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Measuring effects of second wave activation: A theoretical model and tutorial for activation programme evaluation

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Measuring effects of second wave activation

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Rickard Ulmestig
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Measuring effects of second wave activation ^a

A theoretical model and tutorial for activation programme evaluation

by

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Abstract

This article develops a theoretical model for evaluating mandatory activation of welfare recipients in complex activation programmes. The model aims to summarize and describe heterogeneous content that is difficult to comprehend because of local variations, staff characteristics, or other reasons that can blur the descriptions of the programme. Furthermore, the content can be difficult to describe due to a weak correspondence between the official rhetoric concerning a programme and what researchers discover when observing it. We use a two-dimensional variable in our study that is intended to identify essential characteristics for capturing generic components of activation programmes. We use experience from an on-site interview study and on-site observations about 18 programmes to demonstrate how the proposed model can be used to evaluate the effect of the programmes. We evaluate the effects of programme participation on income in this study while adjusting for pre-treatment confounding variables, to test the model.

Keywords: Activation, Active labour market policy, Causal inference, Programme evaluation, Unemployment, Work-first approach
JEL-codes: Z18, C14

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1 Introduction

Activation of unemployed have spread throughout the Global North and can in this sense be said to be a success story in the social policies on fighting unemployment and poverty (Clasen, Clegg and Goerne, 2016; Herbst and Benjamin, 2016; McKenzie, 2017). Some scholars describe activation programmes as ‘the only game in town’ (Sabatinelli and Villa, 2015; Murphy, 2016). Activation has been a new game plan for the unemployed and the poor, which has evolved from a strong emphasis on social rights and an inclusive welfare state to an emphasis on personal obligations, duties, and discipline (See van Gestel and Herbillon, 2007; Eichhorst, Kaufmann and Kondle-Seidl, 2008; Hvinden and Johansson, 2007). There is, however, limited empirical knowledge about who benefits from which content of activation and under which circumstances where income and employment are concerned (Hohmeyer and Wolff, 2012; Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst, 2008; Rønsen and Skarøhamar, 2009). Several scholars have argued from a social policy perspective that activation maintains and reproduces inequality rather than combats it. Examples of this include: activation reproducing low wages and bad working conditions in low-wage sectors (Murphy, 2016; Raffass, 2017; Rueda, 2015), offering discipline rather than tools that will help someone to find work (Bonoli, 2016; Malmberg-Heimonen and Vuori, 2005; Raffass, 2017), governments pushing welfare responsibilities to a lower administrative level (such as municipalities) thus avoiding criticism (Bonoli and Champion 2015, Kazepov 2010), and the individualizing of societal problems (Dahlstedt, 2008; van Hal, Meershoek, Nijhuis and Horstman, 2012; Lødemel and Trickey, 2001; Rueda, 2015).

We thus have conflicting perspectives, where researchers emphasize problems with activation while political actors maintain its advantages (see Dwyer et. al. 2019). In order to provide further motivation for the mandatory participation of unemployed in the activation programs, empirical knowledge is needed about their effects. Here, we therefore go beyond the policy studies and propose a model for studying effects of activation with empirical data. To measure the effects, we need models that allow us to operationalize the content in activation programmes. An activation programme, as inspired by Lødemel and Moreira (2014), is defined here as a service for the unemployed that provides a specific set of activation options and has a specific set of rules, conditions, and sanctions. Leschke (2011, p. 137) argues that ‘while both the transitions and the use of active labour market policies are on the European employment agenda, the specific content remains vague. The institutionalization of a second wave of activation makes it difficult to comprehend the content of activation programs (see van Berkel, and van Berkel, 2010; Borghi, 2008; Lødemel and Moreira, 2014; Murphy, 2016). While the first wave where more of short time projects, temporary staff, and with short term financing, the second wave is characterized by more

complexity, with interagency cooperation, individual services, inclusion of market logics, and decentralization/new ways of governance but also by institutionalization (see van Berkel, 2010; Jessen and Tufte, 2014; Lødemel and Moreira, 2014). Especially the goal to individualize service makes it hard to study the effect of activation programmes. Furthermore, the role of the professional street level staff in individualised activation seems to matter for the content of activation programmes (van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka and Larsen, 2017; Ulmestig and Marston, 2015; Herbst and Benjamin, 2016;). This makes it difficult to evaluate which services the programme provides (See Keskitalo, 2007; Murphy, 2016).

