

***Individual experiences with reintegration
policies in Denmark and the Netherlands***

Pernille Hohnen

***The open labour market
Working Paper 32:2002***



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Work or Charity?
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The Study

The Danish National Institute of Social Research carries out a research programme on the *Open Labour Market*, to be concluded in 2002. The Ministry of Social Affairs initiates the research programme.

This working paper analyses individual experiences of different models of labour market reintegration in Denmark and in the Netherlands. The paper has two principal aims. First, to make an analysis of experiences of reintegration at an individual level in the two countries, based on qualitative interviews with Danish and Dutch persons, who have a reduced capacity to work. The second aim is to discuss how the fact that these jobs are very differently constructed both culturally and socially, may be linked to the different political models in the two countries. The Danish model based on a campaign of corporate social responsibility seems to promote an image of these employees as “weak” and their employment as an act of benevolence rather than as a real contribution to the workplace. The Dutch model, where employers are obliged by law to keep employees with a reduced working capacity, seems to socially construct these jobs like “ordinary” part time jobs.

The working paper is written by senior researcher, Ph.D. Pernille Hohnen in the unit of the Open Labour Market.

Contents

Introduction.....	7
Dutch and Danish Contexts	11
Different Forms of Regulation	11
Reintegration Politics in Denmark and in the Netherlands	12
Comparing Denmark and the Netherlands – Methodological Reflections.....	15
Experiences of Reintegration in Denmark.....	17
Conclusion: A New Category of “Work”	19
Experiences of Labour Market Reintegration in the Netherlands.....	21
Types of Jobs.....	21
Social Position and Stigmatization.....	21
Relationship to Employers.....	22
Separated Worlds of Work and Illness.....	24
The Right to Work and the Right to a WAO	25
Different Categories of “Work for the Weak”.....	27
The Corrosion of Morality and the Reconstruction of Patronage in Contemporary Capitalism.....	31
References	35
Working papers published by the Danish National Institute of Social Research.....	39

Introduction

This paper should be read in relation to recent debates in the US and European politics as well as in the social sciences concerning changing forms of solidarity, citizenship and new forms of social exclusion in contemporary society and related to this an apparently new division of roles and responsibilities between state, market and civil society. These debates in particular focus on the growing political influence and power of the increasingly globalised market and the fact that national states are losing influence in relation to an increasingly more powerful market space. Recent (and some not so recent) debates in sociology, political science and business studies depicting corporate social responsibility, corporate citizenship and market governance as trends of contemporary capitalism have highlighted the apparently changing roles between private corporations, the national states and civil society (cf. Jones, 2001; Johnson and Smith, 1999; Zadek et al. 2001; Klein, 2000). Some writers have argued that we are witnessing a fundamental collapse of social solidarity and the increasing influence of the market is ruining social relations and moral sentiments of solidarity within the sphere of civil society (cf. Sennett 1998 and Wolfe 1989; Klein 2000). Some speak more positively of corporate social responsibility or “a new economy of corporate citizenship”¹ (cf. Commission of European Communities, 2001; Zadek et. al. 2001)². Generally, in spite of these differences, the idea of increased market regulation in the form of partnerships and corporate social responsibility has become an important political, sociological and economic topic. Within the social scientific debates, however, these processes have mainly been analysed at a discursive level (Levitas 1996), whereas empirical investigations concerning the experiences with and consequences of these changes at a local level are relatively sparse, especially if we disregard case studies of “best practice” of the successful development of CSR in private companies. Many studies are prescriptive and have a “business” perspective where the aim is to analyse

¹ Zadek et al. also gives a definition of the concept: “Corporate Citizenship embraces the growing number of voluntary initiatives by the business community that address social and environmental as well as business aims, increasingly in partnerships with civil society organizations and public bodies (Zadek, 2001, 13)

² Some suggest more caution while pointing to the consequences of a rather uncritical use of normative market rhetoric in contemporary scientific discourses (Liep, 2000).

consequences of CSR *for the enterprise* rather than for society or the “target groups” involved (Jones 2001).

Although the proposed new division of labour between businesses, the national state and civil society is a prevalent topic in political science and business studies, this has only received limited attention from social anthropologists and sociologists (cf. Marcus, 1998; Jones 2000; Garsten 1999; Salomon 1999; Moser 1998). Yet some of these writers have diagnosed important “blind spots” in the existing research. Moser (1998), who writes about the cultural meaning of work in post-industrial societies for example, shows that there is an overwhelming tendency to overestimate cultural change at the cost of continuity and to confuse altered structures with altered experiences. Just because the world looks different, it doesn’t mean that it is differently experienced and has a different meaning (ibid.). Although important changes do take place e.g. in the fields of technology and communication, this does not necessarily result in a “far reaching transformation of our system of values and norms” (ibid). Because many of what Moser terms post-modernist analyses lack empirical evidence, there seems to be a tendency to assume that changes in one area automatically leads to broader societal and cultural changes.

