

11 Do Employment Services Need to Be Neoliberal?

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Introduction

The way that labour markets are governed is the subject of a great deal of literature. For example, there is considerable discussion of the effectiveness of active labour market programmes and policies (ALMPs) and their various types. There is also a small but growing literature on the ways that ALMPs are implemented through public management practice. Further, there is substantial discussion locating labour market reform and governance as a core component of neoliberalisation.

This chapter engages with these overlapping literatures, taking the last as its starting point. The original argument to be made from this is that while labour market governance in a neoliberal context is likely to be neoliberalising itself, processes of public management implementation, local governance needs and conceptual openings—like the current policy fad for ‘inclusive growth’ (International Monetary Fund/IMF, 2017)—all create space and opportunity for contestation. The basic message is that there is scope to consciously articulate more inclusive governance practices to reorient employment services in ways that divert from neoliberalising processes. The chapter proposes that the materialist feminist theory of social reproduction provides one fruitful avenue to shape the thinking of policymakers and practitioners interested in utilising their agency to contest neoliberalisation through their ‘policy work’.

The discussion proceeds in several sections. The first outlines how both career guidance generally and public employment services (PES) have increasingly focused on ‘activation’ or the promotion of neoliberal subjectivities in their service users. It suggests that career guidance is an important aspect of PES activity in shaping specific sections of the labour market but that this is, and is becoming even more, problematic. The second section locates the policy preference for activation in a broader understanding of open-ended and multi-scalar neoliberalisation. It is argued that a particular understanding of neoliberalisation is necessary in order to effectively contest it. The third section identifies how the multi-scale nature of neoliberalisation creates space for a range of policymakers and

practitioners to undertake ‘policy work’ which might include contesting neoliberalising practices before the fourth suggests that the contemporary moment may be an opportune time to take up such a task. The final section sketches out some possible directions for contestation both in conceptual terms related to the ‘ends’ of employment services, but also in the ‘means’ of public service management and delivery via ‘inclusive governance’.

Public Employment Services, Career Guidance and Activation

This volume is focused on career guidance and therefore it is initially necessary to outline the firm linkages between this and the more specific focus of this chapter on PES. PES typically perform a number of roles in the delivery of government policy in relation to the labour market. At a policy level they respond to multiple imperatives. As a minimum these include employers’ demands for better motivated and matched recruits; taxpayers’ demands for fiscal responsibility and jobseekers’ demands for support to find work. Recent decades have seen employment services undergo a profound process of reform as they have been required to respond to these crosscutting and competing demands in new ways. Typically—across most countries—they have shifted from a passive labour exchange role to a more active role and focused more exclusively on the unemployed rather than providing more universal services. The career guidance element of what PES do has evolved from a more general service to one which is more tightly focused on the purpose of ‘activation’ and more targeted at the unemployed, and, further, specific sections of the unemployed population—those deemed as not able or willing to help themselves find work. This means that the careers guidance undertaken in PES tends to differ in scope, character and constraints to that offered in other institutional contexts. It tends to take the form of coaching and encouraging jobseekers to look for and apply for jobs and this tends to be less focused on longer-term objectives and more on the immediate goal of job entry. Second, this guidance is often at the frontline of welfare conditionality—i.e. accepting the guidance offered and responding to it is often compulsory and failure to act on it can carry significant economic sanctions for recipients. Third, the individual frontline counsellors providing this guidance are juggling multiple, and partly contradictory, roles and are often constrained by resources and strict bureaucratic rules. As such the guidance that they are able to give is constructed mainly around the state directed objective of finding work or submitting to provider assumptions about this (Considine, Nguyen, & O’Sullivan, 2018) rather than the longer-term hopes and aspirations of the service user (Sultana & Watts, 2006).

While the scope and character of careers guidance inside PES services might be conceptualised as more constrained than careers guidance more

generally, there is considerable scope to suggest that they are both subject to more general pressures to ensure that careers guidance perform the role of promoting a (neo-)liberal governmentality (Darmon & Perez, 2011), in that they typically and increasingly focus on the ensuring that their subjects enhance their ‘employability’ (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), or the adjustment of their own dispositions to the needs of employers. The responsibility to compete successfully on the labour market is conceived as an internal individualised characteristic. Success or failure resides in the individual’s own dispositions, rather than unemployment, low pay, poverty and inequality being rendered as structural or systemic conditions.

