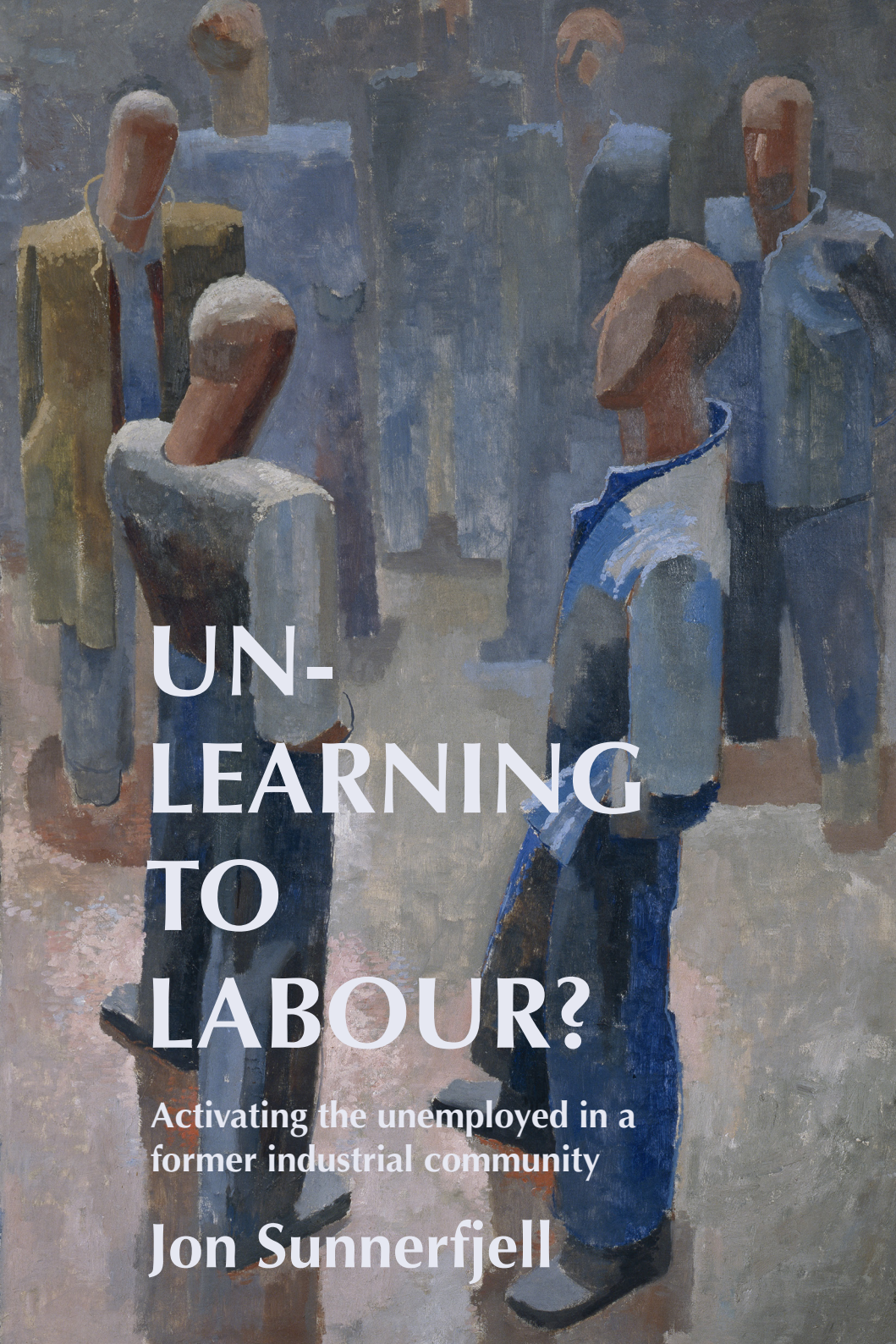

UN-LEARNING TO LABOUR?

Activating the unemployed in a former industrial community

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Jon
Christmas, 2022

It is a strong individual who has his obvious place in a society like Milltown.

(Excerpt from regional
archive's report.)

1. Setting the scene

In his classic 1977 book *Learning to labour*, Paul Willis attempted to answer the question of 'how working class kids get working class jobs'. The book drew on two years of fieldwork that predominantly focused on 12 working-class boys in the transitioning from school to work in an industrial community in the British Midlands. By displaying 'a mystified celebration of manual work', and acting unruly in relation to the formal qualifications of the educational system, many of Willis' informants eventually ended up on similar shopfloors as their parents (Willis 1993 [1977]: 185). In this way, Willis argued, it was by way of their own counterculture, rather than being passive recipients of ideology, that the 'lads' reproduced their position in the social structure.

In fact, Willis' study took place at a time when the industrial sector in Britain was already on the decline (Griffin 2005). Ever since then, processes of automation and relocation of production into low-wage countries have continued to re-structure the Western industrialised nations (cf. Wallerstein 2004). Today, what is left in many industrial communities, besides rundown industrial complexes, are the people who once derived their self-worth from engaging in manual, and thereby 'honest' work (Brismark 2006; Lamont 2000). These are the people who populate not only the British Midlands, but parts of Sweden, the Ruhr area of Germany, and what is nowadays referred to as the United States' 'Rust Belt', for instance, which has been prominent in American political rhetoric. What unemployed people in these environments share with each other is an unsealed fate. By still being adapted to economies of production, they lack the more theoretical and flexible competencies that are increasingly required in today's labour markets (Hansen & Rolandsson 2017). According to the World Economic Forum's *The future of jobs report 2020*, so-called job destruction is accelerating rapidly, with companies estimating that an average

of 40 per cent of workers will require reskilling within six months (WEF 2020). At the same time, due to strong local labour markets, there has been little aspiration among residents in industrial communities to achieve educational progress. As a result, former industrial communities are often burdened by a situated lack of study tradition (e.g. Huggins et al. 2021), which further complicates the adaptation of unemployed to a de-industrialised working life.

According to the sociologist Richard Sennett (1998), industrial society has now transitioned to what he labels 'flexible capitalism', referring to the idea that businesses must embrace market dynamism and recognise their need to continually update processes, practices, and structures in order to remain competitive in an ever-shifting landscape. Consequently, companies must be willing to hire and retain a diverse workforce, create fluid job roles, and focus on improving the skills of their employees to ensure that they can continue to create value in the ever-evolving economy. Importantly, as Sennett pointed out, the shift from industrial society and relatively stable long-term employments to a flexible capitalism characterised by globalised production and flexible specialisation has affected not only the material conditions of people, but also their sense of belonging. This is particularly relevant to consider from a Swedish context. The term 'industrial spirit of community' (Swedish *bruksanda*) has here been used to describe the 'family-like atmosphere' prevailing in milieus where one single employer provided workers with basic forms of social security in return for their labour (Isacson 1997: 122; Forsberg et al. 2001).[1] By modernising previously rural environments with everything from modern housing and electricity to maternity care centres and other services associated with the emerging welfare state, the industries often functioned as community-building forces on site, and as such, they formed a kind of households in the abstracted sense (Lundqvist 2001).

In such a way, with important exceptions from the violent labour market conflicts that prevailed during the 1920s and 1930s, Swedish industrial communities have traditionally been characterised by mutual trust between workers and employers, and by extension, between resi-

1. Although there is no uniform understanding of the concept, what can generally be said is that the 'industrial spirit of community' is strongly related to class affiliation and the social cohesion that developed between workers in industrial environments (Norman 1996: 167).

dents and the companies that established industrial operations. The local culture that developed in these environments had effects on peoples' life trajectories, which were characterised by continuity rather than change. Being employed by the local industry often appeared as a template for how to transition into adulthood. This particularly applied to men, although with the emerging welfare state, day care centres and other social reforms successively also enabled industries to employ an increasing number of women.

However, at a time characterised by flexible capitalism and rapid social change, the life, solidarity and local attachment previously associated with industrial communities is over. As the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa remarked, social change is no longer generational but intergenerational, meaning that peoples' occupation, place of residence and even cultural certainties such as religious beliefs may now change, sometimes several times, from one generation to the next (Rosa 2010). In fact, to be changeable, as it is often phrased, has become something of a status marker. This is seen with the notion of so-called 'job-hopping', referring to the idea that one's career is boosted not by remaining loyal to a single employer but by changing jobs more often (Lake et al. 2018).