Salamon (2000) points to another important task for anthropologists and other social scientists studying corporate social responsibility, namely to reinstall social context into the picture. She maintains that although contextualisation of the “visions” of CSR-notions may happen, this context is mainly understood in terms of general management ideas, faith or business ethics, and she concludes:

“It is the rest of what we tend to call society – the non-corporate world of migrants, unemployed and other excluded and dependent people – that are left unmentioned in these visions” (ibid, 28)

Finally, Jones (2001) critically examines the sociological value of notions such as “corporate social responsibility” and “corporate citizenship”. He cautions that these concepts, created as a part of what we could term “management discourse” may be misleading and inaccurate, since they do not necessarily reflect the mutual roles and social relations of corporations and

civil or governmental partners. Relationships are often dominated by the interests of the businesses rather than by those of the partners'. Jones suggests to shift focus to notions such as "patronage" and "dependency relations" in order to depict changes in social positions of partners and corporations.

".... metaphors of "partnership" and "citizenship" are either inaccurate or misleading..... A better characterization of firms entering into these new practices and identities may be that the broader societal role being adopted is one of *patronage* over an array of less powerful client institutions" (Jones 2001: 3) (my italics)

Jones is mainly interested in changing social relations at an institutional level e.g. between CSR corporations and their partners, but I contend that corporate social responsibility may also result in changing social relations and mutual obligations at a more individual level, e.g. when the social contract between state and citizens (outside corporations) is transferred into an employer/employee relationship within corporations.

The aim of the present paper is to shed more light on possible consequences of the apparent "new role" of private corporations by analysing the social relationships and forms of solidarity, obligations and social rights, that this seems to create - and to do this on the basis of empirical analysis. I shall focus on one particular political field: labour market reintegration as a field where social and economic aims may be integrated. I shall compare individual experiences of reintegration in Denmark and the Netherlands in order to outline possible consequences of different policies in relation to the social roles and responsibilities of corporations. The paper should also be read as an attempt to apply anthropological method and theory to social policy and "business studies".

Dutch and Danish Contexts

Denmark and the Netherlands, although the two countries are often considered rather similar, are different both regarding legislation and in terms of socio-cultural traditions of employment and specifically in terms of gender differences and the position of family life vis a vis work life.

In both countries, along with many other European countries, there has in recent years been a political focus on preventing social exclusion by increased labour market participation (cf. Lind & Møller 1999, van Oorschoot 2000, Lødemel and Trickey 2000). In both countries an important political concern in this respect has been the growing number of persons outside the labour market, especially the number of persons on disability benefits. However, although the political motives are more or less similar, the two countries have followed very different models of regulation in this field.

Different Forms of Regulation

In Denmark, reintegration of persons with a reduced working capacity is an important topic of the discourse of corporate social responsibility (Holt 2001). At the same time, Denmark is usually depicted as a social democratic welfare state with extensive public welfare institutions (Abrahamson 1999). The Netherlands, on the other hand is often depicted as a “consultation economy” and an influential corporatist tradition (cf. Hartog 1999; SER 2001; den Dulk 2000). Following this one could expect a larger “space” for market regulation e.g. Corporate Social Responsibility in the Netherlands, yet this seems not to be the case if we look at reintegration policies. In the Netherlands this area is controlled directly through political legislation, and although employers *carry out* many “social” tasks, they do so by implementing government policy rather than taking independent initiatives based on a sense of responsibility (Hartog 1999). The Danish system on the other hand is relying on voluntary initiatives of enterprises to employ persons with a reduced capacity to work. Yet at the same time the financial responsibility of supplying these people with a sufficient income as well as the responsibility to carry out reintegration e.g. establishing specific jobs rests with the state or municipalities. Although recent reports in the two countries characterize both as moving towards a new economic model of corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility the roles and respon-

sibilities are very differently distributed and administered in the two countries. Although obligations to reintegrate sick and partly disabled employees are much more extensive for Dutch employers than for their Danish counterparts, this is not discussed as “social responsibility” and is not included in the Dutch discourse of corporate social responsibility (SER 2001). Contrary to this Danish employers have no legal obligations to retain or integrate sick or partly disabled employees, but employment of these employees is publicly recognized as a part of an increasing social responsibility of employers. The empirical data analysed above, however, indicates, that on an individual level, the different models of regulation within this field clearly have consequences for the experiences of employment socially and culturally.

Reintegration Politics in Denmark and in the Netherlands

In Denmark disability insurance is public and both sickness and disability benefits are publicly administered as well as publicly financed and organized. In order to attempt to transfer a part of these responsibilities, a political programme focusing on the “openness” of the labour market and encouraging corporate social responsibility was launched in 1994 (cf. Socialministeriet 2000). One important goal of this programme was to promote the employment of persons with a reduced working capacity. This was done by developing a more active social policy line and introducing subsidized jobs on special terms (in Danish called flexjobs) for persons without a full working capacity, as well as by encouraging private companies to include partly work-disabled persons in their work force (Rosdahl 2000). In addition changes have been made in the procedure concerning the allocation of disability benefits. This has altogether resulted in an increasing number of these specially designed subsidised jobs and a decrease in the number of disability beneficiaries (Danmarks Statistik 2001). Danish reintegration policy relies heavily on the establishment of such subsidized jobs on special terms, yet it is voluntary to dismiss and employ partly work-disabled persons employed in ordinary jobs as well as those employed on special terms. Since the mid 90s a politically initiated campaign promoting reintegration as an indication of corporate social responsibility has been used as a means of changing employers reintegration policies. Administratively and legally however, the responsibility for reintegration of work-disabled persons has remained public (it rests with the municipalities) and the employment of such employees is optional for employers. The Danish development epitomizes changing

boundaries between the social responsibilities of the state and of companies (especially private ones) yet it remains highly unclear to what extent and in what ways a transfer of responsibilities actually takes place (cf. Holt 2000, Hohnen 2000).