The complexity is also amplified because the content of activation programmes is often shaped by the particular social policy traditions in a country or other local contexts (van Gestel and Herbillon, 2007; Håvold, 2017; Leschke, 2011; Murphy, 2016). There can, however, also be large variations within a country (van Berkel, and Borghi, 2008; van Gestel and Herbillon, 2007; Kazepov, 2010). The variation makes it more difficult to evaluate local activation programmes than, for example, large activation programmes run by the public employment services (PES), where it is easier to control for the services provided (see Leschke, 2011). However, variation between municipalities or within federal structures (see Bonoli and Champion 2015; [Jacobsson, Hollertz and Garsten 2017](#); Kazepov 2010) with similar laws, traditions, and labour markets can be used for empirical comparisons (Clasen, Clegg and Goerne, 2016). Moreover, the lack of knowledge of effects is affected by the abundance of definitions of activation and related concepts (See Jones, 2012; Lødemel and Moreira, 2014; Trickey, 2001). There is thus an obvious risk that different estimated effects capture different programme content despite a similar label such as vocational training.

There seems to be a consensus about the need for more knowledge on the effects of activation ([Forslund et al, 2019](#); [Hohmeyer and Wolff, 2012](#); [Martin, 2015](#); [Rønsen and Skarøhamar, 2009](#)). This article develops and exemplifies a theoretical model for operationalizing the content of complex activation programmes with the purpose of programme evaluation according to the theory of causal inference (see Abadie and Cattaneo, 2018). In accordance with subject matter theory, we argue that the model reduces the complexity in second wave activation and improves the comprehension of the core content in local activation that may sufficiently define an intervention (see Hernán, 2016). We use a two-dimensional variable that captures generic components of *which* and *how* actions are performed in activation programmes. Rather than focusing on the results of the evaluation per se, the purpose of the paper is to illustrate how the proposed model can be used using data collected from on-site interviews and register data.

2 Model and theory – Studying effects of complex activation programs

To our knowledge, no theoretical efforts have been made up to date to understand the content of second wave activation programmes for the purpose of evaluation. We first identify two interconnected problems that we hope to solve with our proposed model.

First, existing studies do not consider that official institutional information may differ from what programmes provide in terms of services delivered (Herbst and Benjamin 2016, p. 516). There are several case studies on activation programmes that according to the organization, the content, and the street level staff are emancipatory; however, qualitative analyses do not confirm this emancipatory characteristic (see Brodtkin and Marston 2013; Thorén 2008). Despite that, several effect studies rely on organizations' official descriptions (e.g., Falk and Huffman, 2007; Kreiner and Tranæs, 2005; Rønsen and Skarðhamar, 2009). That is, the studies do not consider the possible discrepancy between how the services provided in a programme are described versus how they are apprehended by the researcher. The discrepancy has consequences for meta-analyses as the inclusion criteria for such studies become ambiguous (e.g., Card, Kluge and Weber, 2018; Vooren et.al. 2019). In everyday activation, effects can also be difficult to measure and compare since similar concepts may be used to describe different activities depending on the social policy context in which they occur (Leschke, 2011; Rueda, 2015; Vlandas, 2013).

Second, social policy theories and policy distinctions within the theories are used to form normative empirical categories: however, what is theoretically robust is not always practically robust (i.e., categories that are robust on a macro level). Concepts such as activation, active labour market policies (ALMP), and workfare, which were initially not intended to describe the specific services may nonetheless become a normative starting point for researchers. As Bonoli (2010) argues, a concept such as ALMP encompasses a range of interventions (see Leschke, 2011; Trickey, 2001). Some of the occurring distinctions in different studies (of which not all are effects studies) are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. A few examples of distinctions used in activation research

Source	Distinction
Lødemel and Moreira 2014; Wulfgramm 2011	Activation/workfare
Lødemel and Moreira 2014	Active labour market policy/activation
van Berkel, and Borghi 2008; Nybom 2011	Human resource development approaches/labour market attachment approaches
Martin 2015	Train first approach/work first approach
Konle-Seidl and Eichhorst 2008	Active labour market policy schemes/mandatory activation programmes
Dingeldey 2007	Emancipating activation/repressive activation
Jones 2012	Human resource centred approach/work-first approach
Malmberg-Heimonen and Vuori 2005	Voluntarily/enforced
Dean 2003	Life first/work first
Eichhorst, Kaufmann, Konle-Seidl and Reinhard 2008	Enabling/demanding
Håvold 2017	Dialogue-driven/opportunity-driven
Dean 2003	Human capital model/work-first model
Torfinn 1999	Offensive/Defensive

The question that arises is whether normative dichotomies on a policy level can be observed (see Bonoli 2010) and whether they are emancipatory and according to how service is offered. We argue that activation is made in the relationship between the activation program and the targeted individual considering *what* is actually done and *how* it is structured and that the *what* and *how* is also possible to observe. Dingeldey (2007) concludes that a difference in the descriptive concept of activation is often a difference between some form of emancipating activation and more repressive activation (for similar arguments, see Bonoli, 2010) or, drawing on normativity a bit further, good or bad activation.