Any number of starting points for understanding the unfolding of a policy focus on activation can be used but the Delors White Paper on Competitiveness from the European Commission (EC) and the influential Jobs Study from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (European Commission, 1993; OECD, 1994) are good places to start. While having many differences, both these papers sought to frame the socio-economic problems facing ‘advanced’ economies and societies in North America and West Europe as resulting from a lack of state-scale competitiveness. One important cause of this failing competitiveness, they argued, was to be found in the labour market where strong trade unions and employment protection legislation (EPL), or pay bargaining regulations, reduced the discipline of wage competition and the post-World War II welfare state prevented unemployment reducing wages to equilibrium levels. The overall reform programme resulting from such analyses has involved a reduction in, or reorientation of, EPL, reductions in collective bargaining and the promotion of ‘activation’ via ‘ALMP’, which spread rapidly and are now more or less universal throughout the OECD and many other countries.

ALMPs have been enthusiastically promoted by the OECD and EC (Sultana & Watts, 2006; Weishaupt, 2010). Various forms of ALMP are frequently rationalised as resolving poverty traps generated by generous welfare payments and conditions, and the resulting weak work incentives (Weishaupt, 2011). In the widely promoted meta-evaluations of ALMP effectiveness these organisations tend to differentiate between those ALMPs which involve pressure to find immediate work (or ‘services and sanctions’) and those that have a longer time-frame and focus around training. Meta-evaluations often suggest the effectiveness of the former (Card, Kluve, & Weber, 2010; Kluve et al., 2007; Martin, 2015; Martin & Grubb, 2001) despite the relative mixed evidence of their success (Filges, Smedslund, Knudsen, & Jørgensen, 2015) and evidence that favourable assessments of ‘services and sanctions’ might result from measurement problems rather than their relative effectiveness (Blasco & Rosholm, 2011; Lechner, Miquel, & Wunsch, 2011). Working under these sorts of assumptions about labour market policy, PES have increasingly focused the attention on promoting relatively superficial careers guidance in

‘services and sanctions’ processes while increasingly reorienting services for job changers (if they still serve them at all) or the recently unemployed around self-help job search activity often accessed via the internet, online terminals in job centres or via call centre services.

A focus on activation helps to explain why careers guidance in PES has become increasingly short-termist and constrained. But how should we locate, explain and understand this focus on activation itself? More importantly, what constraints and opportunities might such an understanding present for thinking about how PES might be a site for careers guidance routed in ‘emancipatory impulses . . . striv[ing] to ensure freedom from external obstacles to self-guided choice and action’ (Sultana, 2011, p.277). The section which follows maps out a multi-scalar and open-ended understanding of neoliberalisation as the crucial context for explaining the policy focus on activation, and as necessary for articulating ways that PES might be reconceptualised in more progressive terms.

Scale, Neoliberalisation and the Role of Career Guidance in PES

Our contemporary period is marked by the characteristic of increased global competitiveness driven through world market integration. The types of institutional reform process whereby states have attempted to cope with various competitiveness crises in this context have often been labelled ‘neoliberal’. As Hooley, Sultana, and Thomsen (2018) point out in the introductory chapter to *Career Guidance and Social Justice*, conceptual ambiguity and confusion over the precise meaning of neoliberalism is widespread. Taken as merely a programmatic set of institutional designs (e.g. privatisation, state withdrawal, fiscal discipline, inflation management etc.) neoliberalism is easy to superficially associate with Anglo-American reforms of the 1980s, or in an international context, with the ‘Washington Consensus’, and doesn’t always easily map onto more diverse national settings. Understood differently though, as a much less institutionally coherent, ad-hoc and iterative political project to secure gains for capital relative to labour and a preference for financialised forms of capital, neoliberalisation (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010) is much more elastic and can capture the political economy content of reforms. This approach to a ‘verb’ rather than ‘noun’ (Hooley et al., 2018, pp. 5–6) definition is in line with that of the two volumes as a whole.

