xiii) famous book first published in 1980. Due to the nature of their work, street-level bureaucrats are given considerable freedom in their professional exercise. This freedom, also termed "discretion" (p. 13), makes frontline service workers an influential group of social life. The present article emphasizes the professional commitment of this group as the driving force behind a democratic WSS: persons in working age are needed to commit to occupations in the sectors of welfare state activity, and also to stay committed to providing high quality services in the long run.

It would not be enough to advertise these occupations to young people and to appeal to workers to act in accordance with high professional standards. Notwithstanding personal

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differences between workers,[2] their willingness and ability to function clearly also depends on supra-individual factors. While research on street-level bureaucrats so far tends to have an "individualistic bias" according to Hupe and Buffat (2014, p. 555), "the impact of other sets of potentially explanatory factors, particularly those regarding institutional settings, remains understudied." The present text reviews empirical literature on context factors that can be politically influenced and that impact on professional commitment to and in welfare state services. The aim is to create some overview on what we know from existing research and what remains contentious. Drawing on findings from several disciplines at a time – most importantly labor sociology, welfare state research, and administrative science – the literature review necessarily remains incomplete. Still, it is a good idea to build as much as possible on existing knowledge when discussing the prerequisites of a democratic WSS.

The text is structured as follows: the next section introduces two analytical concepts that show in which respect the WSS needs to solve classical problems shared by *all* employers. It then distinguishes three key areas in which the design of a welfare state and its agencies may have an impact on the ability and motivation of service workers to do their work (well): the *resources* spent on implementing social policy, the *organization of work* in the social services, and the normative fit between the *welfare state's aims* and the individual orientations of its staff. These areas are examined in individual sections, discussing recent developments and empirical evidence of their consequences. The last section summarizes the main findings and the questions that remain for further research.

2 The Availability Problem and the Transformation Problem in Social Service Sectors

The sociology of work has identified two major problems faced by employers which Köhler and Struck term the "availability problem" and the "transformation problem" (Köhler & Struck, 2008, p. 20 et seqq., our translation). The *availability* problem arises as there is no guarantee that the market will supply at any time the required labor in terms of quantity and qualification. Just like for other input factors, employers have to think of how to secure a supply of labor at present and in possible future scenarios. The *transformation problem* means that it is not enough for employers to have sufficient staff on their payroll, as employees' working capacity also needs to be transformed into actual work. The availability problem and the transformation problem also affect the welfare state as the employer or at least the principal of service delivery.[3] This will be explained in the following.

The *availability* problem: shortages of labor with the required qualifications can be either cyclical, thus short- to medium-term, or permanent. *Cyclical* availability problems can affect the welfare state in some fields of activity more than in others. For example, the demand for training and counselling of job-seekers is higher in periods of recession and thus clearly sensitive to the business cycle. In education and (health and elderly) care, the demand for services is more stable and predictable. Nevertheless, we see excess supply and excess demand alternate in education, and the elderly care sector is the scene of a *permanent* and increasing lack of workers. As is widely known, demographic change will lead both to more demand for elderly care and to a shrinking active population. It is not at all clear, and depends

[2] E.g. in dealing with situations of stress at work (Shim, Park, & Eom, 2015).

[3] There does not necessarily have to be a work contract between the State and service workers; the employer can also be an organization that receives funding from the State. In addition, the described problems can also apply in cases where workers are not dependently employed but freelancers. The crucial point is the distance between the welfare state and the process of service delivery, which implies an asymmetry of information. The State finances the service, but does neither offer nor consume it

also on developments in other economic sectors, whether this sector will attract enough workforce among new generations of labor-market entrants (who might feature new expectations vis-à-vis the world of work) and career changers (Grgic, Riedel, Weihmayer, Weimann-Sandig, & Wirner, 2018). For Germany, Drosdowski et al. (2017, p. 114) estimated that even if most elderly persons will be taken care of by relatives, the care sector will need an additional 444,000 professionals by 2030 (compared to 2013) in order to meet the demand. A further increasing labor shortage would immediately translate into an even more insufficient care offer because, unlike in agriculture or industry, the leeway to replace human labor by capital and new technologies is very limited in the care sector, just like in other sectors of personal services. This strategy would not only face problems of practical feasibility, but also ethical limits: a democratic WSS run by robots is hard to imagine, precisely because of the interactive – and thus human – nature of service work (see below). The welfare state thus depends very much on human labor to tackle the growing challenges in the years to come.

The *transformation problem*, according to Köhler and Struck (2008, p. 22), is particularly pronounced where tasks are *complex* and where the individual effort in the work process is *hard to monitor* (e.g. in collaborations) – both are the case in personal services. The principal neither knows enough about the service to be delivered, nor can it administer and regulate it in sufficient detail (Vedung, 2015, p. 17 et seq.). This is so because 1.) the work is done on a human being, to change his or her behavior or condition, and 2.) involves the collaboration of this human being. The latter has been described as the interactive or co-productive nature of services (Badura & Gross, 1976). As Bartelheimer (2017) details at the example of labor-market services in Germany, "service professionals and clients have to manage their mutual relationship, elaborate a shared view of the problem to be solved, agree on goals and coordinate their actions." (p. 140, my translation) Speaking of a "relationship" in this context highlights that service delivery is a *social process* and, thus, necessarily multifaceted and complex (Badura & Gross, 1976, p. 69). The emotional level of the service relationship is a field of professional activity in its own right, as service workers perform emotional work on the client, but also on themselves. Furthermore, the need to define the problem of the client and the goals of the service intervention means for the service worker that it is part of his job to concretize the client's needs (Baethge, 2011, p. 151). The crucial thing here, from a perspective of the democratic WSS, is to do this in a way which preserves some autonomy of the client. The better this is done, the more the service provision is democratic, but the less can it be monitored and standardized by the principal.