The Netherlands experienced a steady increase in the number of permanently work-disabled persons receiving either full or partial disability benefits during the 1970s and 1980s (in Holland these disability benefits are called WAO³). The peak was reached in 1984, where 13.5% of the labour force received disability benefits (Hartog 1999). A series of legal changes, starting in 1987, have made it increasingly more difficult and less advantageous both for employers and employees to use the WAO insurance system. In addition, recent Dutch legislation stipulates an increased financial responsibility of the employer. In the event of an employee becoming disabled, Dutch employers are obliged to pay 70% of the former salary for a period of up to one year. A work-disabled employee is protected against dismissal during the first two years of disability and the “production” of disability now has consequences in the employers’ premium for the disability insurance. Dutch employers are currently obliged to finance disability benefits for their employees for up to five years either by paying a heavily increased premium or by directly paying the benefits themselves (Høgelund 1999). Employers are furthermore obliged to consult a Working Conditions service in order to develop a programme to prevent disability. In 1998 a law on the reintegration of persons with a reduction in their working capacity (Wet REA) was passed. The main aim of the law is to promote the detainment and reintegration of partly work-disabled persons (Maarsen, 2000).

Although legislation both in Denmark and in Holland aims at changing employers’ conduct and promoting the reintegration of people with reduced working capacity into the labour market, the means to achieve this common goal differs markedly.

In Denmark only representatives from the municipality are authorized to establish a flexjob,

³ WAO benefits cover all wage earners, who become disabled. In 1976 a general disability insurance including all Dutch citizens (AAW) was introduced, yet in practice it only covers persons who have become handicapped at an early age and self-employed persons who become disabled (Bengtsson & Høgelund (eds.) 1999). The WAO benefits are by far the most important, and it is usually these that are in focus politically (cf. Oorschoot 2000).

while in Holland establishing a job for a work-disabled person is commonly considered the responsibility of the employer (together with advisory units of reintegration – public as well as private).⁴ The general picture therefore seems to be a high degree of political regulation and control, but at the same time a high degree of private administration and implementation in the Netherlands whereas in Denmark the picture is, rather contrary to this, a low degree of political regulation and control, yet public agents have the responsibility for administering and implementing as well as subsidizing reintegration. It is also worth noticing that the development of reintegration policies in the two countries has taken rather opposite directions. During the 1980s and 90s the Netherlands have changed from a system where social insurance and reintegration was in the hands of the social partners to a more and more government controlled and state-regulated policy. All in all, it was a shift from a rather decentralized system of control and finance to a more central governed model. On the other hand in Denmark, although the state had and still has the basic financial responsibility, legislation has increasingly been aimed at promoting social partnership, e.g. decreasing direct central political influence and responsibility.

To sum up, reintegration politics in Denmark are closely connected to corporate social responsibility on a voluntary basis, whereas in the Netherlands they are governed by legislative means. In a Danish context, the concept of corporate social responsibility is generally seen as the responsibility of enterprises to retain or integrate employees with some form of reduced capacity to work. (Holt 2000, Kolind 2001). Although corporate social responsibility is also a topic in the Netherlands, the concept refers to other social and environmental arenas labour market reintegration, where the responsibility of companies is already stipulated in the legislation (SER 2001).

Finally, it should be mentioned that prevailing traditions of “work” and labour market participation are rather different in the two countries. The Dutch labour market is characterized by part-time work to a much higher degree than in Denmark. Although this is mainly due to a Dutch tradition where women stay at home with their children, part time work is also more common among Dutch men than Danish men (den Dulk 2000). Partly as a result of this, partly

⁴ The responsibility rests with the employer in cases where it is the employer’s own employee who becomes work-disabled, but as this means that the majority of reintegrated persons stay with their former employer, public representatives play a rather limited role in implementing reintegration.

for other reasons, “work” is cognitively and socially a rather broad concept in the Netherlands, where it may connote a range of different forms and degrees of labour market participation. In contrast, in a Danish context it is common to work full-time for both men and women and the concept therefore usually connotes full-time work.

Comparing Denmark and the Netherlands – Methodological Reflections

The empirical material consists of 15 ethnographic interviews with persons who have a reduced working capacity in Denmark as well as 14 in the Netherlands. The interview persons have been selected strategically in order to cover differences in sex, age, and degree of reduction in working capacity and type of job. It should be mentioned, however, that the Dutch and Danish cases are not entirely comparable⁵. Partly due to the fact that the Dutch system is based on *earning capacity*, and the Danish is based on *working capacity*, there seemed to be some difference between the estimated reductions of capacity of a Danish Dutch employees with the same formally calculated reduction percentage. In general this means that Dutch work-disabled persons have a larger remaining working capacity than the Danish counterparts with the same formally estimated reduction. This not only has methodological significance, but also points to the fact that the Dutch group of work-disabled persons are less disabled than the Danish group. Moreover, the Dutch system seems to offer a higher degree of compensation for the same reduction in working capacity.⁶

⁵ Although, in principle it is possible to receive a partial WAO for a work reduction of as little as 15%, most interview persons had between 45% and 55% . In order to compare most accurately with the situation of Danish employees, most attention has been given to the interviews with persons, who had a reduction in work capacity of more than 45%.