2.1 A two-dimensional theoretical model and tutorial on “what” is done and “how” it is done for the classification of activation programs

We use the *what* and the *how* variables in a framework of potential outcomes to define the causal effect of a treatment (Rubin, 1974). This is now a standard framework for causal analysis with empirical observations in the context of programme evaluation (see Abadie and Cattaneo, 2018). The causal effect of the treatment is defined as the contrast of two potential outcomes – i.e., the difference between the outcomes with and without the treatment. In this setting the treatment is an activation program. A meaningful causal analysis needs to be sufficiently well-defined for it to provide a meaningful interpretation of the potential outcomes (Hernan, 2016). Our model includes variables that are observable, simple (facilitating good quality data), and theoretically sound, making it easier to avoid the pitfalls of normativity. We present the theoretical background of the two proposed dimensions, the *what* and the *how*.

- i) *What*; we use the distinction between body and soul to understand *what* is done in the activation programme in terms of the tasks and service offered. Is the service

focusing on the soul through for example therapeutic techniques for work motivation or do the participants work with their bodies?

- ii) *How*; we use the distinction between individual and collective approaches to understand *how* the activation is done. Is the service tailor-made or are all the participants provided with a similar service?

As part of a pilot study preparing the collection of data to a larger database of activation programs, ten municipalities were visited by a team of researchers in social work. An interview study was performed, and 18 activation programs were studied using qualitative methods. The pilot project and larger data collection was performed by the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (IFAU) between 2018 and 2022 (see Forslund et al, 2019). In the pilot study we collected data in each program for approximately one and a half days in the following contexts: a group interview with the local manager and staff, a group interview with participants, and observations of spontaneous conversations with staff and participants. This study directly observes the content of the activities rather than relying on official presentations of the programmes from municipal administrators. We studied the actual doing rather than the official description. Of course, longer observation studies in more programmes would provide more information, but at a vastly higher cost (for further discussions on the method and results, see Ulmestig (2020).

We operationalize the activation programmes into discrete values using nine grades on each scale. There is no rule-of-thumb method available for determining how many categories each dimension should include. Instead, the qualitative description forms the basis for the scale steps determined so that a clear distinction between the different scale steps is obtained.