The first point mentioned above also adds to the complexity of personal services. They address persons living in their specific social settings. Complexity dwells in the *heterogeneity* of people and their life situations; in order to act adequately, workers have to understand and do justice to the individual case. Complexity also comes from the *interconnectedness* (Lipsky, 2010, p. 77) of different domains in the personal life of the client. Usually, for example, homelessness has more than one cause, and an integrated treatment of health care, psychological and legal counselling, etc. can be necessary (thus involving several professional groups). It goes without saying that these aspects of complexity cumulatively lead to a situation where effort and performance of the service worker are hard to judge from the outside. In addition, it is awkward to define benchmarks or introduce performance-related pay if success depends crucially on the collaboration of the client, who need not be willing or able. Therefore, the welfare state needs to trust its agents and grant them space for discretion; to some degree it has to rely on their intrinsic motivation to render high quality services "voluntarily" (Köhler & Struck, 2008, p. 22).

The following sections will elaborate on the proposition that *resources, organization of work,* and *policy aims* are three key areas that condition the availability and transformation problems faced by the welfare state. What can be done in these areas so that public service goods are effectively produced in a democratic way?

3 Resources

Resources at the disposition of the welfare state – here narrowly defined monetarily – determine the number of workers that can be hired and the wages that can be offered. They thus impact the chances of the welfare state to attract and retain (qualified) staff.[4] Resources can also be used to raise the qualification of existing staff by further training. In addition, resources buy the equipment that is available to workers, in terms of buildings, ICT, tools, etc. and might thus impact productivity and, in any case, the amenity of working. I will address in the following section the relationship between welfare state resources and the demand for welfare state services, and how it impacts the work situation of street-level bureaucrats. The second part of this section deals with the importance of pay in the context of other incentives to service workers.

Welfare state expenditure has not reclined in recent years in Western countries, notwithstanding critical discussions on the fiscal sustainability of social security systems and attempts to save cost (Pierson, 2011). However, demand for welfare state services has grown in the context of demographic change and new tasks taken on by the welfare state (in particular in pre-school education and care). The result is a rising cost pressure which trickles down to the individual service worker. Hupe and Buffat (2014, p. 555) theorize the concept of a "public service gap" as a situation of insufficient resources for a given amount of tasks. They distinguish three possible scenarios of a rising workload per worker: "doing more with less", "doing more with the same", and "doing the same with less". While they can illustrate these three cases by examples from different European welfare states, the three corresponding scenarios of a *decreasing* "public service gap" are not described with empirical examples in their paper: a high and further rising workload seems to be a chronic illness of welfare states.

This is not without consequences for the quantity and quality of welfare state services. Already four decades ago, with reference to the US, Lipsky explained the connection between macro-level cost pressures and service quality which is mediated by mechanisms at the work place: faced with a combination of small resources and a high workload, service workers are forced to develop *routines* or *coping strategies* in their daily practices. These routines sometimes clash with the rights and needs of welfare state clients. They can clash with *rights*, for example, when services are "rationed" (p. 87 et seqq.): not all clients who have a legal right are served, but rather, the clients who are promising or who can be dealt with in relatively little time ("creaming"). Rationing can be done by not informing persons of their rights or by "making access to frontline workers cumbersome through incomprehensible application forms, short and inconvenient opening hours, inadequate signage to pertinent offices" (Vedung, 2015, p. 16). Even if treatment takes place, routines can clash with *needs*, for example, when medical practitioners do not afford the time to consider the life context of the client but prescribe a standardized treatment.[5] Both cases are forms of undemocratic

[4] Though this depends: often, service workers do not have the option of changing to a better paid position in the private market, sometimes private employers may even pay less, like e.g. many private schools.

[5] In manufacturing, the standardisation of products has been an integral part of the Fordist approach to equipping the masses with affordable goods. But unlike the consumer of manufactured goods, the service client suffers from standardisation of the production process because this inevitably changes the product itself; it puts the very

service provision: in a strong sense because democratically defined rights are violated, and in a weak sense as there is no room for the participation of the service client (see above). Still, service professionals may need these routines as strategies of self-protection against an unmanageable workload.

Even though he is addressing the topic of welfare state resources, Lipsky (2010) does not refer to another seminal study performed also in the USA some years earlier and already famous by his time: in the 1960s, William Jean Baumol analyzed the reasons for increasing cost pressures on public households and predicted increasing financial distress due to what he called the "cost disease" (Baumol & Oates, 1972). His argument was that services performed on persons are becoming ever more expensive over time because the increase in productivity in many service sectors is smaller than in others (agriculture, manufacturing) while wages have to remain comparable in order to attract enough staff.[6] Just as forecasted, public costs incurred by the education and health system, administration, social work, and culture have been rising constantly over the last decades (Baumol et al., 2012). Today, welfare states consume a high share of public funds in modern societies, and this share will most likely continue to grow.[7] However, this does not necessarily mean that modern welfare states become financially unsustainable. Baumol himself stresses that the "cost disease" can be cured by channeling more money into the health system, the education system, etc. Society can afford this for the precise reason that all sectors become more productive over time (though at an uneven pace), and it is thus perfectly possible to afford more teachers, social workers, and doctors year after year. However, as Baumol also stresses, there has to be the political will to raise taxes and contributions accordingly which implies more redistribution.

There is reason to think that as long as this does not happen, as long as cost containment remains a top priority, the care services will remain in the unrestful situation described by Bosch and Lehndorff (2005, p. 22):

> "In many European countries, the dichotomy between professional requirements and standards and the human and material resources made available manifests itself sometimes in very high turnover rates (care of the elderly) and sometimes in a retreat into part-time work (hospital nursing staff). The cumulative impact of these two phenomena further exacerbates the already widespread labour shortage in care services".

Currently, in Germany, nurses, kindergarten teachers, and elderly care nurses say they would like to retire relatively early, mostly due to the strain in their jobs (Helmrich et al., 2016, p. 115 et seq.), and, in fact, an earlier transition into retirement can be observed of workers in health-related professions in Germany (ibid.).[8] However, there is no consensus that providing

essence of interactive service work at stake (Baethge, 2011, p. 151). For professionals in service sectors, standardisation goes at the expense of discretion and thus bears the threat of de-professionalization (Ponnert & Svensson, 2016)

[6] In the meantime, it has been claimed that the cost disease beleaguering personal services was no longer a problem: All service can allegedly (1) be replaced by manufactured goods, or (2) be automatized, or (3) devolve to the self-service of costumers, or combinations of these ways. But this does – by definition – not apply to the services we are speaking of here, personal services that continue to be delivered by professionals to clients.