Here unemployment and the provision of services to the unemployed are central to the neoliberalisation process. Unemployment has been a (sometimes consciously) disciplinary experience for ‘the wage dependent’ sections of the global population as they have been subjected to market pressure through unemployment and the threat of it, to moderate their wage demands downwards (Streeck, 2014). Moreover, the reorientation of Labour Market Programmes and employment services toward

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the objective of ‘activation’ has also been central to enforcing discipline not just through the market but through equally active state institutions. Peck and Theodore (2001) argue that the adoption of ALMPs were part of a neoliberalising economic rescaling process designed to deal with competitiveness problems, where the logic of globalisation is juxtaposed with the need to seek out coping mechanisms at the local and individual scale. Active and interventionist states, encouraged by the attempts of international organisations to promote policy transfer (Sultana, 2011; Weishaupt, 2010, 2011), often arising at the transnational scale, are used to ‘dump’ risk to lower scales. At the local and city scale, politicians and bureaucrats must cope with the risk of failing to compete, focusing on general labour market conditions, local infrastructure and planning challenges related to business growth, development and survival. Individuals and households must cope with the risks of failure to compete to sell their labour power successfully by building their ‘employability’ (Hooley et al., 2018; Moore, 2012; Pascual & Suárez, 2007; Peck, 2002). This is both a mechanism for enforcing discipline, but also for individualising the responsibility for managing the social risk of low pay, unemployment and under-employment. The current fad in schools, education and guidance services for building adaptability, resilience and aspiration among learners or service users, somehow assumed to be in deficit of these characteristics, is a good example of this (Hooley et al., 2018, p. 3). In this sense, employment services have become focused on neoliberalising ‘ends’.

The way in which employment services are managed and delivered though is also neoliberalising as a ‘means’ (Nunn, 2011). That is, they are increasingly delivered through the use of the same organisational and governance technologies, again spread through the enthusiastic encouragement of key international organisations. These include the widespread adoption of privatisation; payment-by-results contracting; management decentralisation and management by objectives; sub-national benchmarking (at regional, local, office and sometimes even individual levels) and incentive payments to managers and even frontline staff; jobseeker profiling; and targeted interventions deemed successful at ‘activating’ particular demographics experiencing higher levels of unemployment (e.g. young people, older people, women, low-skilled, ex-offenders, disabled people and so on). Such New Public Management techniques (see Hooley et al., 2018, p. 8) seek to ‘depoliticise’ (Burnham, 2001) policy-making processes by rendering them as a technical process of adjusting to ‘naturalised’ pressures of competitiveness, rather than seeing those challenges themselves as political constructions.

These are typically accompanied by short-run and superficial evaluations, the dissemination of this learning vertically within administrative structures, but also horizontally between different states and sub-state administrations. For example, in events facilitated by the EC, it is often the case that local managers will share experiences of local ‘innovations’

with national managers from other countries and various iterations of the Mutual Learning Programme coordinate an annual schedule of ‘research’ designed to share and disseminate ‘best practice’ and learning from experience. This is now consolidated in a multinational ‘bench-learning’ process again designed to hold national authorities to account in their translation of neoliberalising public management technologies. Regions outside the EU also engage in learning from this experience through many transnational regional forums and conferences. Much the same is noted of career guidance more broadly (Sultana, 2011).

Peck described this spread of neoliberal ends and means as ‘Fast Policy’ development (Peck, 2002). Policy ideas are transferred upwards, downwards and horizontally in an endless cycle of learning, innovation and copying. This process helps national, regional and local bureaucrats to attempt to cope with the down-scale effects of competitiveness. However, the systemic characteristic of spatial competition at multiple scales (i.e. between macro-regions like the EU, between states, between regions, between cities, between neighbourhoods and households) inevitably means that attempts to cope, while out-competing others, will result in frequent failures. In this sense failure is frequently invoked as the rationale for further ‘Fast Policy’ development; that is, policies and implementation frequently ‘fail forward’ (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2012, p. 274; Soederberg, 2012, p. 563). Restless modification in policy development and implementation under conditions of competition and information sharing are then characteristic of neoliberalising policy processes.