⁶ It should be emphasized that only persons, who are currently employed have been interviewed. Especially in the Dutch case, employers’ responsibilities to reintegrate seems to result in some degree of labour market polarization, e.g. persons which are considered “risky” by employers may not be employed (Høgelund 1999). Furthermore, in spite of employers’ obligation to reintegrate this may not always run smoothly in practice. Inter-

views with persons with a reduced working capacity, who had not been able to stay with their former employers, indicate that not all employers attempt to find suitable jobs (Hento & Jehoel-Gijsbers 2001: 7). Because the focus of the present study is the social position of employees, I have not included this aspect of Dutch reintegration policies in this discussion.

Experiences of Reintegration in Denmark

Experiences of Danish employees on special terms indicate that reintegration does not altogether lead to social inclusion in the labour market, and points to the fact that reintegrated persons feel partly stigmatised as "employees on special terms" (Hohnen 2001). In spite of the fact that most employees are grateful to be able to continue to work and are not interested in passive payments or pensions, they also consider employment on special terms as "risky" and often meet the opinion from colleagues and employers to the effect that their employment is an act of benevolence. But I believe that this ambiguous social position may be seen as a consequence of Danish reintegration policies where employment on special conditions is promoted in the discourse of corporate social responsibility.

First, although flexjobs according to law may be established for all kinds of jobs, in practice a certain type of type of jobs predominates. Many of these are unskilled, odd jobs. Although there are also employees who continue to work in their "old job" where they as a result of a subsidy, may get a reduction in working hours or in work tasks, the majority of jobs are with a "new" employer, often in a different field of work (Den sociale Ankestyrelse 2000). These jobs are not distributed via the ordinary work distribution channels and persons who work on special terms occupy few existing vacancies. Instead, a special job unit in the municipalities, contact companies in their area and encourages them to take a flexjob employee. This probably contributes to the tendency to construct these jobs as "extra", e.g. with functions and tasks that are specially combined to suit the employee (Hohnen 2000). Secondly, employees emphasize and oppose the image they find being created of them in the media. As one of them states:

I don't like to be called "weak". They talk about us as "the weak" all the time in the radio. Especially Karen Jespersen (minister of social affairs at the time). But I have worked all my life!

(Female employee, aged 56)

To several of the employees, the term flexjob and the way in which it was used by employers and politicians to show the responsibility towards "the weak" in society was

considered offensive and humiliating. Although a great deal of effort has been made politically to focus on peoples' capacities instead of their incapacities, the classifying of these employees as "weak" makes it hard for them to legitimize a position as such. By evaluating the social image of employers by the number of such types of employment, this dimension of benevolence on their part is further emphasized. This makes it difficult for flexjob employees to get their work contribution evaluated as such. Furthermore, this contributes to the social construction of the persons employed in those jobs as social clients rather than employees. This image as social clients is further related to the fact that employees on special terms no longer qualify to receive unemployment benefit in the case of unemployment. Although they are entitled to a publicly administrated "unemployment payment", the administrative shift is considered problematic. In Denmark, due to a close relationship between the unions and the unemployment foundations as well as a generally high level of organisation, membership in a union as well as payments to the unemployment fund are considered important signs of labour market participation. The administrative shift from unemployment benefit to a "public benefit" is experienced not only in administrative terms, but also socially. Unemployment benefit is a right to a benefit one has paid for (as an insured member of the labour market), whereas social payments are associated with being a social client, which means that that you no longer have a right to "get your money back" in the event of unemployment, but get a payment which is apparently associated with social security. The administrative shift on this point is furthermore often experienced not as a substitution of rules and rights with new ones, but as a loss of clear rights and rules as such. Viewed in this light, the group of persons employed on special terms experience their new employment in terms of socially marginalized compared to the position they used to have. Because of this shift reintegration in the form of employment in jobs on special terms can be viewed as exclusion from, rather than integration into, the labour market.

Furthermore, persons employed in these subsidized jobs have a tendency to work more than they are supposed to:

Today it was my day off, but I went there anyway, because I had promised to deliver some goods.... My boss is happy, but there is a lot of jealousy among my colleagues.

(Man, aged 50)

There may be several reasons for this. First, it is simply difficult not to follow the pace and demands of the surrounding workplace. If everybody else is busy and working overtime it appears as a breach of solidarity to leave early, just as it would seem wrong to take an extra break when your colleagues haven't even had time to eat his or her lunch. Second, I suggest that employees in flexjobs may feel that they have to prove their worth since they appear insecure about whether they have been employed because of their qualifications or in order to strengthen the social image of the company. According to interviews with employers, most flexjob employees are in fact employed on the basis of their qualifications, yet this is not always made clear to either the flexjob employee or to his or her colleagues. This creates an ambiguous social role at the work place, where the image of a flexjob employee seems to oscillate between being a "burden" to colleagues and employer and a "valuable" part of the work force. Flexjob employees react to this ambiguous position by socially attempting to pass as ordinary employees for example by working more, thus being evaluated as a resource.