Consequently, the conditions for people residing in former industrial communties have been subjected to fundamental change. In what has been labelled the *active society* (e.g. Elm Larsen 2005), all people are incited to become 'entrepreneurs of the self' (Foucault 2008) by shaping their own fate. Coined in 1968 by the sociologist Amitai Etzioni, the notion of an active society was originally used to emphasise societies' self-governing capacities in a time of increased rationalisation and technological development. In this thesis, I employ a more recent understanding marking a new orientation of both public discourse and welfare policy. In this context, the active society emphasises the fostering of active and employable selves as the backbone of flexible capitalism. Through concepts such as employability and entrepreneurship, it is a policy orientation homing in on individual subjectivity,[2]

2. Drawing on Alvesson and Sköldberg (2008: 415), I define subjectivity as one's conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings, as well as one's relation to oneself and the outside world. In contrast to identity, subjectivity emphasises the fact that we are always *subjected to* historic, economic and discursive circumstances that have an effect on our sense of self.

and thereby aims to change people (cf. Gilbert 2005). The active society may be seen as a response to various material circumstances that have affected public sector expenditures throughout the Western welfare states, such as automation, globalisation of production and economic crises. In this light, it seeks to mitigate public sector expenditures by promoting the active participation of groups considered at risk of social exclusion, such as the sick, the old, the functionally varied, and migrants. This is achieved by way of so-called activation polices motivating individuals who seek support among welfare institutions to take more responsibility for their own self-development, and ultimately, employability. The use of various sanctions is here believed to increase peoples' motivation to change.

Thus, being an active individual means being active in one's own government and conducting one's life like an enterprise (Rose 1999: 164f). For unemployed people residing in former industrial communities, this has meant increased pressure on mobility and education. This is seen with the policy concept of lifelong learning, which denotes individuals' opportunity, and responsibility, to develop and learn new things throughout life (European Commission 2010; European Council 2018). However, for people residing in industrial communities, the leap to more urban milieus and higher education may be perceived as breaking with that which is firm and predictable (Uddbäck 2021: 108; Sennett 1998).

In this thesis, I explore what becomes of policies that aim to deter the working-class from reproducing itself in an environment where the local industries have been stripped from manual labour. The scene is Milltown,[3] a former industrial community in rural Sweden where jobs tied to the industry are now reserved for people with competencies in digitalised electronics, administration and communication. Residents who still desire to perform manual labour have thus had difficulty finding a place on the local labour market. This situation is reflected in the municipality's unemployment rates, which for the last two decades have been among the nation's highest.

In regional news outlets, politicians and actors involved with governing Milltown's unemployed have attributed the municipality's situation to remnants of the community's industrial history. An

3. Figurative name.

alleged 'industrial mentality'[4] (Swedish *bruksmentalitet*) is said to hinder development, referring to a persistent expectation among young unemployed to be able to bypass high-school and occupy blue-collar jobs in the locality, despite a lack of such jobs. A coach working at Milltown's youth activation centre for example explained to me that:

> Young people here, they're really homebound, they don't go anywhere! They want to live here, go to school here, and then preferably work here.
>
> (Coach Lotta, Milltown's youth activation centre.)

The coach thus denoted a form of cultural reproduction in which, it was claimed, young people tended to choose the same life paths as previous generations. Although the notion of an 'industrial mentality' is often used interchangeably with the aforementioned 'industrial spirit of community' in Sweden, the emphasis on 'mentality' rather than 'spirit' bears more negative connotations, such as a weak entrepreneurial spirit (e.g. Larsson 2016).

In the following chapters, I study efforts that were dependent on and intended to remedy the problem that the coach described in the above quotation. Between 2018 and 2022, I resided in Milltown for extended periods of time in order to follow the everyday life in the community and its two schemes of activation: the aforementioned youth activation centre, wherein policy orientations such as employability and entrepreneurship reached Milltown as result of the municipality applying for funds from the EU; and the municipality's already institutionalised Labour Market Unit, which activated unemployed of all ages in various workshops according to gender and interest.

By focusing on Milltown's municipal attempts to manage the active society locally, this thesis highlights a policy turn towards the local level, whereby the aim of enabling individuals to become actively included in society has required coordination of social and employment policy at the municipal level (Berkel & Valkenburg 2007; Heidenreich & Rice 2016). This is part of the active inclusion strategy (European Commission 2008) that aims to provide ways in which people at risk of social exclusion can 'live a life in dignity' by helping them to 'move

4. In this thesis, I employ the 'industrial spirit of community' and the 'industrial mentality' as empirical field concepts, rather than analytical constructs.

towards a decent job or to get more confidence and skills to participate more actively in their communities' (EAPN 2014). This means that ideas about activation are translated and influenced by local governments and governance structures (Künzel 2012; Mc Glinn 2018), paving the way for what has been labelled 'local worlds of activation' (Jacobsson et al. 2017).

The study's objectives

Drawing on ethnographic observations conducted between 2018 and 2022 throughout the pronounced industrial community of Milltown, the present thesis poses the following overarching research question: What becomes of so-called activation policies that seek to mitigate passivity in a locality that for generations has nurtured working-class, and thus presumably active bodies and subjectivities? In order to guide the study and the subsequent analysis, I have posed two more specific research questions:

1. In practice, what becomes of activation policies as they 'trickle down' to a locality shaped by its industrial history?

2. What tensions may be observed in the work of transforming the alleged 'industrial mentality' to fit with the ideals of the active society?

By posing these questions, I am to contribute empirically to the literature on 'local worlds of activation' (Jacobsson et al. 2017; Künzel 2012). This field emphasises that welfare regimes are not homologous entities but are 'susceptible to local practice and hence open to influence from local politics, established local traditions, patterns of networking, and modes of collaborating' (Jacobsson et al. 2017: 86). Seen through this light, it is relevant to explore what becomes of activation policies after they are filtered through situated rationalities and local know-how. Due to the decentralisation of labour market policy, scholars have argued that frontline workers' operating on the municipal level have been granted significantly more discretion in their everyday work to activate welfare clients (Berkel et al. 2010). This situation raises ques-

tions about what transpires in the process of turning policy to practice, and what characterises the interaction between representatives of local level activation schemes and unemployed welfare clients. In other words, although the literature on local worlds of activation is growing, the literature on activation largely lacks ethnographic accounts depicting the everyday life of local activation initiatives (see Boulus-Rødje 2019, for an exception; see also Mc Glinn 2018).

In general, we know relatively little about how activation policy plays out in practice, both in Sweden and internationally (cf. Thorén 2009: 150; Hornemann Møller & Johansson 2009: 7; Lundahl 2010: 24). Nevertheless, Swedish municipalities spend approximately 5 billion SEK in net costs each year on labour market policy activities (Panican & Ulmestig 2019: 108; SKR 2021), a cost that has tended to increase over the past decade. Although recent efforts have sought to map how Swedish municipalities organise activation policy locally (SKL 2018; SKR 2021), such initiatives have often built on self-reporting, which means that little is known about what becomes of activation policy beyond the discursive level. By adding research drawing on ethnographic observations conducted within the aforementioned activation schemes, the present study depicts the ways in which situated rationalities may affect the translation of activation policy locally. That is, this study moves beyond local policy documents and interviews with frontline caseworkers to depict situations whereby activation policy is *enacted*.

Theoretically, the analysis here adds to the (loosely defined) field labelled 'ethnographies of neoliberal governmentalities' (Brady 2014). Taking Michel Foucault's interest in neoliberalism as a political force in modern society seriously, this is a growing field that raises 'concerns that governmentality scholars succumb to a more general tendency among social scientists to present neoliberal transformations in monolithic and linear terms' (Brady 2014: 11). Although much of the literature on present social and labour market policy has utilised Foucault's thinking in order to describe the fostering of active and employable selves (Fejes & Dahlstedt 2013; Mikelatou & Arvanitis 2018), few studies have moved beyond an analysis of textual material to explore how neoliberal subject-formation plays out in practice. The analysis in this thesis reiterates Foucault's notion that governmentality, which

Foucault introduced as the encounter between government rationales and individuals' own self-regulation (Foucault 1997), is always subject to rupture and resistance.