In sum, neoliberalisation occurs both through and within employment service delivery. However, this is not to suggest either that all agents active in the process are politically committed to, or conscious of, their neoliberalising agency, or that contestation is impossible. The next section suggests that the open-ended, path-dependent and multi-scale understanding of neoliberalisation set out here creates space to think about how agency can be mobilised at various scales and in different professional and practice-oriented niches to oppose, contest and seek more socially just alternatives. Recognising that these spaces for agency exist and might use as sites of mobilisation are central to the messy (Hooley et al., 2018, p. 5) search for social justice and to the visionary attempts to construct concepts and practices such as ‘emancipatory career guidance’ (Hooley, 2018) in the process.

Scales, Sites and Spaces for Subversive Agency?

In a strange inversion, depoliticised policy systems often involve local-level bureaucrats and practitioners engaging in highly political tasks to ‘make policy work’ at whatever scale they operate. Public management research on ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky, 1980; Brodtkin, 2011) and social policy research on ‘subversion’ (Barnes & Prior, 2009; Dobson,

2015) suggests that frontline professionals are frequently able to reinterpret policy priorities in the way they implement them and deliver services to users. In so doing, they adapt the political economy content of policy in a myriad of ways and in relation to a wide range of factors including resource constraints, their own subjectivities, their understanding of service user needs and user advocacy, the availability or lack of other services and any number of environmental considerations. At the same time, such agency is not free of constraints and must work within systemic pressures. Moreover, the outcomes of such scope for frontline agency may come in all sorts of political forms. For instance, Brodtkin (2011) found that the way that workers in US labour market programmes responded to performance management systems led them to limit access to benefits, provide ‘inadequate or even useless work “supports”’, legitimate exemptions from work and to undermine service user needs as a function of coping with efficiency initiatives and work pressures. Similarly, Fording, Schram, and Soss (2013) found that US Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programme performance measures have increased sanctioning, that sanctioning is associated with negative long-term outcomes and that they are more likely to be applied to African Americans than white welfare clients (Schram, Soss, Fording, & Houser, 2009). In other contexts, this space might be utilised by professionals committed to social justice to undermine disciplinary and neoliberalising initiatives promoted at a higher scale to responsabilise and punish the poor (Dobson, 2011; Hargreaves, Hodgson, Noor-Mohamed, & Nunn, 2018; Fletcher & Wright, 2018).

In this way, common structural pressures at the scale of world market integration are translated into contingent outcomes at the local scale. These contingent outcomes may reflect a variety of political dispositions, including a preference just to help individuals, communities and public management systems cope with the consequences of systemic neoliberalisation. This ‘contingent coping’ (Hargreaves et al., 2018) may challenge neoliberalisation at the frontline, without necessarily challenging it systematically. But as Bakker notes, quoting Braudel, these everyday low-level practices can have cumulative system-level implications: ‘The everyday happening is repeated and the more often it is repeated the more likely it is to become a generality or rather a structure . . . some structures, because of their long life become stable elements for an infinite number of generations’ (Braudel, quoted in Bakker [2007, p. 542]). As such, reflective challenges to neoliberalisation processes which start with ‘contingent coping’ with the realities of neoliberalisation might ultimately add up to a more systemic challenge to the process itself.

This need to adapt policies to local conditions, is nowhere more likely to happen than in the policy space between system and state-driven pressures to activate unemployed jobseekers on the one hand, and the inability of some of those jobseekers to cope with these pressures on the other. Those

responsible for the design and delivery of vocational education, careers guidance and employment services occupy this crucial space. There are a number of concrete examples inherent to employment service delivery which illustrate these tensions. This is the case, for example, when encouraging unemployed jobseekers to take low-paid work, overcome physical or mental illness or some other frequent poverty- or inequality-related problem such as drug or alcohol dependency or low-level criminality (see Chapter 9 for further discussion of working with this group). It is also the case when trying to help jobseekers to cope with competition from one another to find scarce employment. Employment services also need to accommodate the pressure from employers to access the right skills, at the right time, at costs which reinforce their competitiveness, while also helping jobseekers to find employment of a suitable nature to incentivise them. All of this is undertaken in often rapidly changing conditions of demand/supply and where frequently changing welfare arrangements are politically contested. As Brodtkin (Brodtkin, 2011; Brodtkin, 2013) argues, this is actually 'policy work' of the most complex nature, and day-to-day and minute-by-minute micro-decisions have political consequences for the extent to which policy delivery is neoliberalising or not.