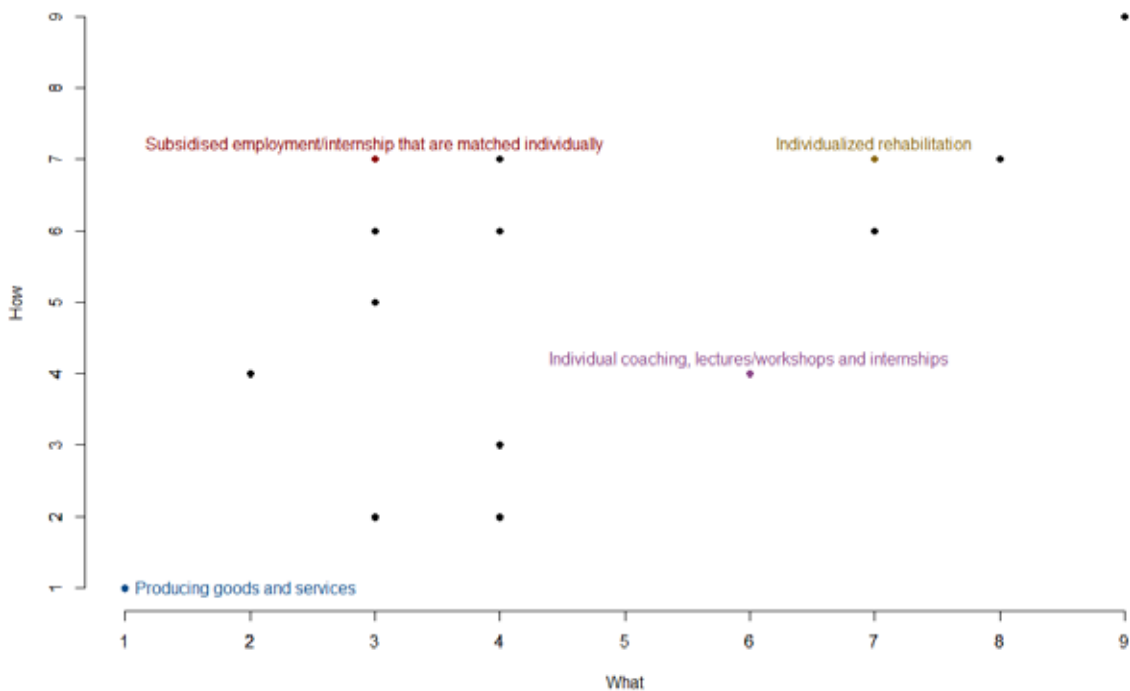


Figure 1. Classification of two-dimensional values on the programmes from the empirical study according to the theoretical model.

Four examples are given: (1,1) Producing goods and services, (4,6) Individual coaching, lectures/workshops and internships, (3,7) Subsidised employment/internship that are matched individually and (7,7) Individualized rehabilitation. A complete description is given in Table 2.

2.1.1 Dimension one: 'What' service is offered the unemployed in the activation programme

Rose (1999) argue that work is a disciplining act presented to offer both fulfilment for psychological and relational needs as well as a road to fulfilment in itself, giving people an arena for autonomy, creativity and responsibility. Activation aims to enhance competence of the unemployed but also to increase labour supply through discipline, for example, by convincing the unemployed to take poorly paid or hazardous work (Bonoli, 2010; Ulmestig and Marston, 2015; Lødemel and Moreira, 2014). Here, we distinguish between the competence and disciplining aimed at the body and at the soul.

- **What – controlling the body**

The main point here is to make the unemployed work with their bodies, either in order to increase their competence or in order to test their willingness to be active (see Hvinden & Johansson 2007). Controlling people's bodies may, for example, be achieved through work in an activation unit or

through an internship at a private employer. Policies for disciplining the body with different work-first approaches are targeted at the poorest in society, combating voluntary unemployment (Bauman, 1998; van Berkel, 2010; Rønsen and Skarðhamar, 2009). This aim dates back to the poor laws (see Geremek, 1991; Goodin, 1988; Piven and Cloward, 1972). Foucault argues however, in his ground-breaking work (1977), that punishment has moved from the body to the soul.

- **What – disciplining the soul**

Activation can also be seen as disciplining the souls of the unemployed through techniques that make them more motivated to enter the labour market (see Considine, 2001; Jacobsson, Hollertz and Garsten, 2017; Lödemel and Moreira, 2014). The therapeutic techniques for motivation towards the individuals must be understood in relation to internalized norms (Binkley, 2009; Rose, 1999). The soul of the unemployed is affected through methods and practices like coaching. The unemployed are expected to become productive workers and members of society (Rose, 1999; Rose and Miller, 2010).

- **What – body and soul as a spectrum used to measure what the aim of the activation programme is**

The model thus deals with the body and soul as if they are anchors of a spectrum of services offered to the activated. We provide examples in order to concretize *what* is done and for structuring the varying degrees of the body-soul dimension.

What is done in the programme – body/soul

- **High degree of body, a work unit (1-2):**

This approach often includes a large unit where the unemployed do different tasks for the municipality, using their bodies. The staff in activation units are often recruited for their practical trade knowledge in specific branches rather than their formal education. The activation has a high level of focus on production and aims to imitate the open labour market. The unit also often offers internship within the municipality. There is hardly any possibility to individualize the service/task even if there are some possibilities to make choices. Typically, individual action plans are not offered, and the work hours are regulated with a timeclock.

- **Lower degree of body, learning/Internship (3-4):**

This activation strategy primarily deals with participating in ‘low threshold’ and informal education such as ‘Swedish for immigrants’ for those who cannot manage ordinary adult education. This education often includes practical subjects such as exercise, healthy eating, and labour market knowledge. Internships to private employers are provided. Participants have little chance of influencing what is being done and where the body physically is supposed to be. There may be some possibility of individualization through personal labour market coaches.

- **Neutral (5):**

This approach provides small group activities with a focus on both practical tasks for the body and rehabilitation with therapeutic techniques but with a fixed schedule. Individual matching of unemployed is an example if the emphasis to match the unemployed to employer's needs. The activation is often managed in collaboration with other actors such as the PES.