[7] This is also due to other reasons apart from the "cost disease", like the new responsibilities mentioned above, but also new costly technologies in health care.

[8] This can lead into a vicious circle (Schildmann & Voss, 2018, p. 6): High absenteeism and turnover place even more workload on remaining workers, who get more stressed and thus more likely to get sick or leave.

the welfare state with more money has any real chance of reducing the workload for workers and raising service quality for clients: Lipsky (2010, pp. 34–37) himself argues that an extended offer will always be matched by a stretch of demand which leaves no possibility for awarding more time to the individual client. According to this reasoning, the visible demand for services is just the tip of the iceberg, whereas most of the populations' needs do not rise to the surface as there is no offer. It should be verified whether this argument, formulated in the US around 1980, can be generalized to other countries, periods, and sectors.

For the availability and commitment of service workers, we can conclude that there is a detrimental effect of the under-resourcing of welfare states, mediated by workload and work-stress. On the one hand, street-level bureaucrats are put in a situation where their individual work and commitment is desperately needed by others – which may incite their engagement. On the other hand, the situation often does not permit them to do their work in a way which is satisfactory for themselves against the backdrop of their own values (see the topic of public service motivation below). In the longer run, this can lead to disengagement from work, and it can also lead to workers leaving for other jobs: "employees under high work demands are more likely to feel emotionally exhausted and, consequently, to tend to leave their organization when their job does not meet their intrinsic needs and personal values" (Shim et al., 2015, p. 566).

What is the importance of wages for motivating service workers? Or, first of all, what do we know about their pay situation? The commonly held perception is that workers earn less in social service sectors compared to other sectors and that they have fallen further behind in recent years. In Germany, workers in education and care are substantially less satisfied with their income than workers on average (Helmrich et al., 2016, p. 11). Hipp and Kelle (2016, p. 242) observe that there has been surprisingly little research on the pay level of service workers in different countries. For the education and care sectors, the literature indeed suggests that service workers earn less than workers with tasks of comparable difficulty (ibid.). In their own study based on EU-LFS data, Hipp and Kelle (2016) do *not* confirm a general situation of low pay. Differences between European countries put aside, it seems that *qualification* is an important predictor: in most countries, workers performing assistant tasks (low-skilled) are paid below the national median wage. In contrast, professionals (high-skilled) in health care and education tend to earn more than the average worker in most countries (p. 250).[9]

With an implicit critique of the formal criterion of qualification, Lillemeier (2017) compares workers' pay in regards to the actual *requirements* of their jobs. They are measured by a "comparable worth index" based on four components: knowledge, responsibility, psycho-social, and physical demands. A comparison between occupations with identical scores on this index shows that in Germany, skilled workers in the service sectors are considerably underpaid against the backdrop of their job requirements, and that unskilled workers in health and care sectors are even *dramatically* underpaid as they do face high requirements. This highlights injustices both within and between sectors: while in education, wage differentials between skilled and non-skilled workers can be somewhat justified by unequal job requirements, there is virtually no such gap in the health and care sectors, where pay differs greatly: in 2012, unskilled workers earn gross hourly wages of 11.97 Euros, skilled workers

[9] These findings apply also when controlling for composition effects (p. 532), as workers differ across sectors according to gender, age, family status, education, and other personal and work-related aspects (p. 247 et seq.).

of 15.64 Euros. In turn, the latter is just half of what managers in information and communications technology services earn (32.53 Euros an hour on average).[10]

Lillemeier (2017) explains differences in pay by the fact that it is mostly women who work in the education and care services. She diagnoses rather a devaluation of "female work" than of these services as such (p. 2). In the analysis by Hipp and Kelle (2016), however, correcting for gender does not make sectorial effects disappear, and comparing across countries, the sectorial share of female workers does not seem systematically related to income positions (ibid., 257). The latter authors give credit to a hypothesis having to do with the specific social role service workers play:

> "Emotional hostage can turn workers into prisoners of love, reluctant to walk out on strike or even to leave an occupation in which they know they are badly needed." (Folbre, 2014, p. 6; see also Hipp & Kelle, 2016, p. 243 et seq.)

Others consider this altruism hypothesis as a "myth" (Schildmann & Voss, 2018, p. 33, my translation) and argue that the problem lies rather in a lack of collective representation of interests in sectors which do not have such a tradition and where financing eventually comes from the State so that the direct employer is not perceived as the one mainly responsible for low pay (ibid., drawing on Schroeder, 2017). Hipp and Kelle (2016, p. 258) prudently confirm a relationship between the importance of collective agreements in the overall economy and wages in care services. Still, even though it may be too romantic to stylize care workers as "prisoners of love", we may at least suggest that they are "prisoners of co-production": to the extent that services are interactive, the social impact of withholding services has an individual face.

The extent to which low pay – where it applies – compounds the availability and transformation problems of the welfare state is thus not entirely clear. On the one hand, the pay level is a signal for recognition and status, and it is said to affect the professional identity of service workers (Baethge, 2014, p. 98). In this case, higher pay could improve the welfare state's position in the competition for high-skilled workers and contribute to their work motivation. On the other hand, it is also possible that not material but emotional or organizational features of work mean most to service workers (see next section). This is suggested by the results of some empirical studies: Borzaga and Tortia (2006, p. 242) find that for Italian employees in social service organizations "there is no relationship between the level of the wage and workers' loyalty." Connelly (2013, p. 259) confirms on the basis of interviews with Irish service workers that "financial reward is not the central motivator". Schildmann and Voss (2018, p. 18) conclude that, in spite of prospects of career development which are generally unfavorable, loyalty to the learned profession is high in Germany. Performance in the social services might thus be partly decoupled from pay – a different question being whether society should rely on, or respectively, exploit this.