A Good Time for Seeking Alternatives?

In their introduction to *Career Guidance and Social Justice*, Hooley et al. (2018, pp. 11–12) ask the question 'are we moving to a Post-Neoliberal period?' and suggest tentatively that, in the wake of the 2008 crisis, 'political certainties are up for grabs and the future of neoliberalism looks less certain'. Of course, the election of Trump, Brexit and the (re)emergence of far right, populist and nationalist political movements across Europe suggest that political certainties being 'up for grabs' does not guarantee progressive outcomes.

The political instabilities generated by the crisis have a top-down and a bottom-up aspect. The bottom-up aspect is well characterised by the emergence of left- and right-wing populism, extra-parliamentary, anti-establishment political movements and electoral re-alignments. It is also manifest in the collapsing promise of social inclusion in an expanding 'new middle class' that had been a politically stabilising feature of western societies since World War II (Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2017).

From the top-down, there is increased recognition among elites in international organisations that neoliberalisation may have been part of the problem generating these instabilities. The OECD, World Bank, IMF and even the World Economic Forum are increasingly interested in containing and/or reducing inequalities as a means of containing political and social destabilisation to integration at the scale of the world market, again suggesting that neoliberalisation is an open-ended and contested/contestable process (Nunn, 2015; Nunn & White, 2017). These

organisations and elites more broadly (Hooley, 2018) are not just looking at the state of inequality now but into a future further affected by automation and casualisation and increasingly recognise the need for new forms of extended social protection in order to guard against further destabilisation in the future. One curious phenomena thrown up by this 'new politics of inequality' is that there is increasing elite recognition that policies promoted, transferred and even enforced in the past have generated the inequality that is now seen as destabilising. Thus, key figures in the IMF question their commitment to neoliberalism (Ostry, Loungani, & Furceri, 2016), the OECD blames rising inequality on reductions in EPL, skill biased technological change, off-shoring, declining trade union power and privatisation (OECD, 2011) and a range of now powerful voices question the role of trade liberalisation.

But campaigners also suggest that activation policies and practices are also part of that process, and what is more, are very much implicated in the direct social harm that is done to individuals in the process of producing inequalities (Sayer, 2017). This is the case in relation to the discursive construction of social norms in policy papers which intensify the opprobrium with which those unfortunate enough to 'require' activation might be treated (Jensen & Tyler, 2015; Wiggan, 2012) but also in the direct effects of professional practice in the production and receipt of public services. In the US, research has repeatedly shown that both the means and ends of activation policy are harming to both PES staff and the recipients of their services (Brodkin, 2011; Fording et al., 2013; Schram et al., 2009; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011) and that this often resulted from frontline discretion in professional practice. Similarly, in the UK research has shown that in the context of the wider construction of post-crisis austerity, frontline PES staff and local scale managers sometimes accentuate the discipline available to them in their dealings with jobseekers (National Audit Office/NAO, 2016; Nunn & Devins, 2012) and that austerity-based regulatory changes have increased the scope of this discretion and the culture of disciplinary intent in the system (Fletcher & Wright, 2018). There is also good evidence that this does measurable harm, increasing poverty, hunger, homelessness and reliance on charity for basic livelihoods (Watts, Fitzpatrick, Bramley, & Watkins, 2014). Research in Australia and the Netherlands also suggests that internal application of NPM techniques creates disciplinary consequences for jobseekers who are ignored when they may benefit from career guidance from PES/private counsellors or are pushed toward low-paid jobs that might not be in their best interests or that of the economy overall (Considine et al., 2018; Van Berkel, 2014).