Conclusion: A New Category of "Work"

In several cases of establishing flexjobs there have been conflicts between the employer, the trade union and the local authorities. Conflicts usually concern the calculation of payment for the employee in question⁷. In most cases, the trade unions find the minimum wage quite unacceptable, since most flexjob employees have many years of working experience. One employee explained that the trade union almost got her fired, because they demanded a higher wage than that the employer was ready to accept: "They wanted to help, but they almost got me fired. I finally had to tell them that I wanted to accept the conditions as they were" (woman, aged 52).

I suggest that disputes about the level of wages indicate different interpretations concerning the basic principles on which the economic calculation ought to rest. Should it

⁷ The law on flexjobs, which is a part of the Law covering active social policy, stipulates that wages and work conditions in a flexjob must be in accordance with the collective agreement or the agreement of a similar job, although the subsidy part must not exceed the minimum wage (Lov om aktiv Socialpolitik af 10. Juni 1997).

be calculated on the basis of existing principles of estimating experience and qualifications in accordance with the general agreement of the trade unions, or should it be comparable to disability benefits and therefore positioned as part of the social policy sphere? This particular dispute about wages epitomises a more general struggle about the categorization and positioning of these jobs as part of the labour market or as social policy.

The same kind of dispute is also found at workplace level. Quite surprisingly, colleagues and employers explained that their actual experiences with flexjob employees had differed markedly from their expectations. Most of them, despite generally positive attitudes towards the idea of employing a person with reduced working capacity, had feared that this would increase their own workload. In other words they had imagined flexjob employment as a “burden”. To their surprise, they had been forced to adjust their view, and in most cases the employee on special conditions turned out to be regarded “a benefit”, contributing much more to the workplace than had been expected. The same view seemed to prevail among at least some of the employers. One of them found several of his flexjob employees to be more effective as well as more committed and flexible (e.g. agreeing to working irregular hours) than the employees on ordinary terms. He commented: “We have no problems with the ones on special terms – we can demand almost anything and still they say thank you”. For colleagues and employers alike, this change has in some cases made it more difficult to estimate the social role and position of the flexjob employee, and has subsequently resulted in discussions about wage levels and work tasks and limits to the number of employees on special terms.

Experiences of Labour Market Reintegration in the Netherlands

Generally speaking, the Dutch employees with a partial WAO insurance seems to feel more comfortable with their position on the labour market and felt rather more as an integrated part of the workforce than their Danish counterparts. In the cases where they did have problems, these were of a different nature.

Types of Jobs

In general, there seem to be little difference between being employed on ordinary terms and employed as partially work-disabled. In many cases of mental or physical illness the person in question works only part time, yet often with the same or some of the same tasks as before the illness. An example could be a change of work schedule for persons, who earlier worked in shifts, but then started to work during the day only. In the larger companies there seems to be a tendency to take make room for senior employees or employees with reduced working capacity in the organization. Some administrative tasks, such as cleaning and control functions, are in such workplaces exclusively available for this group of employees. It should be emphasized however, that none of the jobs appeared to have been “invented” to suit the employee, and often there would be a period of “filling inn for absent employees or assisting others before a more permanent suitable job would be vacant.

Social Position and Stigmatization

It was not nice to become a WAOer. I really had to get used to it and I didn't like it, but it didn't make me feel subordinate or anything.....

(Man, aged 50)

Although one may feel uneasy about not being regarded as having full work capacity, none of the interviewees seemed to have felt that this influenced their work identity.

At the time of the interviews, the WAO system was highly debated in Holland, because the Social and Economic Council (SER) had just published their recommendations for a reform of the WAO system (cf. Business Planet March 22, 2002; Arbo-advies February 12, 2002).

This, however, did not seem to worry the WAO-receivers that I spoke to, because they did not expect eventual changes to effect them. Although most of them suggested that there was indeed a certain amount of stigmatization of the WAOers, few had experienced this personally. Several of the respondents had encountered views on WAOers suggesting that fraud and misuse were widespread. Negative views on WAOers seemed mostly to concern those who didn't work at all – and employees with a partial WAO did not feel that such stigmatization included them. For example, one woman explains that during her first period of illness, where she didn't work at all, she hardly felt like going out, because she was ashamed of not working and felt she had to “account for” being at home in the middle of the day. Yet after she had started to work (16 hours a week) she no longer felt uncomfortable about being at home most of the time. There were however a few cases, in which the partial WAOers felt they had to justify their position. This was not in relation to colleagues and their employer, but in relation to persons outside their workplace, e.g. acquaintances. In those cases, the employees in question found it difficult to justify that they received an allowance, because the cause of their work disability was not visible. Both cases concerned younger persons with rather limited reductions of working capacity, a fact that was also pointed out as a problem by the persons themselves.⁸

Relationship to Employers

When one of their own employees experiences a reduction in their working capacity, employers, as mentioned above, are obliged to sustain employment – in other words it is very difficult to dismiss an employee who receives a partial WAO benefit. In some cases, however, if the employer can find no suitable job, dismissal may be the only solution. According to most of the interviewed persons, this was not experienced as a problem and generally it was found that employers did their best to find suitable work for them. However, there were also examples where it didn't work very smoothly. A few persons had in spite of the regulations experienced a dismissal and one felt very clearly, that his employer was not happy with the arrangement, because he found it too expensive. It should be emphasized, however, that even if the employee felt this, the employer hadn't directly said so and the employee did not experience this as a personal problem and furthermore, he found that his employer ought to support him:

⁸ One had actually tried to renounce the allowance – but had been informed that it was her right to receive it.