[10] In Germany, wages in the sector of elderly care have been low, e.g. compared to the health care sector. Recently, in autumn 2019, government passed a new law making collective wage agreements binding for the whole care sector. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the policy aim is to fight shortages of staff:
https://www.bmas.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2019/pflegeloehneverbesserungsgesetz-beschlossen.html, last accessed 2019-11-05. Also, professional training will soon be unified for all care workers in Germany.

4 Organization of work

Even though the delivery of services takes place between two *persons*, a worker and a client, the *organization* which employs the worker matters in various respects. The resources at the worker's disposition (wages, further training, etc.) are provided by a particular organization, even if they are eventually financed by the welfare state.[11] The organization determines the physical working space, working time rules, job security, performance criteria, equipment, and other features of the working environment. However, like all organizations, those in providing welfare state services are subject to specific constraints and have their own agendas. Independently of how much employees' well-being matters to management, they also have to heed other determinants of the organization's success, like the fulfilment of its legal (or advertised) purpose, financial viability, laws and regulations of procedures, productivity, clients' demands and public opinion, and sometimes competitors' strategies. Multiple goals inevitably lead to trade-offs. These have to be dealt with in the context of the specific character of personal services (see section 2), which puts limits on the justifiable division of labor, standardization, de-skilling, and use of technology (Baethge, 2011, p. 159).

There is a consensus that public sector organizations have changed in many ways as a reaction to rising cost pressures (Gottschall et al., 2015, p. 3). The general direction of change, emanating from the more liberal welfare states since the 1980s, has been characterized as *new public management* (NPM). It comprises several elements (Hood, 1991, p. 4 et seq.) that exert either direct or indirect influence on work and employment: this holds true particularly for "private-sector styles of management practice" (ibid.) that include pushing back the civil servant status with its secure and upward-bound career paths and introducing performance-related pay. Moreover, "standards and measures of performance" are introduced, there is a greater "emphasis on output controls", a disaggregation/decentralization of organizational units, and a shift to "greater competition in the public sector" (ibid.) which means that providers compete for clients. Part of NPM is also a "greater discipline and parsimony" in using resources (ibid.). Overall, NPM is an attempt to make the public sector more similar to the private sector and public sector organizations more similar to private companies, in order to reach the higher levels of efficiency that are attributed to the latter.

Even though marking a departure from the traditional "command and control" logic of the authoritarian state which considered clients as subordinates, NPM has been received, rather critically, by many scholars. Concerning detrimental effects on work and employment, there are several issues. One has to do with the introduction of performance indicators. To understand why they are part of the "NPM toolkit" (Brodkin, 2011, p. 254), one has to consider that market logics can be emulated only imperfectly in welfare state services. An important reason is that, as Lipsky (2010, p. 54) bluntly states: "Clients in street-level bureaucracies are nonvoluntary." NPM tries to change this by introducing competition between providers, e.g. the private local institute offering training classes can now be driven out of the market just like any private company. In contrast, the public employment services (PES) – which may finance the private provider through training vouchers to job-seekers – will never not run out of clients, even after NPM reforms, so long as seeing one's case manager is obligatory for receiving unemployment allowance. Consequently, other ways of sustaining (quantitative and qualitative) performance remain necessary for public

[11] Note that as the welfare state carries the cost while the organisation delivers the service, there is a second principal-agent problem, beyond the above-described one between organisation and individual service worker.

organizations. Performance indicators are thus meant to substitute market signals and to provide some informational basis for performance-related pay.

Part of the problem with performance indicators is that they hardly ever give a complete account of service quality. For this, they would require an even greater documentation effort by the service worker which adds to the workload beyond service delivery itself. In part, this is happening already: workers who have originally chosen a job to "work with people" find themselves trapped in paper work at the expense of face-to-face-time with clients.[12] In part, to avoid this, indicators are based on process-generated data which is not necessarily the most relevant data, however. Judged upon criteria that are easy to quantify, service workers may be incited or even forced to deliver inadequate services. For example, Brodkin's (2011, p. 273) ethnographical research in US public service organizations reveals that street-level bureaucrats' ways of dealing with NPM includes "under-investing in administration, shifting administrative costs to clients, favoring speed over need, substituting ritual for resources, and de-legitimating claims for help." In this case, having to do what indicators (can) measure obviously violates professional standards. To the extent that service workers are intrinsically committed to serving clients' well-being, it is plausible that their job motivation suffers in circumstances that keep them from doing the job well. A way out would be to involve caseworkers in the process of designing the indicators; this would bring professional standards into the monitoring instrument.

Another issue concerns insecurity in service workers' jobs and professional careers. As mentioned above, the status of civil servant is considered outdated from the NPM perspective, and also, open-ended contracts for employees have reclined in recent years. Indeed, the public sector is no longer a positive role model in the general employment system (Briken, Gottschall, Hils, & Kittel, 2016) concerning the share of open-ended, temporary, or marginal employment. Other factors that add to insecurity are the increased competition between service providers which can now be incited or forced to dismiss staff. The dismantling of big public organizations into smaller units also weakens employees' bargaining power. This, in turn, reduces their ability to oppose increased work pressures.

What do we know about the consequences? Concerning the availability of manpower for welfare state services, Shim et al. (2015) identified job requirements as "important predictors of street-level bureaucrats' turnover intention" (p. 575) in Korea. High strains follow from "excessive performance requirements demanded by the new managerial approach of New Public Management" (p. 565), but also from other challenges in public sector management, such as role conflict and red tape. Their study focusses on the role that *Public Service Motivation* (PSM) plays in moderating the mechanisms at work. PSM "is characterized as altruistic intentions that motivate individuals to serve the public interest." (Bright, 2008, p. 151) PSM has been found to be "more prominent in public service than in private organizations" (Houston, 2006), as it attracts persons to serving government and reduces the probability of leaving to look for a job somewhere else (Naff & Crum, 1999). Shim et al. (2015) argued that while Lipsky had posited that workers with high PSM "could be more burned out and more likely to leave their organization because of the gap between the ideal concepts and realities" (p. 574), PSM does not only "have a direct negative association with

[12] Samantrai (1992) interviewed social workers in public child welfare in California: Almost "all participants expressed despair, as well as outrage, about the unmanageably high caseloads and paperwork. Regardless of the program area in which they worked, all said they spent about 65 percent to 75 percent of their time on paperwork" (p. 455).

turnover intention", but also "to mitigate the positive associations between job demands and work exhaustion, and between job demands and turnover intention." (p. 563) Thus, PSM – as a source of subjective sense connected to work – could be seen as a "psychological coping mechanism for individual street-level bureaucrats to reduce their work exhaustion and turnover intention." (p. 575).