The tensions in the provision of career guidance in this context of conditionality and discipline (as highlighted by Sultana & Watts, 2006) not only reveals PES career guidance to be the rather thin silk glove covering the iron fist of disciplinary conditionality, but also the divisions between

relatively low-paid public and privatised professionals and the demonised recipients of their services, acting in their roles as parallels for what Wacquant has called the 'glorified working self' versus the degraded 'recipient self' (Fletcher & Wright, 2018; quoting Wacquant, 2009).

So Do Public Employment Services Need to Be Neoliberal? A Framework for Contingent Contestation and Coping

So how might reflective policymakers and practitioners exploit the opportunities in this context to use their agency in the process of policy transfer and implementation to contest neoliberalisation? And how might these small steps taken at lower scales help to contest neoliberalisation at a more systemic scale? It is to these questions that this section now turns. As with our discussion of neoliberalisation through public management practice, the answer to these questions needs to consider both the *ends* and *means* of policy and service delivery (see Chapter 15 for further discussion of the reflexive engagement with neoliberalism by practitioners).

The materialist feminist literature on social reproduction (for an introduction see Steans & Tepe, 2010) might offer some insights into how to do this. This literature has focused on the role of contemporary inequities of gender and race, which overlap with class in relation to these (Federici, 2005; Mies, 2014; Roberts, 2017). This literature draws attention to the ways in which households and communities constitute the 'background conditions of possibility' (Fraser, 2014) for the formal economy and produce labour power with particular characteristics which make it more or less suitable to the demands of employers and to insertion at different points in the hierarchically stratified labour market and occupational structure (Elson, 1998).

This is of crucial importance to the ways that employment services do, and can, operate. Typically, PES design assumes atomised individuals and employers responding rationally to price and information signals. In reality, individuals belong to households in which there are complex trade-offs between investments and costs for different individuals. Firms make decisions based on imperfect information on how households will offer labour power of particular quantities and qualities to the market. Both act on the basis of past information, but in a rapidly changing labour market driven by increased technological change, precarity and competition, such signals of future behaviour might be very unreliable.

To be effective in their operation, and to move beyond neoliberalisation, employment services need to recognise and respond to these inequalities (1) *between* households, firms and institutions; (2) *between* different households (e.g. richer and poorer households); (3) *between* different firms (e.g. start-ups, micro-enterprises, small- and medium-sized enterprises, multinationals); and (4) *within* households and firms. As a basic example,

employment services delivered to women need to be reflective of the availability of good-quality and affordable childcare, or care services for other dependent adults. But they need to do so in a way that does not merely lead to domestic female labour in the household being replaced by low-paid and low-quality jobs undertaken by women in the market. Where this has taken place, partly because of the pressure from employment services to activate women, it has actually reconfigured gender inequalities rather than reduced them, and it has accentuated inequalities between households (Nunn, 2016; see also Chapter 2). Similarly, activation and conditionality imposed through employment services may narrow and shorten the decision horizons that poorer households operate with, relative to more wealthy ones (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997), reproducing inequalities into the future. As such, the way in which employment services interact with the full range of productive and reproductive processes and the wider public service eco-structure involving education, training, guidance, healthcare, childcare etc., will help to shape the complementarities and feedback loops between public services, households and employers.

The capacity to generate alternatives to neoliberalisation in this way is highly dependent on localised conditions. But these localised conditions are partly determined by the *means*, or *form*, of policy delivery. Here, governance matters, and two popular contemporary governance trends can be utilised to generate greater space to contest neoliberalisation through public service practice, including among frontline professionals. The first is the trend to promote decentralisation, devolution and local scale governance—itsself very much part of the inter-scalar search for competitiveness discussed above. The second is the popular policy mantra for ‘inclusive growth’ (see e.g. European Commission, 2010; Ianchovichina & Lundstrom, 2009; IMF, 2017; RSA, 2017; Scottish Government, 2015; Stott, 2017).