He hasn't said that he would like me to stop, but I know that he would be relieved if I quit, because I am expensive. But I feel that I have contributed to this company for 8 years, and now they should support me!... (Man, aged 45)

Although the employee in question undoubtedly finds it a strain to work under the impression that the employer would rather get rid of him, he also feels that the employer owes him something! He feels that law should not only retain him, but also because he is morally entitled to be so. This way of thinking was reflected by most other informants, who neither regarded their employment as a special favour nor felt that they had reasons to be particularly grateful:

I don't feel I owe her anything – I just do my job and get paid. I do what I have to and I am no less valuable than the others that I get a WAO has nothing to do with it ... she employed me, because she needed me”

(Woman, aged 34)

A few informants had changed workplace after they had become partially work-disabled – and this seemed in all cases to be due to problems with their former employer. One had simply been dismissed, because the employer had successfully argued that there was no work for him, two found it too difficult to return to their old workplace because the work was too hard and also because they simply didn't want to return. According to existing research the general picture seems to be that some employers are unwilling to retain employee with a reduced working capacity, and subsequently manage to dismiss them by convincingly arguing that they have no jobs for them (cf. Hento, 2000). According to the Dutch REA (reintegratie arbeidsongeschikten) law, employers who employ a partially work disabled person benefits from this financially. One might expect this to influence work experiences in other words that would be like their Danish counterparts (who find it difficult to have their work contribution acknowledged as valuable), but this seemed not to be the case. Although these employees may find their job situation less secure, because they may be employed on a half-year contract – interviews with them did not reflect different experiences of the work and work situation from those who continued to work for their former employer.

All in all the data implies that although there may be cases where the employer/employee relationship is strained, only one (out of the 10 interviews with persons who continued to work at their former employer) had the impression that the employer would rather dismiss him. In

all the other cases this was simply not an issue. As an employee from a large brewery wonders:

I don't know if he would have sacked me had he been allowed to do so – we don't think about it – it is not an option here.....maybe he would have done that

(Man, aged 55)

All the employees who have stayed in their former job area find that they make a valuable contribution to the workplace and therefore don't see any reason why their employer should want to dismiss them. In most cases therefore, the view is that retention is advantageous to the employer and therefore there is no need to discuss dismissal at all.

Separated Worlds of Work and Illness

In the Dutch system, employment of persons with a reduced working capacity can also be viewed as consisting of two parts: a subsidy or allowance part aimed at compensating for the loss of working capacity and a salary paid by the employer for the work which is done. When comparing individual experiences however, the social construction of the Dutch jobs is rather different to the Danish case. As one employer formulates it:

I regard the WAO payment and my work as two different entities. When I work – I get paid for what I do - the WAO allowance is for the time I spend at home.

(Woman, aged 34)

This statement reflects a tendency among the Dutch informants to regard their employment as an “ordinary” job and their salary as payment for the work being done. The WAO allowance on the other hand is regarded as a compensation for the lost earnings as a consequence of the reduction in working capacity. This picture is furthermore strengthened by the fact that most of these jobs seem to be part time jobs – and no different from other such jobs at the workplace. According to the interviews, employees in these jobs didn't experience their employment as special. However, in most cases, persons who receive a WAO allowance inform their colleagues, which is not always the case in Denmark. The Dutch persons interviewed seemed rather surprised at the question focusing on altered relations with colleagues as a result of the reduced working capacity. As one employee replied:

“Why should they think it was a problem”? Nobody would do this of his or her own free will. It could have been them - they could become ill too!” I suppose this is how we think about it.... but we never talk about it...maybe they joke about it or something like that...

(Man, aged 55)

Generally, informants couldn't see any reasons why colleagues should be concerned at all, let alone annoyed because of the employment of a person who also gets a WAO allowance.

The Right to Work and the Right to a WAO

Based on the interviews, Dutch partially work-disabled employees are not employed in specific “jobs on special terms”. They seem to be employed in ordinary jobs, often similar or related to the ones they held earlier. They often work part time, carrying out the same tasks as other part time employees, or in the larger companies, some more administrative jobs may simply be reserved for them and for senior employees generally. Furthermore, employees expressed the view that they felt as valuable to the workplace as any other employee. The interviews altogether convey a picture of partially work-disabled employees who do not experience their position as much different from before they became disabled. Even though there is some degree of stigmatization of receivers of WAO allowances in the Netherlands, this seemed mostly to involve those who do not work at all. Furthermore, in the few cases where employees felt the need to justify their position, this had mainly taken place outside the sphere of the work place and none of the respondents had experienced any problems in relation to colleagues (one whose work involves being a substitute for different companies usually did not tell colleagues that she received a partial WAO). The Dutch material generally seems to reflect a tendency to regard both the WAO allowance and the right to work as both a legal and a moral right. Although interviews with employers may have revealed a more critical stand towards the Dutch reintegration policy, which makes it compulsory to retain partially work-disabled employees, apart from one case, interviews conveyed no image of a strained relationship between employer and partially work-disabled employees. It should be emphasized however, that there are most probably also cases where the employer is more negative and which end with job shift or dismissal in spite of the legislation, either because the employee finds another job or because the employer convincingly argues that there is no suitable job available. Such cases do not form part of the research.