- **Lower degree of techniques towards the soul, group labour market rehabilitation (6-7):**

This approach includes small groups and emphasize rehabilitation with a long-term goal to enter the labour market. This distinguishes labour market rehabilitation from, for example, therapeutic techniques to increase motivation to work. This approach places low demands on the individual unemployed but has a large degree of individual flexibility regarding working hours, duties, and sanctions in comparison to work units that try to imitate the open labour market. The approach can further be combined with an internship but is often associated with support and adaption of tasks.

- **High degree of techniques towards the soul, individual labour market rehabilitation (8-9):**

This approach uses individual meetings for unemployed considered to be a long way from the labour market and it relies on social workers who can provide therapeutic techniques such as individual counselling and have the possibility to tailor rehabilitation. The counselling often has an investigating/mapping function with a focus on the labour market.

However, in order to grasp the complexity of local second wave activation it is not only necessary to have the “*what*” but also the “*how*”.

2.1.2 Dimension two: “How” service is provided for the unemployed in the activation programme

Individualized services, or put in another way, tailor made services seems to be more effective in the sense that people find work (Hasluck & Green 2007). The relationship between the collective and the individual intends to capture observable variations in “how” activation is performed. While the unemployed are dealt with in similar ways in the collective approach, attempts are made in the individual approach to tailor-make the service for each unemployed. The collective and individual positions are also considered here as anchors in a spectrum between programs that offers “One size fits all” versus Tailor-made services to the unemployed.

- **How – “One size fits all” as a collective approach**

Poor relief has in principle, since its early days, concerned saving society from the mob – i.e., from the poor as a collective (Geremek, 1991; Simmel and Jacobson, 1963). Poverty and unemployment are associated to social instability and welfare can make citizens more keen to become a law abiding citizen and worker. Labour market policy also takes a collective approach

as its point of departure is from the labour movement's desire to ensure that workers as a collective have some protection from sudden changes in the labour market. Collective values such as class solidarity, universal welfare systems, and collective wage negotiations are valued (see Anttonen, Häikiö and Stefánsson, 2012; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Johansson and Hvinden, 2007). Collective approaches are also supported by organizations that need to standardize human problems since it is both difficult and costly to provide tailor-made services, for example, in activation programmes (Handler and Hasenfeld, 1997; Hasenfeldt, 2000).

- **How – “Tailor-made” as an individual approach**

Activation is influenced by rising individualization (van Berkel and Valkenburg, 2007; Dahlstedt, 2008; Rueda, 2015). Individualization in social service provision is defined as ‘services [. . .] adjusted to individual circumstances in order to increase their effectiveness’ (van Berkel and Valkenburg 2007, p. 3). However, individualization is an ambiguous concept. On the one hand, it can concern requiring more individual duties, fewer rights, and an understanding of structural problems such as unemployment as an individual flaw (see Gubrium and Fernandes, 2014; Valkenburg, 2007). On the other hand, it can be about providing activation that is adapted/tailor-made to individual needs and preferences (van Berkel and Valkenburg, 2007).

- **How – Collective and individual approaches on how the activation is supposed to achieve the aim**

Finding a balance between an efficient way on *how* to process individuals through a service provided to unemployed as a collective and also meeting individual needs becomes important for an organization to be considered legitimate (see Gilligham, 2015; Hasenfeld, 2000). The balance often needs to be handled by street-level bureaucrats (Brodkin and Marston 2013; Lipsky 2010). There then comes a difficulty to grasp *how* the activation is performed. To facilitate empirical studies, we use the collective and individual approaches defined below as a scale to measure how activation is performed.

How is a service provided – individual and collective approaches

- **High degree of collective approach – manual labour in workhouses (1-2):**

These are large units where unemployed carry out different tasks for the municipality such as washing cars, selling second-hand goods, renovating playgrounds, or working in public forests. The unemployed can also be placed within the ordinary workforce in the municipality but without adapting tasks to the wants or needs of the individual.

- **Low degree of collective approach – internship on the ordinary labour market (3-4):**

The unemployed are provided with internships, but the tasks are not usually adapted to the unemployed or a part of their education. There is often a focus on trades within the municipality where there is a lack of labour supply, not to the needs of the unemployed. Here, an example could be care workers.

- **Neutral (5):**

These are group activities with few participants and with a focus on both the labour market and rehabilitation but with a fixed schedule. However, individual support efforts are common in the form of coaches, staff, or vocational counsellors.

- **Low degree of individualized approach – abstract training (6-7):**

These activities have clear elements of abstract training in how the service is provided, for example, CV writing, job interview training, education, and study visits to employers. Internships with different individual support are often combined with part-time group work as classroom training, for example, becoming an unregistered nurse.