Bright (2008), based on his study of workers in public organizations in three States of the US, concedes that high PSM reduces turnover intention, but, according to him, this link is mediated by the person–organization fit: persons with higher PSM tend to experience a greater congruence between their values and the organization's aims (i.e. to render public services). This positively impacts on their job satisfaction which in turn makes them stay longer in the organization. One way or the other, we should expect a declining loyalty of street-level bureaucrats with their organizations if the latter fail to be perceived as publicly useful by their employees (see also next section). This is the case, for example, with social workers of public child welfare in California, USA, interviewed in the context of a qualitative study by Samantrai (1992). "Their commitment now, most said, was to help children and families, but not necessarily through the public child welfare system, because this system often did not permit them to help" (p. 456).

Samantrai's (1992) research compared workers who had stayed employed with the child welfare department and those who had left. Subject to a very small sample size and possible self-selection of respondents (p. 457), she found no difference between two groups concerning, for example, the nature of their work, working conditions, motivation, and commitment (p. 455). "Among those who stayed, four factors appeared to influence their decision: (1) preference for child welfare work, (2) decent wages and benefits, (3) other advantages, and (4) job security" (p. 456), the last factor being named as the least important. Those who left generally attributed the same advantages to their former jobs. A decisive factor for their decision to quit seemed to be a bad (relationship with their) direct supervisor. Faced with their clients' hardships which "inevitably evoked feelings in the workers" (p. 455), the backing of the direct supervisor turned out to be the decisive factor for loyalty to the organization. It has to be mentioned that all respondents who quit remained in child-related jobs.

Still on the topic of PSM, Borzaga and Tortia (2006) find that suboptimal incentive structures cannot be compensated by high intrinsic motivation to do socially useful work. They distinguish between workers' motivations, job satisfaction, and loyalty to the employer. On the basis of a survey among Italian service workers, mostly in non-profit organizations and to a lesser extent in public ones, they highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation for job satisfaction: "workers driven by deeper lying motivations and by the desire to build positive social relations on the job are more likely to be satisfied with their work" (241). However, when it comes to explaining turnover intentions, "intrinsic items (the social usefulness of the work) are not significant in explaining loyalty." (242) Instead, what seems to motivate employees of non-profit and public service organizations is what they get out of them for themselves (wages, job security, but also social encounters at work) and how they work (regarding "decision making autonomy, variety and creativity of the work, professional growth, recognition of workers' contribution", p. 230). This underscores Samantrai's finding on the importance of a positive interaction with supervisors, and it points to potential threats of NPM for staff loyalty: Bezes et al. (2012) discuss the "conflict existing between reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM) and professional groups operating in the public

sector and working in state administrations" (p. 3). It seems that NPM has mostly been perceived as an attack on professional autonomy (p. 4).

As an interim conclusion, it seems relevant to distinguish between 1.) PSM as a feature of a person's character (only changing in the longer run, if at all), 2.) personal commitment to a profession, and 3.) personal commitment to an organization (which can be situational). PSM seems to boost the commitment of workers in the social services sector in general. The extent to which high PSM can compensate for problems at the workplace (workload, stress) remains somewhat unclear: on the one hand, PSM seems to help workers endure difficult situations, and, on the other hand, it cannot make up for a lack of other rewards, like job security and autonomy at work. However, disengaging from an organization does not mean getting disenchanted with the work as such. The empirical literature on turnover (intention) focusses on reasons why employees leave their employers while there seems to be a lack of research on whether and why persons turn their back on their profession in welfare state services.

Concerning commitment of service workers to their everyday professional tasks, Vogel (2017) concludes from an empirical study that *so far*, job precarity has not had an impact on the professional spirit in the observed sectors of municipal administration, postal services, and hospitals in in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. This means that service quality seems to be maintained partly at the expense of workers and of their intrinsic motivation. There is some cleavage by qualification (ibid.), in that low-skilled interviewees do stress the importance of a reliable employment setup (which they probably lack to a larger extent than their high-skilled colleagues). Of course, the finding of a persistent work ethos may just be preliminary: a public service sector revamped by NPM may, in the long run, erode the commitment of the existing staff and/or attract workers with a different kind of motivation. It is not excluded that workers' commitment which constitutes the capital of the welfare state in some way, is being used up but not renewed in times of NPM. However, Connelly (2013), in her analysis of what motivates street-level bureaucrats in Ireland, points to the strong persistence of "old-fashioned" values also in the long run:

> even though "NPM ideas have been in place in Ireland for nearly three decades" (ibid., 266), "the values associated with NPM ideas, first championed by senior management within the public sector, have not filtered down to the bureaucrats and professionals at the 'street-level' of Irish social policy. The prevailing values mentioned by participants are linked to the traditional model of public administration. These values include honesty, integrity, confidentiality, respect, duty of care and so forth" (p. 257).

A variety of empirical studies, differing in place, time, and sector seem to be necessary to answer the questions raised here: Gottschall et al. (2015) argue that there has not been a uniform effect of NPM on work and employment in public services. They stress the need to differentiate between countries due to their differing openness to NPM ideas and between sectors due to their different conditions of service delivery: "while some areas might be subject to privatization, others are exposed to competition between public and private provision or subject to internal marketization." (p. 7) Therefore, we have to be prudent both about dramatic as well as about conciliatory assertions on the future of welfare state services. The shortcomings of governance by performance indicators show that, in any case, high quality services continue to hinge on workers' commitments. The following section will examine in what ways recent trends in policy orientations, beyond changes of workers immediate working environments, could affect that commitment.