Different Categories of “Work for the Weak”

Formally, the model of jobs for persons with a partial reduction of their capacity to work is rather similar in Denmark and in Holland. In both countries it is possible to work in an “ordinary” job by making use of the work capacity that one has, and to get a subsidy or allowance as a compensation for the working capacity that one has lost. The individual experiences of Danish and Dutch employees are not only remarkably different, but these differences seem to imply that we are dealing with fundamentally different categories of work in the two countries - categories that seem to invoke different sets of social relations, obligations and rights. I suggest that these differences can be related to the very different contextualization of reintegration and the different social discourses that they are a part of in the two countries.

In both the Danish and the Dutch cases, jobs formally consist of two parts: a working capacity, on the basis of which one is supposed to work, and a reduction in working capacity according to which one is supposed to be “sheltered” in terms of fewer working hours or specifically light work tasks. In the Dutch case, there is a tendency to separate the two parts, not only in practice by employing people in ordinary part time jobs, but also if we look at them as social constructs and sources of identity. In the Danish case on the other hand, the boundary between the two parts is blurred – and employment as such is categorized as different from other jobs. This makes it difficult not only to estimate the value of the work done, but also on what basis such calculations ought to rest. Although in practice the employer pays for the work that is being performed and gets a subsidy that covers what we could call “the benefit” part of the job, this does not seem to influence the way these jobs are perceived.

Although the aim of the Danish policy has been to emphasize people’s resources rather than their incapacities, jobs are socially and culturally formed as a specific category of jobs “on special terms”. Furthermore, experiences are these jobs indicate that they involve a different set of moral obligations and social relations as opposed to jobs on ordinary conditions. Experiences of being employed “out of mercy” and “as one of the weak”, not being sure of one’s rights, feeling the obligation to “pay back” the employer by working overtime and finally disputes about the principles on which calculation of wages ought to rest indicate that these jobs invoke certain social relations of both dependency and moral obligation – conditions that I suggest can be understood in terms of gift relations:

The act of giving seems to create simultaneously a twofold relationship between giver and receiver. A relationship of solidarity because the giver shares what he has or what he is with the receiver, and a relationship of superiority because the one who receives the gift and accepts it places himself in debt of the one who has given it, thereby becoming his dependent at least for as long as he has not “given back” what he was given.

(Godelier 1999: 12).

Gift giving is morally invested: it takes place between two or more interdependent actors, and the transaction establishes a durable social relationship of mutual obligation between the giver and the receiver of the gift. (Mauss (1969) (1954). In all of the empirical examples given above, flexjob employees are either directly or indirectly positioned differently from employees in other jobs. The way these jobs are socially constructed positions them socially in a sphere which is dominated by obligations and favours, rather than by the rights prevailing in the surrounding labour market – and which to some extent serve as its boundary. The concepts of solidarity and superiority, as well as what Mauss (1969) (1954) termed the obligation not only to repay the gift but also to receive it, are all at work in the social construction of the flexjob. The experience of gratitude and the role of “the weak” signal that these employees are employed not because of their qualifications, but because of their symbolically construction as “receivers”. The status of these jobs as “gifts” is underlined by the experiences of exclusion from labour market regulations and rights, and of being positioned in an unclear social zone dominated by “favours” and “duties”. Finally, the rather surprising tendency to work more than one is supposed to, although employed in a particular soft job, suggests that flexjob employees are attempting “to return the gift”.⁹ This indicates, in turn, that we are dealing with a specific set of social relations that are remarkably similar to the ones outlined in connection with gift-exchange.

The categorization of these jobs as a kind of “charity” is sustained in a range of ways, for example in the administration, implementation and establishment of jobs by public agents (municipalities) yet I suggest that most decisive is the importance of the political discourse in Denmark, which places these employees as objects in the discourse of corporate social responsibility.

⁹ This point was made by Mikk-Meyer in an analysis of the attitudes of the social relations between “clients” and professionals in an activation project. Here, newcomers, who had formerly received allowance from the state

In contrast, the Dutch experiences do not in any way suggest that we are dealing with the social and moral conditions inherent in gift exchange. In spite of the fact that the Dutch reintegration politics are by and large the responsibility of employers, e.g. in terms of establishing and financing jobs for persons with a reduced working capacity, this does not seem to have led to these jobs being socially and culturally constructed as “special”. The Dutch interviews suggest that persons with a reduced working capacity experience their position as more or less similar to employment on ordinary terms. Employees tend to work with tasks similar to other employees, and they do not seem to feel any particular kind of gratitude and therefore do not have any reason to feel, that they “owe” the employer anything in return for the job. On the contrary, for persons who have worked for years at the same employer and then get ill, for whatever reason, there seems to be a tendency to feel that the employer owes them something, and that it would be an ethical breach if they were dismissed. According to Howell (1997) this reflects more overall differences in what she terms reigning orthodoxies. In other words, the Dutch employees seem to find that it is not only a legal but also a moral right to continue to be employed in case of partial work disability. Furthermore, according to interviews with employees furthermore, dismissal had not even been considered. Finally, it is worth mentioning that relations to and reactions from colleagues differ from the Danish situation in the sense that none of the Dutch work-disabled employees had experienced any problems with, or negative reactions from colleagues and more importantly, they were really surprised by the question. It seems that somehow the Dutch jobs are not singled out as special – and therefore not subject to debate and criticism as in Denmark. It follows from all this, that these types of employment do not form a specific category of “work for the weak” and furthermore that the social relationship between employer and employee in the Netherlands does not seem to be morally and emotionally invested in terms of gratitude and obligations inherent in gift exchange.