- **High degree of individualized approach – relational social work (8-9):**

These activities motivate change that is broader than focusing on the labour market and are conducted with therapeutic techniques for individual counselling, not only individual meetings. There may often be an investigative/mapping purpose with the contact. The activation is often directed at psychological problems and how these need to be handled before the unemployed can seek work. These activities include a few meetings between staff with therapeutic competence and the unemployed, usually once a week to every three weeks.

We will develop the proposed theoretical model of what and how from a theory on statistical analysis, prior to putting the model to work with examples from the qualitative data from the Swedish municipalities in the study about what they do and how they do it in their local activation programmes.

3 Evaluating local activation effects: theory and empirical example

With data from the pilot study, we analyze a population of 5441 individuals registered at municipality activation units. Here, we classify 15 programmes according to the two-dimensional model described in the previous section.

Table 2. Classification of labour market programmes, reducing 18 programmes to 15.

Two-dimension position (what-how)	Description	Number of participants: N = 5441	Mean duration (weeks)
11	<i>Producing goods and services for the municipality through subsidised employment or internship</i>	499	28
24	<i>Subsidised employment that can be combined with other activation services</i>	6	30
32	<i>Internship combined with job-coaches and an introduction course for all</i>	491	19
35	<i>Mainly different form of subsidised employments and internships where the unemployed can make choices</i>	237	13
36	<i>Subsidised employment that gives support and can be individualised</i>	5	34
37	<i>Different forms of subsidised employment/internship that are matched individually</i>	2393	14
42	<i>Subsidised employment where all work full time, but additional activation service is offered</i>	1	22
43	<i>Internship in combination with education and help to study</i>	447	11
46	<i>Individualised internship or subsidised employment combined with job-coaches</i>	456	18
47	<i>Subsidised employment with focus on the youth, not work-related activity. The staff are teachers and focus on psychosocial approach</i>	21	21
64	<i>A combination of individual coaching, lectures/workshops and internships</i>	220	16
76	<i>Rehabilitation for youth focusing working in groups and with individual subsidised employment /internship</i>	284	33
77	<i>Individualized rehabilitation with the focus on individual development for multi-problem unemployed</i>	321	22
87	<i>Individual job-coaching and working with groups, training of social skills. Internships with very much support.</i>	11	24
99	<i>Focus on psychological health. The staff are highly skilled professionals working with individual counselling</i>	49	6

The table describes activation programmes for the 15 different positions in the two dimensions (what/how) observed in the empirical study. The municipalities in the study population were visited in 2016 and on-site interviews were performed with organizers from the municipality units as well as participants. The programmes, henceforth referred to as treatments in line with theoretical framework in causal inference that is commonly used for policy evaluation (Abadie

and Cattaneo, 2018), were classified on the scale 1-9 in two dimensions, thus comprising 81 possible values. 18 unique programmes were classified to 15 values in the present study.

The suggested theoretical model implies that a treatment is defined using discrete values (see Uysal, 2015; Yang et al. 2018). The causal effect of interest could be either the average treatment effect or the average treatment effect of the treated, which describe the effect in either the entire study population eligible for the treatment or a subpopulation of the treated units. See for example Yang et al. (2018) for a discussion of causal parameters. The statistical research area of causal inference describes properties of estimators of causal parameters such as in Equation 1 and has become a well-established research field in statistics and econometrics. Causal parameters are of key interest in the social sciences, where we are interested in evaluating effects of programmes targeted at individuals who are subject to different policy interventions (e.g., activation programmes). See Kopf and Zabel (2017) and others for examples on how the methods are applied in practice.

Formally, we now introduce the potential outcome framework for a multi-valued treatment denoting the treatment T_i , with $T_i = t$, taking values in the set $t = \{1, \dots, K\}$. For each individual in the sample ($I = 1, 2, \dots, N$), we define K potential outcomes, one for each level of the treatment, denoted by $Y_i(t)$. We also assume that the observed outcome, Y_i , is the potential outcome corresponding to the treatment that was actually received.