5 Policy Aims

Another crucial message of Lipsky's (2010) seminal book is that street-level bureaucrats are not only policy takers, but also policy makers (p. 13). Concretizing written law in real life situations involves the freedom to interpret the law in one way or another or even to deviate from its intention. While Lipsky highlights necessary coping mechanisms (see above), i.e. the self-interest of street-level bureaucrats, as the principal reason for deviation, another reason can lie in their personal political attitudes and/or ethical convictions. Street-level bureaucrats are persons with their own views of what is right and what is wrong, and in part, it is probably these attitudes and convictions which made them choose their profession in the first place. In addition, on the basis of their work experience, street-level bureaucrats accumulate expertise when it comes to judging matters in their fields of activity. Their opinions need not always coincide with official social policy or with the service organizations' practices.13 In fact, street-level bureaucrats becoming disenchanted with their work is a recurrent theme in the scientific literature. An obvious reason can of course be the working conditions that service workers experience which I dealt with in the two preceding sections. In the present section, I will look at the role of policy orientations:14 what do we know about the congruence of mind-sets between policy and street-level bureaucrats which I call the "normative fit"? And what do we know about the consequences in terms of career decisions and professional commitment in cases where there is a gap between political trends and agendas and street-level bureaucrats' own values and persuasions?

Street-level bureaucrats' attitudes have already been related to public service motivation (PSM) above. There is a consensus in the literature that they tend to score above-average on the PSM scale. However, what does this mean exactly in terms of subjective orientations, what do street-level bureaucrats actually perceive as serving the public? The literature distinguishes two opposing professional roles of street-level bureaucrats, the "service role" and the "regulatory role", see for example Marrow (2009, p. 259). The former is client-oriented and fits in within the motivation of helping concrete people who need welfare state services. The latter, instead, involves a disciplining approach to clients. One could say it is rather oriented to the public as the principal of service delivery, or even more abstractly, to serving "the system" (ibid.). Expressed in extremes, while the service mission is about protecting the clients against the system (e.g. correcting perceived injustices of their situations), the regulatory mission aims at protecting the system against the clients (e.g. preventing abusive use of social services). While most street-level bureaucrats, to some degree, combine both missions in their professional roles, there is also some variance. Marrow (2009) characterizes medical staff and teachers as more inclined toward the service role as opposed to bureaucrats in law enforcement, the court system, and the administration of social benefits who tend to fulfil a more regulatory function. From this perspective, it appears that the debate on whether street-level bureaucrats are "state agents" or "citizen agents" (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000, p. 329; see also Lavee, Cohen, & Nouman, 2018, p. 335 et al.) can be avoided by differentiating between, both, sectors and individuals. What we can assert at this point is that street-level bureaucrats have often been attributed humanistic and quality-of-life related mentalities (Gartner/Riessman in Häußermann & Siebel, 1995, p. 44). In her study on what motivates Irish service professionals, Connelly (2013) finds that across sectors they "are very similarly motivated. Helping people (altruistic motives); doing

[13] Whereby perceptions are "often more important than actual facts" (Isett, Morrissey, & Topping, 2006, p. 217), and they may even be maintained in cases where they are contradicted by the facts (ibid.).

[14] It is perfectly possible to pursue policy goals shared by workers though organisational practices that workers reject, or vice versa.

interesting and varied work (intrinsic motives); dealing with people and interacting with colleagues (social motives) are frequently mentioned across the board." (p. 259).

Turning to the welfare state, how can we locate it on the normative map? On the one hand, we should keep in mind the existence of different "worlds of welfare" which Esping-Andersen (1990) has famously described: the way and the extent at which welfare states intervene in social life (e.g. correct market results) depends on the outcome of historical political struggles in the respective countries. On the other hand, it seems that the aims of European welfare states have been changing rather uniformly during recent decades, making social-democratic and liberal welfare states become more similar to the liberal ones (which only underscores the analytic benefit of Esping-Andersen's typology). There is a widely-shared impression that in the context of policy processes at the level of the European Union (EU), social policy in the Member States has undergone a trend of economization (Buestrich & Wohlfahrt, 2008, p. 21; Dörre, 2009, p. 41 et seqq.) that corresponds with a pervasive trend of political neo-liberalization (Stiegler, 2019). One example is the "social investment" agenda (European Commission, 2013; Lehwess-Litzmann, 2018) which currently inspires the social policy discourse in the EU. While some consider it as a departure from neo-liberalism (Morel, Palier, & Palme, 2012), others see it just as a new phase (Laruffa, 2017). Social investment explicitly intends a shift away from the traditional welfare state which "repaired" damage when social risks struck: The "modern" welfare state would instead emphasize the economic added-value of investing in people early on and preventing casualties from happening in the first place. It may be that the European Social Model is now being discussed as an economic asset in order to preserve the welfare state. Yet, at the same time, social risks seem to get a bit out of focus of social policy. The new way of thinking about social policy is paralleled by a changed perception of clients. The notion of "activation" conveys a new role for them: instead of being mainly receivers, clients are asked to actively contribute to overcoming their dependency. Based on the premise that the neo-liberal state is actually not a counter-weight to, but a facilitator of markets, Stiegler (2019) argues that turning clients into market participants is the whole purpose of welfare state services in the context of neo-liberalism.15 While this may be a bit too gloomy, it is evident that the road towards a welfare service state can well be a neo-liberal one which would put its "social equalizing" function into question.

How does this described development fit with the attitudes of street-level bureaucrats? We can draw only a small number of hints from empirical research here. It was mentioned above that there has been powerful opposition from public service professionals against NPM reforms, but this mostly addressed implications for professional autonomy (Bezes et al., 2012, p. 7); protests may also have meant the political concept of neo-liberalism to some extent, but we cannot disentangle this.16 Concerning labor-market policy, May and Winter (2009) find that for the public employment services in Denmark, the policy priority of putting clients into jobs is generally implemented by street-level bureaucrats because they know and support

[15] In the same vein, the social investment agenda brings about a deeper involvement of the State in market transactions, just like neo-liberalism increased the role of the State compared to earlier liberalism.