Taken together, these initiatives create opportunities to pursue ideas of ‘inclusive governance’ too (Hobson, Clark, & Nunn, 2017; Nunn, 2012, 2013). Inclusive governance is an approach which seeks to open up public management to a wider range of stakeholders, including sub-altern groups, such as service users and their advocates, in order to ‘re-politicise’ delivery. Ideally this would be done via comprehensive public service reform, but since we have seen that systemically, policy-making is subject to neoliberalising imperatives, this is difficult to imagine. But this can also be done flexibly to match the scale at which agents operate and their envelope of autonomy. So for instance, local PES offices could appoint panels or governance boards to provide input to the way in which localised services are delivered, with representation from different user groups: employers, advocacy groups, trade unions etc. Clearly this is constrained by the degree of autonomy available at different scales. However, once in place such arrangements are only likely to increase pressure for further autonomy.

Other public management techniques can be utilised to inform decision-making and demands for autonomy to meet localised contexts. For example, performance management information and targeted evaluation can be used to generate learning about how specifically employment services can work in a deeper context of social reproduction to influence positive complementarities and feedback loops. This might involve using this learning to inform inclusive governance networks to increase pressure to integrate employment services with other forms of service provision such as childcare provision or caring services to adults, the extension of training services and so on. The inclusion of subaltern voices in the governance process might help to turn these tools into processes, which extend the time horizons for measurement and incorporate emancipatory imperatives. Careers guidance in PES governed inclusively might stress the need for longer-term measures of effectiveness, challenging the perverse messages which arise from short-run comparisons of substantive training versus job entry for example. They may also promote alternative recruitment and HR practices, stressing the importance of ethical commitments to care, solidarity and emancipation over the willingness to pressure service users or 'sell' them the advantages of immediate job entry. Such examples are mundane, but they are the everyday stuff of an institutional environment more conducive to emancipatory career guidance.

Conclusion

This chapter makes a series of linked and progressive arguments. It is claimed that employment service delivery has evolved over recent decades under a neoliberalising influence and that in both form and content, employment services have contributed to neoliberalisation at multiple scales, producing harm for service recipients, increasing inequalities and undermining the scope for substantive career guidance as part of their services. However, because neoliberalisation is an open-ended, multi-scalar and contingent process, policymakers, bureaucrats and frontline workers often have considerable autonomy. This autonomy is often about remaking policy at a variety of scales in order to confront localised problems and variation.

The contemporary political environment is highly unstable and marked by conflict over the future. Neoliberalisation has generated considerable material inequalities and these are now being realised in series of confrontational political subjectivities. The confrontation between these different visions for the future may be opening new policy spaces for policymakers and practitioners to exploit to generate alternatives to neoliberalisation.

Policymakers and practitioners involved in the delivery of vocational training, careers guidance and employment services occupy a particularly significant space in determining the complementarities between households, firms and institutions. This gives them substantial potential to influence

the generation of alternatives to neoliberalisation. The feminist theory of social reproduction offers one fruitful way of conceptualising employment services in ways that are not unrecognisable to current orthodoxies but do radically transcend them. The paper argues that reflective policymakers and practitioners interested in alternatives to neoliberalisation would do well to inform their thinking with these understandings of social reproduction. The production and dissemination of knowledge at the intersection of critical research and pedagogy and reflective practice in volumes such as this one might be the essential starting point for seeding such thinking.

Finally, it is argued that an ‘inclusive governance’ approach can repoliticise employment service delivery, among other aspects of labour market governance. Inclusive governance might provide the perfect vehicle for debates such as those in these volumes to influence practice. In a context of inclusive governance, some of the public management technologies of neoliberalisation might be turned to alternative purposes: to inform a coalition of support for a more inclusive approach to contesting neoliberalisation.

Such resistance and contestation will in many instances be incorporated at the ‘micro-scale’. As such, it may only be able to assist with ‘contingent coping’ with the effects of neoliberalisation. However, many reflective micro-scale routines of opposition and coping might add up to challenging the systemic context of neoliberalisation. As ALMP policy and practice is reformed in Europe and North America and spread through elite policy networks into new regions—such as Latin America—the restless innovation of reform creates ongoing and iterative opportunities for this contestation to occur.

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