As Neil Barnett (2003: 35f) has argued, the implementation of reform packages in local settings 'opens up for new forms of resistance, which takes place in the interplay of subjectivity and subjection'. The present study complements the Foucauldian apparatus with perspectives focusing on working-class culture, and more specifically, how the morals integral to it (e.g. Lamont 2000) may hinder neoliberal subject-formation aligned with flexible capitalism. With freedom becoming something of an 'obligation' in the active society (cf. Rose 1999), as reflected in labour market policies promising individuals the 'enticing possibility of remaking oneself' (Walkerdine 2005: 59f), the present thesis points to the fact that working-class subjectivities may be less susceptible to hailing such possibilities. One of the main arguments posed in the present thesis is that notions of belonging and community may counteract policies seeking to foster mobile and entrepreneurial individuals. The thesis here sheds light on an inherent paradox in the active society. While activation policies promoted under the active inclusion strategy by default presume that unemployed are passive and socially excluded individuals, I will show how unemployed in Milltown seemed to nurture a strong sense of responsibility and loyalty towards the community. This raises the question of what assumptions are entailed in the very notion of inclusion as wielded in national and supranational policy recommendations. That is, to what extent does active inclusion refer to individuals' general sense of belonging and responsibility towards any specific locality, or to the absorption into the more boundary-less world of self-realisation under the prism of flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998)?

Outline of the book

The remainder of this book is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I provide an historical outline of the active society orientation (Elm Larsen 2005). This paints the socio-political context in which the present study is situated. I then tie this policy orientation to a Swedish context, whereby framework legislation allows municipalities to practice self-

government, thus marking a dual system of activation. In Chapter 3, I discuss the study's theoretical beacons, drawing on Herbert Blumer's notion of theory as 'sensitising concepts', referring to 'a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances' (Blumer 1954: 7). That is, rather than employing theory as a strict framework with which to decipher the landscape, I employ theory as a searchlight that guides me in the field and during the analysis. Here, three overarching inspirations are presented: the governmentality-inspired literature (e.g. Rose 1999; Dean 1995), literature on working-class ethos (e.g. Lamont 2000; Willis 1993 [1977]), and French pragmatism in the form of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (2006). Whereas the governmentality-inspired literature is used to make sense of the logic imbuing present activation policies, I employ literature on working-class dignity to show how governmental attempts to foster neoliberal subjectivity may clash with principles of hard work and loyalty towards the community. I then seek to make sense of tensions observed in the everyday work of activating Milltown's unemployed by carving out two competing modalities of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) at play simultaneously in Milltown. In Chapter 4, I turn to the study's methodological considerations, teasing out my own ethnographic approach to the field.

This leads me to the second part of the thesis, which entails observations from the everyday life in Milltown and its local activation initiatives. Starting with Chapter 5, I have assembled a collage of the study's empirical material, which is analysed in light of the aforementioned theoretical inspirations. This continues throughout Chapters 6, 7 and 8 after which I seek to draw some conclusions in Chapter 9 that are related to the difficulties of implementing the active society in a traditional working-class environment. Here, I seek to render visible some of the tensions inherent in the active society in general, which, I argue, stretch beyond the case presented herein.

2. The active society orientation

This chapter provides a background to the discussion about the active society orientation in public policies. I start by discussing the structural constraints stemming from automation and globalisation of production (cf. Wallerstein 2004). I then discuss industrial communities as 'immoral geographies' left in the wake of industrial re-structuring. This is followed by an introduction of more workfare-inspired rationales and supply-side policies that aim to equip unemployed with entrepreneurship and employability. A more historical overview of Swedish activation policy follows, whereafter I turn to the organisation, contents, and effects of municipal activation schemes. I conclude the chapter by discussing research on social and labour market measures as 'governmental techniques' (Rose 1999) aimed at aligning individuals' self-understanding and aspirations to socio-political objectives.

New demands on the workforce

Western labour market structures are constantly changing. Since Willis' seminal work (1993 [1977]) was published, the manufacturing industry has continued its rapid decline throughout the Western welfare states. As structural transitions on labour markets occur, the labour force must move from one sector to another. What is left of industries in former industrial communities are often control functions, research on innovations, marketing, and design development (Andersson & Jansson 2012: 28). These occupations are mainly reserved for people with competencies acquired through higher education. This situation, which is often known as a knowledge economy, requires an educated and continuously learning supply of manpower. In other words, working life is reorganised, placing demands on the updating of abilities

and knowledge as part of constant improvements of the labour force. In the age of information and communication technology, characterised as it is by information-intensity, decentralised integration, network structures and knowledge as capital (cf. Castells 1996), previously standardised work processes and skills that have supported the technical management of production have been replaced by employees with skills that are both more theoretical and more flexible (Hansen & Rolandsson 2017: 137). According to Statistics Sweden, only 11 per cent of the workforce are currently employed within the category 'industry or mining', compared to 22.2 per cent in 1980. As early as 1999, 70 per cent of Sweden's wage workers were employed in the service sector, while only 25 per cent worked in production (Hansen 2001).

Low-skilled men in particular have had difficulty adapting to a service economy. The reason for this is not entirely easy to explain. While the rise of the service economy has 'stimulated demand for the female workers who have historically dominated many of the occupations found in this sector', it has been pointed out that service work 'requires skills, dispositions and demeanours that are antithetical to the masculine working-class habitus' (Nixon 2009: 300f). That is, giving up on manual labour, and hence agreeing to a devaluation of one's practical competencies, may hinder parts of the male working class to transition from an economy of production to a service economy.

It is in this climate of industrial re-structuring on the Western labour markets that the notion of lifelong learning has gained salience. Adopting lifelong learning means staying abreast of new technology, and continuously updating one's skill repertoire in order to be marketable. In other words, lifelong learning is a central tenet of employability in flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998).

Just as the idea of employability refers to personal qualities as much as formal qualifications (Garsten & Jacobsson 2004), lifelong learning is as much about showing a *positive attitude* towards learning new things as it is about updating one's skills and knowledge (Jarvis 2004). As such, both employability and lifelong learning connote individuals' psychological characteristics. Both ideas here pertain to the active and entrepreneurial self who shows initiative and is open to change. In line with the market logic (cf. Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) inherent in the notion of employability, social media platforms such as

LinkedIn and Facebook have here proven to be key. Functioning as new technologies for 'impression management', these platforms help us to influence others' perceptions of ourselves by regulating and controlling what information we send out (cf. Goffman 1956). In order to attract presumptive employers in the service economy, we are incited to communicate that we are active and alert individuals who are always on the look-out for 'new opportunities'. Consequently, in the educational system, students are now supposed to work on their 'communicative abilities', leading Deborah Cameron (2000: 2) to describe how 'a commonplace social activity has been transformed into a technical skill, with its own professional experts and its own technical jargon'. In the active society's service economy, even attractiveness has shown to be a property of employability (Cremin 2010; Fogde 2009; Garsten & Jacobsson 2004). As discussed by Mikael Holmqvist and Christian Maravelias (2006: 19), being active and putting this into expression might carry as much weight as merely presenting one's formal qualifications when looking to find a place in the labour market.

Industrial communities as immoral geographies

In light of industrial re-structuring and relocation of production, the active society has witnessed a 'mobility imperative' (Farrugia 2016; Garsten 2008) encouraging citizens who aspire to contribute to society productively to abandon former industrial environments in favour of more urban milieus. This is reflected in the devaluation of industrial regions once contributing to the Western welfare states. In the United States, for instance, the vast area that was once referred to as the 'industrial heartland' of America, has now become known as, simply, 'flyover states' (e.g. Townsend 2016).

In Sweden, the sociologist Lotta Svensson (2006) has pointed to a strong middle-class norm inciting young people to gravitate away from the rural peripheries of post-industrial society. According to Svensson, young people may sense that there are expectations on them to explore more exiting and promising milieus and may therefore experience a 'push' towards more urban environments. Remaining in rural small towns like Milltown, on the other hand, is often seen as a passive choice synonymous with contentment and stagnation.

Paraphrasing Felix Driver (1988), at a time when active citizenship involves mobility as much as it does self-reliance through employability and entrepreneurship (Siklodi 2015), I suggest that former industrial communities like Milltown increasingly appear as 'immoral geographies' in the active society. In line with the derogatory term 'Rust Belt', denoting deindustrialisation, economic decline, and depopulation, these are environments that are often left to their fate.