[16] Isett et al. (2006), based on a study on health care workers' attitudes on managed care systems (an approach aiming at raising efficiency in hospitals), argue that "attitudes and perceptions of street-level bureaucrats […] are not likely affected by large-scale systems or regime changes because their day-to-day activities remain fairly constant" (ibid.) and they join Lipsky in saying that street-level bureaucrats are "insulated in a number of respects from the broader policy environment by the rules they establish to get the work done." (ibid.) This speaks for the hypothesis that street-level bureaucrats will tend to ignore changes in political ideology (because and as long as they can neutralise its effects by their use of discretion).

these goals.17 For the field of education, there is a debate about streamlining curricula along labor market needs in which teachers participate, and in the field of health and elderly care, workers discuss the permissiveness of "making money" in their sectors. Yet, we are not aware of representative studies of service workers' attitudes on the matter of a general "economization of the social". Some further hints can be drawn from studies on "policy alienation of public professionals", which Tummers et al. (2009, p. 685) performed in Dutch public service organizations. Based on their surveys, the authors concluded that today "many public professionals feel estranged from the policy programmes they implement". One of the reasons is a feeling of "meaninglessness" which can result from "a professional's perception that a policy programme is not actually dealing with specific societal problems, or with the provision of desirable public goods and services, such as delivering financial protection and security." (p. 689) Next to "meaninglessness", the authors identify "powerlessness" and "social isolation" (p. 687) as drivers of policy alienation defined as "as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy programme being implemented" (p. 686).18 The authors highlight the need to analyze inter-personal variation of street-level bureaucrats' attitudes more:

> "Some professionals did agree with this cost-cutting goal, agreeing that the social security system had become too expensive. […] While the factors included in our model can explain why feelings of policy alienation have evolved, they do not explain why some public professionals feel more alienated than others. More research is needed to explain why this is so." (Tummers et al., 2009, p. 702)

What are the consequences for the welfare state as an employer in the case of a clash between policy goals and street-level bureaucrats' attitudes? Following the well-known typology of Hirschman (1970), workers have, in principle, two options: exit and loyalty. *Exit* would mean leaving the organization or even opting for a different occupation – which adds to the above-described availability problem of social service organizations. Indeed, Shim et al. (2015) show that role conflict (which arises from contradicting missions) promotes turnover intentions among street-level bureaucrats. A systematically higher exit rate of workers who disagree with a reigning policy paradigm – thus self-selection – will of course, in the long run, lead to a change in organizational culture and altered professional standards. It has to be mentioned, however, that the probability of exit depends on the (substantially different) alternatives as service workers are usually dependent on having an income from work.

The probability of exit will also depend on the success of the strategic alternative: *loyalty* means staying, but not necessarily while maintaining a high professional commitment. In this case, the transformation problem can become stronger in the sense that the welfare state and its agencies cannot count fully on their staff. It has amply been shown that conflicting values can lead professionals to re-interpret their official mission in the light of their own values (i.e. "policy divergence"). Belabas and Gerrits (2017), for example, demonstrate that their sample of Dutch street-level bureaucrats "were more likely to use their discretionary power in favour

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[17] Their survey measures "policy endorsement" as "the extent to which they positively evaluate the goals of the national employment reform act." (ibid., 460)

[18] Policy alienation of professionals is of general concern as "for satisfactory implementation, some identification with the policy is required." (p. 685). Baethge (2011, p. 159) explicitly states that alienation in social services is much more threatening than in industry due to the interactive nature of services, alienation concerns both producers and consumers. We should keep in mind that for consumers, commodified personal services replace interactions that traditionally took place with persons socially close in the context of their private household.

of motivated clients when the goals that clients were expected to meet were considered ineffective, unrealistic or unfair" (144). Staying can also involve taking political action, an expression of what Hirschman calls "voice". Lavee et al. (2018, p. 334) even argue that the feeling of alienation may spur street-level bureaucrats' efforts to influence policy "not only via implementation practices, but also by trying to influence policy design directly". In the long run, there is again the possibility of policy changes affecting professional practices: Marrow (2009, p. 759) argues that government impacts, not only on the way street-level bureaucrats work, but also on the roles that they define for themselves. In studying how Hispanic immigrants are incorporated in some new migrant destinations in the US, she found that changes in the legal environment shift street-level bureaucrats' perceptions of their own professional role on the continuum between the service and the regulatory mission.

6 Conclusion: A Puzzle Without all the Pieces

Western countries' welfare states have witnessed deep changes in recent decades: a growing scarcity of resources due to a proliferation of responsibilities and a rising demand for services; profound reforms of organizations and governance that strengthened managerial control within bureaucracies and introduced elements of competition between providers; and policy orientations seem to have changed from the post-war welfare state's solidarity-based redistribution to a social policy seen as (or at least sold as) a catalyst of economic growth and resilience.

The present text gathered insights from existing research on how these changes influence the position of the welfare state as an employer: workers being the most important asset particularly of a welfare *service* state, it has to secure their supply (availability problem) and their professional commitment to implementing welfare state aims (transformation problem). These two challenges are considered in the following three areas of regulation: the *resources* at the disposition of the welfare state and its agents, the *organizational forms* in which workers are embedded, and the *policy orientations* which are supposed to guide street-level bureaucrats' actions. These three areas have been the stages of the above-mentioned historical changes which affect the work and employment situation of the welfare state's staff.

Why is this important? Only if the welfare state can attract workers in sufficient numbers and with the right motivation, it can produce the public goods which most of the population (have to) rely on: for their children to unfold their talents in school, for patients to overcome health issues through adequate treatment, for crimes to be prevented from happening by security forces, or for justice to be done by the judicial system, etc. The quantity and quality of public services is key for the well-functioning of modern societies.

6.1 Resources

Given the cost pressure under which welfare states operate, service workers have to deal with high and rising *caseloads*. Work stress leads part of them to retreat to part-time work or early retirement. It also undermines workers' health, leading to absenteeism. These reactions trigger a negative spiral of even greater workload for those who remain – a vicious circle. High caseloads also force street-level bureaucrats to find coping behaviors, e.g. to withhold services or to deliver them in an inadequate way. In this situation, factual social policy deviates from the intention of policy-makers. The smaller the resources are in relation to demands, the bigger this deviation becomes. There can be an additional feedback effect from low quality services to "defection": many street-level bureaucrats being motivated by the public service idea and having to deliver objectionable service quality can lead to low work satisfaction which is, again, linked to turnover intentions.