Defining a causal effect of an activation programme corresponds to a population comparison of a relevant outcome for an individual taking versus not taking the programme. A causal parameter would be a population comparison of the two potential outcomes $Y(t)$ and $Y(t')$. For example, the average causal effect (ACE),

$$ACE(t, t') = E[Y(t) - Y(t')] \quad [1],$$

would be the mean difference in potential outcomes if everyone participated in programme t versus if everyone participated in programme t' . Since we only observe the potential outcome for each individual under the treatment that was actually taken, additional assumptions are needed to identify the effect in Equation 1. Causal parameters defined by potential outcomes are frequently estimated in the context of programme evaluation under different assumptions. One of the most common assumptions is that of ‘conditional independence’ (Equation 12, Section 4.1; Abadie and Cattaneo, 2018), which assumes that treated individuals from different programmes can be compared conditionally on some set of baseline characteristics.

Using the proposal from the previous section, we use our theoretical two-dimensional model of the mechanisms involved in the activation programs. We estimate average effects on the individuals’ income, of four programmes at different positions in the two-dimensional scale. As

an example, consider comparing the programs with lowest score on both scales (1,1) with the program of highest scores (7,7) targeting the average causal effect:

$$ACE(11,77) = E[Y(1,1) - Y(7,7)] \quad [2].$$

The aim of the analysis is to estimate a meaningful contrast of the content of the activation programmes using the body/soul and individual/collective dimensions involved. We use an augmented inverse probability (AIPW) estimator here, implemented in the statistical software R (R Core Team, 2021), package pSweight. Their estimator is adjusted for background demographic covariates, labour market and social receipt's history and municipality characteristics, see Table 3.

Table 3. Background characteristics of Programmes 11, 37,43 and 77, the complementary programmes (Combined) and the overall study population.

Covariates	Treatment 11 (N=499)	Treatment 37 (N=2393)	Treatment 43 (N=447)	Treatment 77 (N=321)	Combined (N=1781)	Overall (N=5441)
<i>Outcome 2017</i>						
Mean (SD)	116 (123)	107 (115)	113 (116)	105 (118)	106 (114)	108 (116)
Sex						
Males	274 (54.9%)	1091 (45.6%)	223 (49.9%)	152 (47.4%)	869 (48.8%)	2609(48.0%)
Females	225(45.1%)	1302 (54.4%)	224 (50.1%)	169 (52.6%)	912 (51.2%)	2832 (52.0%)
Immigrant						
No	198 (39.7%)	478 (20.0%)	233 (52.1%)	271 (84.4%)	1105 (62%)	2285 (42.0%)
Yes	301 (60.3%)	1915 (80.0%)	214 (47.9%)	50 (15.6%)	676 (38.0%)	3156 (58.0%)
Age						
Mean (SD)	36.2 (11.3)	37.6 (11.6)	28.7 (10.8)	32.3 (10.1)	30.3 (12.4)	34.0 (12.2)
Disposable income*						
Mean (SD)	1100 (570)	1190 (677)	942 (745)	851(466)	918 (644)	1050 (665)
Days registered as open unemployed**						
Mean (SD)	46.3 (72.3)	54.1 (81.8)	41.3 (70.0)	53.5 (77.8)	47.8 (76.5%)	50.2 (78.2)
Days registered as open unemployed*						
Mean (SD)	83.5 (99.8)	91.2 (93.1)	82.2 (92.4)	84.3 (91.6)	78.8 (90.0%)	85.3 (92.7)
Income support receipt*						
Mean (SD)	186 (270)	138 (229)	71.8 (164)	86.4 (214)	137 (247)	134 (235)
Days registered at PES*						
Mean (SD)	198 (137)	207 (135)	192 (137)	189 (139)	182 (135)	196 (136)
Highest level of education*						
Compulsory school	12 (2.4%)	24 (1.0%)	23 (5.1%)	10 (3.1%)	48 (2.7%)	117 (2.2%)
Upper secondary school	86 (17.2%)	410 (17.1%)	119 (26.6%)	93 (29.0%)	662 (37.2%)	1370 (25.2%)
Post upper secondary school (other than university)	214 (42.9%)	869 (36.3%)	199 (44.5%)	143 (44.5%)	696 (39.1%)	2121 (39.0%)
University	86 (17.2%)	68 (18.4%)	66 (14.7%)	58 (18.1%)	165 (9.2%)	816 (14.9%)
Unknown	101 (20.2%)	649 (27.1%)	40 (8.9%)	17 (5.3%)	210 (6.9%)	1017 (18.7%)
Percentage social benefit receivers*						
Low	136 (27.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1558 (87.5%)	1694 (31.1%)
High	363 (72.7%)	2393 (100%)	447 (100%)	321 (100%)	223 (12.5%)	3747 (68.9%)

* Calendar year 2015 ** Calendar year 2014

In Table 3 we show distributions of background variables in the evaluated programmes and combined sample. All background variables in Table 3 are adjusted for in the analysis.