As depopulation leads to reduced tax revenues, the material conditions have changed for the people still residing in these milieus. In Sweden, there are now large differences in both educational conditions and labour market conditions between different parts of the country, as well as municipalities' ability to live up to basic welfare commitments (Olofsson & Kvist 2019: 8). In line with Svensson's (2006: 146f) observation, young people living in rural industrial communities are thus forced to deal with tensions relating to centre and periphery, where 'the better life' they have come to understand is to be found 'somewhere else'.

In contrast, by interviewing young adults on their decision to remain in the small town where they grew up, the Swedish working life researcher Hanna Uddbäck showed that staying may in fact be seen as an active choice whereby notions of relationships and safety are emphasised over ideas connoting opportunity and self-actualisation:

> For many, staying is a decision made in relation to, or together with close relatives. There is a collective and a relational dimension to mobility decisions. […] the young adults emphasise values such as relationships and safety connected to the locality. […] This can be understood as a desire for predictability and control over parts of one's life.
>
> (Uddbäck 2021: 108, my translation.)

Uddbäck showed how the notion of place and locality entails emotional as well as rational aspects that may work contrary to the 'mobility imperative' inherent in flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998). By associating their hometown with notions of security and interrelationships, urban cities were instead associated with the insecure and impersonal.

It is noteworthy that the discourses inciting people to loosen themselves from notions of home and community are not necessarily imposed as a result of being shared by a majority in society. Drawing

on sociological thinkers such as Talcott Parsons, British journalist David Goodhart (2017), for instance, has argued that decrees for mobility are imposed by a growing elite in society, which he labelled the Anywheres. Comprising only about 20–25 per cent of the British population, Anywheres refer to the active and mobile self that similar to Zygmunt Bauman's (1998) Globals and Ulf Hannerz' (1996) Cosmopolitans 'dominate our culture and society' (Goodhart 2017: 3). According to Goodhart, there is an increasingly acute value divide between Anywheres, who are characterised by having occupied 'portable and "achieved" identities based on educational and career success', and the Somewheres, the majority who

> are more rooted and usually have more 'ascribed' identities – Scottish farmer, working class Geordie, Cornish housewife – based on group belonging and particular places, which is why they often find rapid change more unsettling. One group of *Somewheres* have been called the 'left behind' – mainly older white working class men with little education. They have lost economically with the decline of well-paid jobs for people without qualifications and culturally, too, with the disappearance of a distinct working-class culture and the marginalisation of their views in the public conversation.
>
> (Goodhart 2017: 3.)

By valuing the material and psychological security that may come with being rooted to a locality (Uddbäck 2021), the Somewhere lifestyle counteracts the ideals inherent in the active society. As Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005) pointed out, fixity has no place in what they label the 'new spirit of capitalism', whereby traditional Fordism has been replaced by network-based labour markets. Thus, being an active citizen not only means being an entrepreneurial self who knows how to be self-reliant, but also involves a 'cosmopolitan ethos' (Rozpedowski 2010; Durante 2014) by which one ought to become a citizen of the world, rather than the community.

Activating the unemployed

In order to manage the challenges of unemployment and social exclusion, national and supranational policy recommendations increasingly emphasise the notion of active inclusion (e.g. European Commission 2008). This strategy aims to integrate social and employment poli-

cies into a coherent approach that fosters social cohesion and employability amongst groups that are, in various ways, considered vulnerable (Heidenreich et al. 2014). Generally speaking, policies that belong under the umbrella term active inclusion entail both disciplinary measures, such as economic sanctions aimed at deterring welfare clients from accepting financial benefits, and 'softer' interventions, such as various forms of 'work on the self', rehabilitative measures, and work placements. It is crucial that all activation policies are designed with a strong labour market focus pertaining to a 'make-work-pay' logic (e.g. European Commission 2016). This is contrary to so-called passive measures, which mainly aims to compensate individuals financially in case of, for example, unemployment. In this way, activation polices tend to move away from universal protection of citizenry towards rationales implying the responsibilisation of citizens (e.g. Barnett 2003; Goddard 2012; Juhila et al. 2017).

This 'active turn' of the Western welfare states has its roots in the US where, during the 1980s and 1990s, so-called 'workfare' policies were delivered as a response to growing public sector expenditures on social benefit claimants. During this time, public debates on the morals of benefit claimants had become lively and American researchers – most notably, the political scientist Charles Murray and his colleagues – had started to raise questions about whether social welfare programmes were in fact *harmful* to both benefit claimants and society at large (Murray 1984). They argued that welfare programmes could in fact contribute to *creating* an underclass, as illustrated by the term 'welfare trap'.

The debates reached a peak with the passing of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*, which, together with the *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families* (TANF) reform in 1992, were famously announced by Bill Clinton to 'end welfare as we know it'. Eventually, these were ideas that had considerable impact on European policymakers as well (Winlow & Hall 2013: 47; Bengtsson & Jacobsson 2018: 162).

What active labour market polices share with 'workfare' rationales is that a certain *quid pro quo* is increasingly being required in order for citizens to be eligible financial support in case of economic difficulties due to sickness, unemployment, disability, etc. However,

what may be said to characterise active labour market policies specifically is the emphasis on *enablement*. In other words, with the active inclusion strategy, attempts have been made to prevent social exclusion by enabling long-term unemployed, young, old, single parents, refugees, sick, inexperienced and disabled people to participate in the labour market (Heidenreich & Rice 2016: 3). This a way of combining economic and social objectives with the overarching aim of reducing public sector expenditures on 'passive measures' while simultaneously increasing productivity. In Sweden, this is exemplified by the state-owned company Samhall, which is devoted solely to developing people with functional variations by 'putting them to productive use' through the organisation's ability to 'combine medically based expertise and care with the efficiency goals of the profit driven enterprise' (Holmqvist et al. 2013: 194).

Since the 1990s, this 'new wisdom' (Gallie 2004: 198) of abandoning 'passive' welfare policies in favour of 'active' initiatives that aim to prevent 'the depletion of human capital associated with an unemployment spell' (Bonoli 2010: 435, 441) has reverberated on both sides of the Atlantic. As shown by Jørgen Goul Andersen (2005), most European welfare states have now incorporated some elements of active labour market policies as part of their overall unemployment policy. In the guidelines of the European Employment Strategy (EES), which is part of the overarching Europe 2020 strategy aiming at smart, sustainable and inclusive growth throughout Europe, the notion of activation appears as one of its primary features (e.g. Palpant 2006). Successful activation includes three key elements: the activation of the economy, which aims to ensure economic stability by encouraging entrepreneurship; the activation of social welfare, which stresses the importance of abandoning welfare systems that encourage passive dependence on solidarity; and the activation of the individual worker, which aims to help individuals adapt technological and psychological qualities to a knowledge economy (Crespo & Serrano Pascual 2004: 7).

The latter aspect of the activation policy can be understood as a shift in policy focus from demand-side to more supply-side policy interventions. This means that explanations of unemployment are increasingly 'sought in the supply of labour, more precisely in the qualities and characters of individuals, rather than in the supply of jobs as

determined by macro-economic policy' (Garsten & Jacobsson 2013: 828). Alongside measures such as vocational training and internship, coaching-oriented measures are now commonly employed as a way of motivating unemployed to 'work on the self' in order to adapt to the demands on the labour markets (cf. Cremin 2010). This is part of the social investment paradigm that aims to modernise 'social policy by supporting human resource development throughout the life-course' (Bengtsson et al. 2017: 367). In line with Barbara Cruikshank's (1999: 38f) observation, the fostering of active and employable individuals is here facilitated by way of influencing individuals' own attitude towards self-improvement.

Consequently, individuals are deemed either worthy or unworthy of social assistance depending on the extent to which they meet the requirements. As described by Eduardo Crespo and Amparo Serrano Pascual (2004: 13):

> By concentrating on measures designed to change individuals' attitudes to work […], the issue is turned into an individual, psychological problem. Social differences can thus be presented as 'personality' differences, i.e. differences in people's ability and attitudes with regard to fitting into society and being prepared to adapt to the demands of work. Hence, this type of intervention involves transferring conflicts from the macro sociological level to the individual, personal level.