Another possible impact of welfare state resources can work via *wages*, as these resources also set limits to monetary rewards: research suggests, though, that the pay level is not among the most important factors attracting workers to the welfare state, and that everyday professional commitment is also not a function of pay. More important is the feeling of doing something valuable for society, e.g. helping people in need, and the social component, i.e. having good contacts with colleagues and clients. Yet, part of the patience that today's service workers show could also be explained by the lack of other jobs where the acquired qualifications could be put to use. This begs the yet unanswered question whether a welfare state which pays little and offers little in terms of job security will attract enough workers among the new generations of labor-market entrants.

6.2 Organization of work

Beside idealistic and social components, an important incentive for being a service worker is the autonomy that street-level bureaucrats traditionally enjoy. In this context, the rise of *new public management* (NPM) since the 1980s has been perceived as an attack on their professions (Bezes et al., 2012). Many countries and sectors have adopted NPM to differing degrees, but the impact on workers' availability, motivation, and professional identity are still somewhat unclear and, particularly, the long-term impacts. At first, the opposition between NPM and various professional groups of street-level bureaucrats has been visible literally "on the streets" in some countries. Until the present, research notices a persistence of professional identities and administrative cultures in spite of NPM. It may be for this very reason that NPM has been found to lead to policy alienation of street-level bureaucrats, i.e. caused by feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness (Tummers et al., 2009) which can lead to increased turnover intentions and weigh on the delivery of services. But the future is open: is the reformed welfare state living on prerequisites which it does not reproduce and which will slowly vanish through generational change, or do professional values spring from sources which are different and independent from the welfare state's institutional setup? Alternatively, will NPM lead to a new form of professionalism, different from the ancient one but equally functional (Bezes et al., 2012)? There is a need for more long-term and comparative studies exploring and exploiting the variance of NPM in different sectors and countries.

6.3 Policy Aims

As a third area, the article discussed whether changes of political paradigms can impact the availability and professional commitment of those who execute policies on the frontline. Rather than answers, some fundamental questions have been found. One interpretation put forward in the literature is that street-level bureaucrats need not care about macro-level discourses because the exercise of their profession is not really affected by them. According to this view, they fly below the radar of politics by virtue of their leeway for discretion. However, this does not hold true when changes of policy orientations are accompanied by measures controlling implementation, thus reducing discretion. This is precisely what happened in recent years when a general trend of *economizing social policy* was accompanied by the above-mentioned NPM reforms. It can be due to this combination that there is a lack of empirical knowledge about how much street-level bureaucrats support or oppose the general trend of policy: conflicts around NPM have been reported, but it is hard to tell whether they addressed the content as well, and not just the means of policy.

Participating in a demonstration corresponds to the image that is drawn by some researchers of street-level bureaucrats as political actors who challenge policy by action within the political arena (Lavee et al., 2018). Inversely, it has also been argued that changes in policy

make street-level bureaucrats adapt their professional roles (Marrow, 2009) which reduces dissonance and role conflict. Doing business as usual, adaptation to new goals, and political voice are all reactions that can be described as forms of "loyalty" in the sense of Hirschman (1970); it would be interesting to know more about the determinants. The alternative option, "exit", depends on the prospects of finding a new job which is substantially different.

6.4 More Work Must Be Done

The text has discussed trends at the level of political orientation, governance, and resources as *overarching* trends, abstracting from differences between countries and sectors. Empirical counter-examples may be found easily, just like individual street-level bureaucrats may find jobs in organizations that are not affected by resource scarcity, NPM rules, and economizing logics. But if it is correct that some trends are rather universal, then this has a particular consequence: service workers who reject this trend are left with only two options: policy divergence within the job – which reinforces transformation problems – or leaving a profession completely (not just a particular organization) – which reinforces availability problems. As both are undesirable from the perspective of the welfare state as an employer, there is reason to monitor service workers' attitudes and to consider them in policy-making.

Despite the abundance of research on street-level bureaucrats in recent years, the preferences of this probably heterogeneous group and the factors that weigh on their career choices do not seem to be fully known. For example, while there is a consensus that street-level bureaucrats are driven by public service motivation, it does not seem so clear how this category is actually filled: what service do they actually find useful for the public, and who do they perceive as "the public?" As mentioned in connection to the study of Marrow (2009), there is a need to distinguish between different sectors here. Another example is that while there has been much research on tenure at the level of the organization, there has hardly been any research on when the welfare state workers turn their back on their professions as a whole.[19] And in regards to those who stay, are they "prisoners of love", as many deem, or, rather, prisoners of their specific qualifications, just like other professionals?

6.5 Prerequisites of Democratic Service Provision

The topic of democratic service provision was approached here from a workforce perspective. The reasons to do this are manifold: first, services are resource intensive, they raise the question of staffing more than any other domain of welfare state activity. Second, the content of service delivery is hard to separate from the persons that deliver the services. We must not be indifferent about who are the concrete persons that act in the name of the welfare state. Third, services are delivered in a given context of work and employment with this context impacting the quantity and quality of service provision. There are thus a number of reasons to include the topic of work in the discussion on the democratic Welfare Service State.

Of course, one also has to look beyond the workforce perspective. Professionals may have a strong position vis-à-vis the client in the service relationships, but they cannot anticipate and dominate the whole process of service delivery (and neither can the organization or the welfare state). This would also be against the idea of interaction. A crucial thing for democracy in personal services is a public mandate to allow and promote the autonomy of the

[19] On this topic, see the GenDis project: http://www.sofi-goettingen.de/projekte/gesellschaftlich-notwendige-dienstleistungen-sicherstellen-ist-arbeit-am-gemeinwohl-attraktiv/projektinhalt/

client. Besides, his or her autonomy is also a function of what they can draw on apart from services which brings the monetary branch of welfare state activity back to the agenda.

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