We estimate the average causal effect of the contrast in [2] for the four program categories (1,1: producing goods and services), (3,7: subsidised employment), (4,3: internship and education) and (7,7: individualized rehabilitation) vis-à-vis each other and the other treatment groups combined. For the statistical analyses we use a double robust estimator described in Uysal (2015) and implemented in R in package pSweight, see Table 4.

Table 4. Effect estimates of programme contrast ATE(t,t') in hundreds of SEK, where control represents treatments not equal to 11, 37, 43 or 77.

Treatment effect	Estimate	Std error	95% Confidence interval	P-value
37,11	-7.60	6.50	(-20.35; 5.15)	0.24
43,11	9.77	10.21	(-10.24;29.79)	0.34
77,11	4.08	13.18	-21.75;29.91	0.76
control, 11	-9.02	8.74	-26.15;8.11	0.30
43,37	17.37	8.74	0.24;34.49	0.05
77,37	11.67	11.99	-11.83;35.17	0.33
Control, 37	-1.43	6.90	-14.95;12.10	0.84
77,43	-5.70	14.37	-33.85;22.46	0.69
Control,43	-18.79	10.49	-39.37;1.78	0.07
Control, 77	-13.10	13.36	-39.29;13.09	0.33

The results with the estimated effects are shown in Table 4. Here, we see a small significant effect of internship combined with education (4,3) versus subsidized employment (3,7). Also, at the ten per cent level we have a small but significant positive effect of internship combined with education (4,3) versus the combined group. For the contrasts further out on the two-dimensional scale, the results indicate that both more individualized targeted programs, but also broad practically oriented activities aimed at the body have limited effects for income.

4 Discussion

Millions of unemployed participate in mandatory activation programmes that we know little about in terms of merits and limits (Clasen, Clegg and Goerne ,2016; Rueda, 2015 Rønsen and Skarðhamar, 2009). If individuals do not comply, they can be denied basic financial security (Handler and Hasenfeld, 1997; Lødemel and Moreira, 2014). Social policy researchers focus on the risks while the politicians focus on the potential with activation.

If focusing solely on the existence or nonexistence of a mandatory activation program for recipients of social assistance, effect studies may lose knowledge on the aspects of *what* activation is performed and *how* it is implemented. Building on theories from social policy including perspectives on social rights, individualisation of social problems and unequal power relations, we propose a new classification of activation programs. Together with statistical methods from causal inference and data from a pilot study we implement our classification and estimate effects of activation of the proposed categories.

Municipal activation programmes in Sweden can be described as second wave activation programmes. They are characterized by large local variations, few laws or regulations, and no state control or monitoring. Swedish local activation programmes may thus serve as generic examples of the presence of diverse local activation programmes for which this model is motivated. We argue that there are two interconnected problems that needs to be solved, and present a model that can observe and measure what is done and how it is done within activation

programmes. This increases the likelihood of more valid studies, i.e. studies that do not proceed from formal descriptions. We also wanted to distance our model from normative empirical categories and instead use the variation and complexity in how municipalities have chosen to organize activation. We use the framework of potential outcomes to define the causal effect of second wave activation (see Rubin 1974) in a model that makes it possible to merge knowledge from qualitative data on what is actually done with the data from statistical registers on, for example, income, unemployment periods, and variables on local labour markets.

Even though the main purpose of the paper is to provide a theoretically based model for evaluating activation programs, we also describe the results of an empirical study. Using data from a pilot study of more than 5000 individuals we operationalize the two-dimensional scale on a collection of prototypical programmes ranging from collective /"one-size fits all" programs, to individually/"tailor made" activation programs. Here, small but positive effects on income are estimated for a program combining internship and education. The results of the pilot study question the focus on a one-sided subsidized employment without educational content. The results have their methodological limits. Measuring the effect on income is a narrow measurement which lacks, for example, the well-being of the activated (see Wang et. al 2021).

Our aim is that the theoretical model together with the description of the statistical analysis can provide guidance for practitioners to repeat the analysis on their own data after projecting their activation programs under study on the two-dimensional scale. We hope that the suggested model and the tutorial will increase the knowledge of the effects of activation within local activation programmes. However, all models have their limitations. The suggested model combines qualitative and quantitative methods which requires broad competence in the research team. Another apparent challenge is that the model must be proven in action, but we hope others will continue to develop and test it. For example, qualitative data on the local activation programmes together with theory and new research may give opportunities for new dimensions or for adapting the two we suggest.

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