Although activation policies may differ amongst countries or regions, in general, socio-political objectives have thus increasingly homed in on the capacity of individuals to meet the requirements of flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998). As stated previously, this includes adapting individuals to ever-changing labour markets requiring an increasingly flexible and mobile workforce. As reflected in the above quotation, a prerequisite for effective activation polices is thus that they are individually tailored (European Commission 2016: 10).

In general, two overarching strategies of getting unemployed closer to the labour market are discernible in the active society. On one hand, the promotion of labour market participation as a panacea to various social problems may be achieved by way of more disciplinary measures, as seen with the 'work-first approach', which aims to get unemployed people into the labour market quickly by employing stricter

requirements on job-search frequency. On the other hand, the 'human capital approach' aims to equip individuals with employability to make them more attractive on the labour market. Consequently, Mattias Bengtsson and Kerstin Jacobsson (2013) have described contemporary labour market policy as Janus-faced.

Moreover, the supply-side policy focus of present labour market policy has required new constellations of organisations whereby previously separated policy domains, such as 'employment, housing, child care, transportation and social services' (Heidenreich & Rice 2016: 3), have been brought together to effectively deliver activation polices at the local level. In this way, 'the aim to make services more individualised has contributed to a process of decentralisation […] devolving policy-making powers to municipalities in order to enable them to adjust policies to local circumstances' (Berkel & Valkenburg 2007: 6). Consequently, activation policies have shifted 'welfare interventions from the relatively homogeneous definition provided by national legislation towards local milieus, structures and initiatives' (Künzel 2012: 6).

The Swedish case of activation: A dual system of state-local responsibilities

As stated previously, the active turn of Western welfare regimes can be traced back to the US where, during the 1980s and 1990s, so-called 'workfare' policies were delivered as a response to growing public sector expenditures. However, Sweden has a long history of so-called active labour market policies. Stretching back to the early 1900s, the 'work principle' (Swedish *arbetslinjen*) instilled individuals with the responsibility to support themselves by means of labour (Junestav 2004). In order to receive economic aid, the poor had to the accept labour-heavy and often dangerous relief work, which aimed to deter individuals from passively accepting economic benefits, thereby increasing labour mobility.[5] By way of the 'work principle', Anna Fransson and Annika Sundén described how 'rights and coercion, aid and discipline

5. However, mobility in this respect is not to be confused with the so-called 'mobility imperative' referred to previously, as the latter refers more to a neoliberal discourse of self-realisation, rather than coercion to move.

are weaved together into one and the same concept' (2005: 10, my translation).

Moving forward to the 1950s, what came to be labelled as the 'Swedish model' was then institutionalised by way of the so-called Rehn-Meidner strategy. Developed by the two trade union economists, Gösta Rehn and Rudolf Meidner, the programme emphasised the compromise between capitalistic interest of economic growth and a comprehensive programme for active labour market policies and income protection in the event of unemployment (Bengtsson & Berglund 2012). Under the label 'equal pay for equal work', the programme implied that companies that were unable to deliver fair wages would be outmanoeuvred. To cover for the inevitable islands of unemployment that would follow, Rehn and Meidner emphasised the importance of increased profit taxation of companies in order to afford costlier retraining programmes, measures aimed at relocation, and generous income protection for citizens in-between jobs (Erixon & Wadensjö 2012). Eventually, the Rehn-Meidner model became synonymous with the 'Swedish model' whereby the labour market is regulated by collective agreements rather than legislation. In turn, this contributed to a labour market characterised by consensus rather than conflict, and whereby unemployment and shortage in labour demand was managed by way of extensive active labour market polices aiming at full employment.

Over time, however, the meaning of the 'work principle' was increasingly deprived of its emphasis on social security (Bengtsson & Jacobsson 2018; see also Nybom 2014). In the wake of the economic recession between 1991 and 1993, unemployment increased from 1.7 per cent in 1990 to 9.4 per cent in 1994 (Fredriksson 2022: 32). With rising public sector expenditures, the period may be seen as a turning point in the Swedish welfare state (Panican & Ulmestig 2017). From then onwards, new ideas inspired Swedish labour market policy. A ceiling on public sector expenditures was called for, and the universalistic principles of security associated with the Social Democratic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 2006) started to be challenged by rationales that emphasised the responsibilisation of welfare clients (Juhila et al. 2017; see also Bengtsson & Jacobsson 2018). Although the so-called 'new work principle' was developed by the centre-right government

before it came to power in Sweden in 2006, the stricter austerity policies had major consequences for all those workers who lost their jobs in the wake of the economic crisis in 2007. The proportion of unemployed people dependent on public welfare increased sharply during this period. After a period of economic recovery, costlier measures, such as readjustment programmes and employment training, were nevertheless downplayed in favour of more sanctions and reinforced emphasis on responsibilising welfare clients to become self-reliant.

Municipalities' role in activating unemployed

The 'new work principle' included not only governmental labour policies but also municipal activation efforts (Hollertz 2010: 92). In fact, Swedish municipalities have a long history of organising labour market policy locally. Although it is the state via the Public Employment Service that has the overall responsibility for labour market policy, since the early 1900s, municipalities have delivered labour market policies at the local level. During the early 1900s, the costly expenditures on alms-houses led municipalities to organise local employment services whereby relief works, as described above, were mediated in line with the British model (Isaksson 1996). Soon, municipal labour market measures became so widespread that, in 1906, the Swedish government was finally 'convinced of the need for employment services' and therefore started to support the municipal initiatives by means of allowances (Ulmestig & Panican 2018: 469, my translation). Successively, by providing grants and directives, the state took more and more responsibility for the unemployed. Eventually, the state perceived boundary problems when it came to municipal and state responsibilities, which led to municipal control over local employment services being taken over by the state in 1941.

To this day, however, it is municipalities that are responsible for unemployed individuals considered to be positioned far away from the regular labour market. As part of the welfare state's ultimate 'safety net', municipalities' social services, which are regulated by the *Social Services Act*, are responsible for providing people on the margins of society with basic economic support, including health care and accommodation. The task for municipalities is to provide rehabilitative measures aimed, in the long-term, at getting clients closer to the labour

market. These are clients who, in one way or another, are considered to suffer from some kind of social problem, such as alcohol or drug abuse, sicknesses, or homelessness.

Recent studies have found that unemployment is currently the most common cause of applications for financial aid via the municipalities' social services (Jacobson-Libietis 2017: 49). This needs to be understood in light of the aforementioned austerity policies that were launched in tandem with the previous decade's financial crises. In 2007, the Swedish centre-right government removed the possibility of making a tax deduction for union fees (Kjellberg 2010). Thus, it became more expensive for individuals to join the unemployment funds, resulting in an influx of unemployed people ending up seeking social support at municipal social services (I return to this point below). In this way, public expenditures were increasingly dislocated from the state level to municipalities.

In order to mitigate expenditures on social benefits locally, Swedish municipalities have been motivated to extend their local efforts of activating the unemployed. Since the mid-1990s, changes in the Swedish *Social Services Act* towards stricter activation requirements encouraged the activation of all welfare clients under the age of 25. Against the background of structural rationalisations and economic crises, the stricter requirements were inspired by the wider discourse on 'workfare' that had started to travel over the Atlantic. In 2012, the requirements came to apply to clients over 25 as well, and Swedish legislation gives municipalities the opportunity to demand some form of activity in return from all citizens seeking economic aid from their municipalities' social services.

An institutionalised way for Swedish municipalities to mitigate expenditures on social benefits is to organise so-called Labour Market Units (LMUs). These are organisations found in almost all Swedish municipalities that work to activate welfare clients of all ages in various forms of more or less labour market-focused activities. As this thesis will show, this may include everything from courses on how to polish one's CV, to semi-jobs aimed at supporting the municipality's maintenance work.

However, it is also common for the LMUs to activate clients belonging to the Public Employment Service, who may hire placements for

unemployed people at municipalities' LMUs, thereby subjecting individuals to more localised activation efforts. This means that LMUs may activate many different people, of different ages and backgrounds. For example, people who receive economic support in terms of social benefits from the municipalities may be enrolled in the same activation measure as people who receive economic income by way of state-subsidised employment, such as so-called extra positions.[6] What these people have in common is that, for various reasons, they are deemed to be positioned far away from the regular labour market, and/or lack unemployment insurance. For unemployed social benefit claimants who refuse to be activated, there is no financial safety net to fall back on (Fredriksson 2022: 46).