without working, would work very much and be very committed to their new “job” and this Mikk-Meyer interprets as an attempt to “repay” their debt to society. (Mikk-Meyer 1999)

The Corrosion of Morality and the Reconstruction of Patronage in Contemporary Capitalism

The empirically based comparison points towards at least three more general characteristics or consequences of corporate social responsibility and more generally of the self-regulating market. First and foremost, the contextualization of moral and social obligations as corporate social responsibility seems to fundamentally alter social positions as well as the experience of identity and belonging that was supposedly the aim of social policy and/or corporate social responsibility. These changes, e.g. the conversion of “work” from the sphere of commercial exchange to the sphere of “gift exchange”, seems furthermore to be closely connected to the discourse of corporate social responsibility and not to its “practice” e.g. corporations “carrying out” social obligations or initiatives. In the Dutch situation employers have a range of social obligations, but these are by and large embedded in a general discourse of work and employment. An interesting indication of this is the rather widespread use of what in Dutch is termed *therapeutish werk*, which makes it possible to arrange a reduction of working hours for an employee, who is under pressure for some reason, for even a longer period of time without involving any other parties than the employer and the employee. This not only suggests that social obligations of this kind are considered a part of an “ordinary” work situation, but also that the implementation of such obligations do not necessarily invoke a symbolic separation and marginalization of the persons, who are the targets of such initiatives. Furthermore, the Danish experiences suggest that employment “marked” in this way as a part of a corporate social responsibility arrangement seems to alter the social positions and relations at the workplace. This kind of employment simultaneously alters (or threatens to alter) the former structures of group solidarity by strengthening the *vertical* social relations (between the employee on special terms and the employer). The vertical employer-employee relationship is furthermore based on emotions such as gratitude and a sense of obligation, and thus may threaten to undermine the generally more impersonal relation between work-giver and work-taker prevalent in the workplace. This sustains the idea of what Jones

(2001) termed dependency relations and social patronage as inherent in this type of corporative responsibility.

Second, the process of “marking” “the social” and thereby symbolically separating it from other prevailing business discourses seems to be an inherent aspect of corporate social responsibility. Jones (2001) points to the implications of the tension between calculative responsibility and moral altruism inherent in business discourse. He suggests that the moral dimension in Corporate social responsibility is “weak and ineffectual” because the principal reason is to *appear acceptable to the moral expectations* of others, rather than a change of moral conversion of corporations (ibid). The consequence of this in his view is that it is not necessarily the most urgent social problems or the most marginalized groups that are targets of concerns and initiatives of CSR corporations, but rather those that may make the company appear socially responsible. I would push his argument even further and suggest that the fundamental characteristic of corporate social responsibility is this separation of moral appearance and moral conviction and that the result is not only that the moral dimension becomes weak and ineffectual, but that it is lost altogether. The contextualization of moral and social obligations in terms of appearances not only tends to create social relationships of dependency, but have far-ranging consequences for the kinds and range of moral obligations that are being created. Viewed in this light, the development of CSR does not only concern the boundaries of responsibility between different actors and their different degrees of obligation, but reconstructs the contents of social obligations and rights as such.

This aspect of appearance or “branding” is crucial in understanding the different individual experiences of reintegration in Denmark and in the Netherlands. In the Dutch situation, there is no need to emphasize the employment of a person with a reduced working capacity, since employers are obliged to reintegrate anyway. On the other hand in Denmark, the social image connected to reintegration may become profitable for employers, but only if hiring these employees is an apparent and appropriate “social task” to consumers and stakeholders, hence the tendency to picture these employees as “a social and financial burden”. Although Danish as well as Dutch employers

pay more or less a salary that is more or less commensurate with the work that is being performed, in the Danish case, the employer socially constructs employment as an act of benevolence.

Finally, the third and last issue in relation to market governance and corporate social responsibility concerns the very process of “branding” or “marking” social and moral issues, which I suggest reproduces social exclusion. By converting social problems to the increasingly symbolic world of commerce, “branding” simultaneously hides and reproduces social marginalization. In the (often dominant) cultural discourses of marketing and consumption the boundaries between actual social problems and the social images (as a symbol) that are created on the basis of them becomes blurred. In addition, by selecting the symbolically most powerful social problems as “brands” of the corporation’s social image, new kinds of exclusion and inclusion are taking place.

I shall end here by returning to the Danish and Dutch labour markets as an example of the above mentioned symbolization of social responsibility. What the Dutch work-disabled employee conceives as a “return gift” from his or her employer, or perhaps from society, is in the Danish case reinterpreted through its contextualization as corporate social responsibility. This fundamentally alters the social relationships, and positions the employee as being morally in debt to the employer. On top of this, Danish employers don’t actually give any gift, since they only pay for the work being done, yet they are socially positioned as givers via the discourse of corporate social responsibility. Although in many ways it could be maintained that Dutch employers carry a much heavier social task on their shoulders, than their Danish colleagues, it is the Danes who are most visible in the symbolic world of social images, corporate ethics and moral responsibilities.

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