Activating young people: Interplay among the Social Service Act*, the* School Act*, and the EU at the municipal level*

As part of a wider trend throughout Europe, young people have proven to be particularly at risk of social exclusion (Olofsson & Wikström 2018). There are many reasons for this. Firstly, as I discussed previously, the pathways into the labour market have become increasingly complex in post-industrial society, with higher demands placed on young peoples' formal and informal competencies. Consequently, young peoples' route to self-reliance has become more difficult and thus prolonged (Goodwin & O'Connor 2017: 23; Furlong 2017). Secondly, for young people finding a place in the labour market, the fact that 'Standard employment has been replaced by flexible work and precarious careers' (Heinz 2017: 3) has made it more challenging to maintain secure employments (Standing 2011).

6. An extra position means that the salary cost is subsidised by 100 per cent for a maximum of two years. Employment takes place within welfare, public, cultural or the non-profit sector, and can be either permanent or fixed-term. The aim of an extra position is to increase the opportunities for the long-term unemployed to find unsubsidised employment. Individuals with extra positions are entitled to salaries and other employment benefits that correspond to the collective agreement in the industry. This means that the employer must also take out insurance for the person from whom they receive the subsidizes. However, an extra position does not entitle individuals compensation from the unemployment insurance fund if they become unemployed again after the employment expires. As of January 1, 2022, the Public Employment Service will not make any new decisions about extra positions. However, anyone who has received an extra position keeps it until it expires.

Uncertain employment conditions mean that young people increasingly live in a state without predictability or security, which affects both their material and psychological well-being. As is the case with Milltown, young people's transition and establishment patterns are also largely dependent on geographical differences:

> it becomes obvious that the opportunities differ greatly between various regions and municipalities. The geographical starting position – the place where one has grown up or has come to – has decisive significance for individuals' career paths and social conditions.
>
> (Olofsson & Kvist 2019: 41, my translation.)

That is, besides concluding that young people have surpassed women in holding temporary jobs, the authors stated that geographical opportunities for education and work affect young people's opportunities to establish themselves in the labour market. Due to little or no working life experience, young people thereto seldom qualify for the unemployment funds, as they have not fulfilled the so-called 'work condition' necessary for receiving unemployment insurance.[7] Consequently, an increasing number of young people today end up at the municipalities' social services, who demand some form of activity in return for financial support.

At the supranational policy level, the fact that young people are subjected to increasing difficulties in working life establishment, is illustrated by the increasing attention given so-called NEETs (e.g. European Commission 2018), an acronym for 15–29-year-olds who are 'not in employment, education or training'. Alongside the poorly educated and non-European migrants (Olofsson & Kvist 2021), NEETs have shown particularly vulnerable to future risks of poverty and social exclusion. As Anders Forslund and Linus Liljeberg (2021: 5) pointed out, the group is rather heterogeneous, as they are defined on the basis of what they do *not* do. As such, NEETs may consist of those who suffer from serious social and/or medical problems, as well as individuals who, for example, have wealthy parents, which allows them to travel the world instead of studying or actively seeking jobs.

7. The 'work condition' states that individuals who have not been employed for at least six calendar months, at least 80 hours per month, are not eligible to receive income from unemployment funds.

What unites them is the fact that they are registered as passive in the active society.

In Sweden, one way of managing the challenge of maintaining an active society is the so-called activation responsibility (Swedish *det kommunala aktivitetsansvaret*). Being regulated by the *School Act*, the responsibility states that the home municipality must continuously stay informed about young people under the age of 20 who do not yet have a high school education. Once young people belonging to the target group are identified, they must be offered 'appropriate individual measures'.[8] This includes supporting school drop-outs to take up their high school education, or find other reasonable alternatives, such as work placements. Municipalities are allowed to organise the work in any way they want, as long as it takes place all year round. It is important that the municipality cooperates with other relevant authorities and actors, such as the Swedish Public Employment Service, and other agencies. The person responsible for continuously identifying, informing and contacting passive young adults is called the activation manager.

As a result of the influx of young people seeking economic support at their municipalities' social services, municipalities tamper with increasing expenditures on social benefits. A common way for municipalities to 'secure badly needed funding' in order to manage the situation, is to turn to the European Social Fund (Lundahl 2002: 162).

As one of EU's main tools for promoting employment throughout Europe, the European Social Fund (ESF) allows for municipalities to 'work with skills development, employment measures and integration initiatives' with the aim of 'reducing unemployment and exclusion' and 'strengthen Sweden's long-term supply of skills and growth […] to increase cohesion within the EU' (ESF n.d. b). By aiding municipalities financially in the organising of active and preventive labour market projects, the fund forms a vessel for bringing active inclusion down to the local level. As is the case in the present study, municipalities may use the funds to merge the activation of young social benefit claimants, with the activation responsibility described above, under one roof, which is known as an activation centre.

8. *School Act* (SFS 2010: 800), SkolL, Chapter 29. § 9.

Increased pressure on municipalities to extend local activation initiatives

Moreover, in the so-called January Agreement, made in 2019 between the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, the Liberals and the Green Party, it was agreed that the Swedish Public Employment Service would be fundamentally reformed. This included stripping the organisation by letting the agency's role be streamlined to control jobseekers and subcontractors and to develop the organisation's digital infrastructure, as well as focusing on analysing the labour market. At the time of writing, the Public Employment Service had closed down approximately half of its 242 offices, forcing many municipalities that were already troubled by high rates of unemployment and expenditures on social benefits to further extend their local activation initiatives. In a recent report that account for how Swedish municipalities feel about their collaborations with the Public Employment Service, a majority stated that they were unsatisfied, and that the latter did not have sufficient resources to provide support to long-term unemployed (SKR 2022). As a result, respondents working with municipal activation felt that they had taken over responsibilities that were previously in the hands of the Public Employment Service. Consequently, the situation has been described in terms of a transfer of the governing of unemployed from the state towards the municipalities (Åsgård 2022).

In sum, Sweden has witnessed a shift whereby detailed regulation and centralisation of labour market policy have gradually been replaced by framework legislation and greater decision-making powers for municipalities to organise local activation measures. Compared to national activation schemes brought about by the Public Employment Agency, there is currently no control or requirement on Swedish municipalities to provide a certain type of effort to unemployed welfare recipients. Hence, at the local level, this opens up for disparate practices of activation that 'may or may not include *upskilling* of people' (Jacobsson et al. 2017: 87). Below, I move on to the effects of local activation schemes, where practices may be distinguished in terms of leaning towards either 'resource activation' or 'job activation' (Nybom 2014).

Contents and effects of municipal activation schemes

A study that is especially relevant in relation to the present thesis illustrates the diverse nature of locally organised labour market measures (Hansson & Lundahl 2004). Researching three EU-funded activation projects, labelled Rural, Regional Centre and City, the authors found that, despite similar project descriptions, the activation projects differ considerably depending on what locality they were implemented in. For example, whereas the rural project was characterised by clearly defined and concrete tasks following a fixed-hour schedule, activities in the regional and urban activation centres were more ambiguous. With vaguely defined working-hours, the regional and urban activation centres instead focused on cultivating notions of entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation (Hansson & Lundahl 2004: 167). The authors concluded that the respective activation programmes seemed to be organised in line with the participants' *habitus*; that is, the young adult's class-based and thus inherited ways of perceiving, valuing, choosing, and acting in the world (Bourdieu 2010). In the rural activation centre, for example, participants' interest in motors led to placements in car repair shops similar to a real job, whereas the urban activation centre drew more on notions of creativity and innovation in line with labour markets in more urban environments, where individuals possess more cultural capital. As such, the respective programmes tended to reproduce rather than break with such inherited differences.

Comparing the organising of municipal activation interventions for young unemployed between 1993 and 2005, Katarina Hollertz (2010) examined four Swedish municipalities. Although the author concluded that the proportion of young social benefit claimants was much lower in 2005 than it was in the 1990s, processes of institutionalisation seemed to have contributed to the fact that municipal activation initiatives had been taken for granted. More specifically, 'regardless [of what had] happened with the original problem' (Hollertz 2010: 243), activation programmes had been institutionalised as a way for municipalities to govern young adults. The results have a bearing on the present study, where, as I aim to show, the activities offered to unemployed benefit recipients by Milltown's Labour Market Unit did not seem to be up to date with the demands for an employable work-force.

In terms of the contents of municipal activation schemes, Jenny Nybom (2014) showed how activation measures can be divided into 'resource activation' on the one hand, where the purpose is to improve the position of social welfare beneficiaries *vis-à-vis* the labour market by means of educative and competence-enhancing activities, and 'job activation' on the other hand, entailing stricter activation requirements in the form of sanctions as a means of deterring the unemployed from passively receiving benefits. Nybom's study, which was based on quantitative data from 351 welfare clients residing in four Swedish municipalities, showed that 'resource activation' seemed more effective than 'job activation' in getting clients out on the regular labour market. Interestingly, however, the author concluded that measures characterised by 'resource activation' were often directed towards the kind of clients that were in fact already relatively close to the regular labour market, and who had often completed their secondary education. According to Nybom, measures aimed at 'job activating' efforts were commonly directed towards the group of clients who were most in need of educative and competence-enhancing initiatives. However, because the results were based on a relatively small sample, and due to the possibility of selection effects in relation to the various activation approaches described in the study, the author cautions the study's generalising reach.

A study that strengthened Nybom's conclusions asked managers of 237 Labour Market Units to estimate how many working hours was spend on various activities (Marita 2017). Overall, it was estimated that 18 per cent of the working hours were spent on work assessments, 14 per cent on municipal labour market employments and 13 per cent on coaching efforts. Only between 5 and 3 per cent of working hours were geared towards more competence-enhancing activities. However, this finding is not surprising since educative efforts are often costlier than more 'job-activating' initiatives.

Through a combination of quantitative data on Swedish municipalities' activation efforts, and qualitative case studies within some of the municipalities, Åke Bergmark et al. (2017) identified which methods and organisational structures appeared to be more successful than others in municipal activation efforts. As municipalities strive to decrease the duration of social assistance among clients, the length of clients' period of receiving benefits worked as a dependent variable in

the quantitative part of the study. The authors found that municipalities that succeeded on the basis of these criteria employed clear and systematic elements of activation. Thereto, they focused on the development of human capital, and organised programmes that were specifically aimed at young people. Moreover, municipalities that seemed to do better at mitigating the time of enrolment showed good cooperation with the Public Employment Service, and employed sanctions regarding the participation in activation programmes. However, the authors stresses that using duration of social assistance as a measure of the activation scheme's success may be misleading since there may be many reasons why some participants stop receiving social benefits at a given time.

Although the body of literature on local schemes of activation is growing, as stated previously, the mapping of municipal activation initiatives is often based on reporting from managers (SKL 2018). In terms of outcomes, in 2014, Katarina Thorén conducted a literature review on the effects of municipal activation efforts and noted that when 'there is no information on the design, content and participants of the measures', it 'makes it impossible to evaluate them in a scientific manner' (Thorén 2014: 244, my translation). Thorén also pointed out that the situation is further complicated by the fact that several actors are often involved in the organising of local activation measures, and as clients who participate in such initiatives are often clients in relation to other welfare authorities, such as social insurance and the Public Employment Agency, measures are seldom clearly demarcated from one another. Similarly, Rickard Ulmestig and Alexandru Panican (2018: 47) argued that it is generally difficult to say anything concrete regarding the effects of initiatives if researchers or evaluators have not applied an experimental design with randomised groups. Without this, the possibility of isolating factors in the search for explanatory variables behind eventual effects of activation initiatives is lost. Moreover, the authors concluded that when it comes to locally organised programmes of activation, the effect-studies that have been conducted are characterised by so-called process evaluations, in which the perceptions of participants and programme representatives have been key, rather than 'actual' results of the initiatives in terms of mitigating unemployment and getting participants out on the regular labour market.

In order to redress the deficit of knowledge concerning the effects of local activation measures, a database named KOLADA was recently established. In 2020, building on statistics collected by Sweden's Municipalities and Regions once a year, 248 of Sweden's 290 municipalities contributed information regarding what initiatives were offered, how the work was organised, and what results were achieved. The municipalities' net cost for labour market initiatives amounted to SEK 4.9 billion. In total, just over 96,300 people participated in various municipal labour market initiatives during 2020, almost half of whom lacked upper secondary education. Thereto, 51 per cent of the participants had been unemployed for more than 24 months before enrolment. The most common measures organised by municipalities were shown to be job training, help in applying for jobs or internships, and support for clients who were activated in work placements. From the municipalities that reported data, there were 48,271 closed cases in 2020. Here, 35 per cent had started to work or study (23 per cent work and 11 per cent studies). The rest (1 per cent) were registered to have ended the measures for 'other' reasons.

Based on the information from the new database and the studies discussed above, it can again be established that Swedish municipalities do extensive work in the area of labour market policy locally (SKR 2021).

Attempts to transform subjectivity in labour market measures

It has been pointed out that present socio-political aims are often infused by a so-called 'neoliberal' rationality through the fostering of employable and self-managerial selves (Berkel & Valkenburg 2007; Crespo Suárez & Serrano Pascual 2007; Fejes & Dahlstedt 2013; Mikelatou & Arvanitis 2018). Employing a Foucauldian parlance, individuals are here 'brought to work on themselves, under certain forms of authority' in relation to discourses such as employability and entrepreneurship (e.g. Rabinow & Rose 2006: 197). The fact that Milltown's unemployment problems are allegedly related to a persistent so-called 'industrial mentality' makes it relevant to review more closely the literature on governmental attempts to change people (Gilbert 2005: 15).

In her dissertation, Matilda Fredriksson (2022) highlighted the fostering of employable individuals within a municipal activation measure organised by a Swedish municipality. Departing from questions of what discourses were prominent in the activation of 18–29-year-old NEETs, as well as what identities were available to them, Fredriksson showed how the 'adult' rather than 'employable' individual appeared as a desired subjectivity in the activation of young unemployed. This included being orderly, proper, compliant, social and communicative. Although the young people enrolled in the programme tended to view the programme as 'meaningless' by not amounting to an employment, they also stated that they had become less aggressive and 'happier' by partaking in the activities (Fredriksson 2022: 293). In line with previous research that has explored young people's experiences of activation programmes (e.g. Johansson & Langenskiöld 2008; Josefsson 2007), Fredriksson described how activation is important for young people in terms of offering a social context. Regardless of whether the young people participated actively in the operations, the author thus pointed to the social value of activation (Fredriksson 2022: 234). By offering young unemployed a context in which they could exchange experiences and create routines, Fredriksson concluded that municipal activation programmes have potential as social work, primarily by keeping young adults away from social exclusion.

Moreover, in ethnographically researching a project organised by the Public Employment Service (not a municipal activation scheme) that aimed to enhance entrepreneurship among unemployed, the Swedish social anthropologist Renita Thedvall pointed to the shift whereby 'the right to employment' has increasingly been replaced with a 'duty to be employable' (Thedvall 2004: 132). Spending two months in the project where she conducted observations and interviews with participants and the course leader, Thedvall showed how personality tests and 'pedagogical techniques' were used in order to render visible previously unknown 'entrepreneurial qualities' amongst the former (2004: 140). Themes that were in focus during the project included competition, profit and personal characteristics. The participants were told that being an entrepreneur meant being innovative, decisive, responsible, and risk-taking. This included the ability to welcome change, be a creator of wealth, and be hardworking. However, when

participants learned that the 'best way' to start one's own business was to invest in the project with one's own capital – the bank was only to be considered a 'last resort' – some participants immediately left the project. Being unemployed, and hence economically challenged, this option was simply not considered possible. Ultimately, Thedvall concluded that the Swedish Public Employment Service may be understood in terms of a 'governmental technique' (Rose & Miller 1992) aiming to implement an individualised labour market discourse by promoting notions of self-reliance and the autonomy of individuals. Interestingly, although several participants internalised the discourse of the 'self-employed', Thedvall described how, at the same time, they negotiated the meaning of the entrepreneur so that it better suited their own identities. This illustrates that governmental attempts at self-formation (Dean 1995) are seldom linear workings and are instead often subject to individual agency through negotiation (cf. Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018).

Moreover, the Swedish management researcher and sociologist Mikael Holmqvist (2009) showed how activation policies have resulted in consequences pointing to passivity rather than activity. Investigating how active efforts are aimed at offering employment to all, including the disabled, Holmqvist conducted ethnographic research within the Swedish state-owned company Samhall. Aiming specifically to develop people with functional variations by 'putting them to productive use', Holmqvist found that 'Samhall is an example of an activation program that, contrary to its intentions, breeds passivity' (Holmqvist et al. 2013: 194). As such, the findings are in line with much sociological organisation theory pointing to the often paradoxical effects of bureaucratic organisations (e.g. Meyer & Rowan 1977). Holmqvist concluded that the 'occupationally disabled' individual is formatted via processes of bio-medicalisation (Holmqvist et al. 2013: 194). This, he argued, was done through the organisation's ability of combining efficiency goals with medically based expertise. That is, individuals who have experienced long-term unemployment, often resulting in low self-esteem, may internalise medical knowledge of themselves stating that they in various ways deviate from the norm. As a result, they are subjected to processes of re-evaluating the self, whereby ambiguous experiences in life are re-interpreted in light of medical expertise. Consequently,

Holmqvist and colleagues argued, participants in Samhall regulate their identities according to the organisation's goal of activating the occupationally disabled.

Contributions to the literature

The present thesis contributes to the aforementioned literature on activation in various ways. Firstly, by employing the ethnographic approach, it adds to the research emphasising 'local worlds of activation' (Künzel 2012; Jacobsson et al. 2017). This is done by providing much-needed insights into how situated rationalities affect the translation of activation locally. More specifically, I will show how notions of community and loyalty affected the local activation of unemployed. In doing so, the study brings aspects of spatiality, community and social class into the analysis of translating activation policy locally. The thesis here contributes by exploring the way in which notions of place attachment and community form resistance to the aforementioned mobility imperative entailed in the active society orientation.

Secondly, although this thesis reiterates the notion that governmentality is no linear, top-down instilled process fostering desirable subjectivities in line with societal demands, it also shows how some discourses may have precedence over others in the transformation of subjectivity. In the present case, whereby an alleged 'industrial mentality' was to be transformed into an active and employable *ditto*, the analysis adds to studies highlighting how biomedical discourses may influence the activation of unemployed (Holmqvist 2009; Holmqvist et al. 2013). By motivating individuals to relate to themselves as disabled subjectivities, it is shown how the active society may be achieved through processes of first disabling individuals, which in turn opens up for subsidised employments (Garsten & Jacobsson 2013; Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018).

Not least, by engaging in the everyday life of translating activation policy, the present thesis contributes with critical perspectives on the discourses inherent in the active society. Ultimately, it points to the normative assumptions imbuing policy concepts such as active citizenship, social exclusion, and its binary opposite active inclusion.

3. Aids to navigation: The study's theoretical beacons

> The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation.
>
> (Whitehead 1978 [1929]: 5.)

In order to shed light on, and help interpret the data, the present study draws inspiration from three overarching theoretical perspectives: the governmentality perspective, a social class perspective emphasising its moral constituents, as well as French pragmatism. As I describe more in the methodological chapter below, rather than forming a concrete theoretical framework with which to decipher the empirical material, these are used more as 'sensitising concepts' in that they have provided me with a kind of searchlight guiding the analysis (Blumer 1954). At the end of this chapter, I show how the perspectives may complement, and sometimes overlap each other, despite their obvious differences.

Scan, locate and transform: The governmentality perspective

In order to conceptualise the problematisation and activation of the alleged 'industrial mentality' in Milltown, I have taken inspiration from the governmentality-inspired literature, especially how it has developed in the Anglo-Saxon tradition (Rose 1999; Rose & Miller 1992; Rabinow & Rose 2006; Dean 1995). I understand the outreach and activation of unemployed as a so-called biopolitical rationale that aims to 'control and normalize individuals' by subjecting them to 'possibilities of a better life' (Puumeister 2014: 301). Unlike deductive

power, whereby citizens are governed through means of sanctions or punishment, biopolitics here connotes a productive *ditto*, fostering various subjectivities aligned with socio-political rationales by alluding to notions of empowerment and conduct of the self. In Sweden, the municipal activation responsibility discussed above is an illustrating example. By breaking young peoples' passivity, the idea is to actualise their inherent potential as alert and productive human beings. This is achieved by motivating individuals to scrutinise, and 'work on the self' (Foucault 1997). By pertaining to possibilities of self-actualisation, present activation policies draws on what Nikolas Rose has labelled 'government through freedom' (1999: 273). In Rose's words, the 'pastoral' government of nineteenth-century liberalism has been replaced by rationales that aim to produce self-managerial, 'free' citizens who, in various ways, wish to realise themselves in an increasingly market-oriented and individual-centred society.

Whereas the notion of biopolitics is linked to the problematisations of populations, who must not be stagnated, but are encouraged to actualise themselves in society (in the present case, being loosened from an alleged 'industrial mentality'), the better known concept of governmentality instead refers to the ways in which the state exercises control over citizens by means of various techniques ultimately turning into self-governance. Here, Foucault referred to governmentality as the encounter between 'technologies of the self', and 'technologies of domination of others' (1997: 225). The former marks what Mitchell Dean has labelled 'ethical' forms of self-formation, connoting the 'practices, techniques and rationalities concerning the regulation of the self by the self, through which individuals seek to question, form, know, decipher and act on themselves' (Dean 1995: 563). Illustrating examples here include everything from people who take selfies at the gym in order to illustrate bodily discipline to people who seek to 'find themselves' by joining new-age movements, or undergoing neuropsychiatric assessments in order to receive diagnoses such as ADHD (Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018; Conrad 2007). Dean distinguished such 'ethical' self-formation from 'practices of governmental self-formation', referring instead to 'the ways in which various authorities and agencies seek to shape the conduct, aspirations, needs, desires and capacities of specified political and social categories, to enlist them in particular strategies

and to seek definite goals' (Dean 1995: 563). The fostering of active and employable selves is an illustrating example of the latter, whereby individuals are incited to realise themselves on the labour market. The neoliberal subject of governmentality is manifested here by the individual who is able and willing to perform self-inventory processes in order to become who she or he was 'meant to be'. As stated above, the point here is that modern forms of government operate through notions of self-realisation and empowerment. This is how biopolitics, in the Foucauldian sense,[9] maximises 'collective human vitality' (Rabinow & Rose 2006: 197, 209).

Hence, when referring to the governmentality perspective, I refer to all 'rationalized schemes, programmes, techniques and devices which seek to shape conduct so as to achieve certain ends' (Rose 1999: 20). As I have shown elsewhere in relation to present labour market measures (Sunnerfjell 2022; Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018), this may include everything from conversations inciting unemployed to turn their gaze inwards in an attempt to render previously undetected strengths visible, to psychological test-batteries, and various self-evaluative exercises that motivate self-inventory processes. In the present thesis, I show how methods such as coaching and motivational interviewing aim to serve similar purposes. The goal of such 'socio-technical arrangements' (cf. Callon 2004) is to actualise re-evaluation processes among unemployed through the destabilising of subjectivity; that is, individuals' ways of understanding themselves and the outside world (cf. Benson 2008). It is through such processes 'stirring' individuals' self-understanding, as it were, that new and employable subjectivities may be moulded that are better suited to the demands of today's flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998).

Beyond such pragmatic considerations, however, recent governmentality-inspired ethnographies have reiterated Foucault's notion that governmentality is a complex and fragile working (Brady 2014; Hansen Löfstrand & Jacobsson 2022). That is, although individuals may be vulnerable to discourses inciting them to re-evaluate themselves in light of particular discourses (cf. Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018), governmentality is no linear working. On the contrary, rationales aiming

9. Through Foucault's usage of biopolitics, the concept came to be associated with a politics of life itself (cf. Rose 2001).

to foster different types of subjectivities are subject to everything from local circumstances affecting the translation of various policies to the resistance and agency of people themselves, whose self-understanding is the subject of intervention.

Considering methods such as coaching and motivational interviewing, which incite individuals to free their inner potential, we may conclude that much of today's pedagogy and labour market policy are inspired by a postmodern ethics of self-realisation (cf. Hyrén 2013: 21f). In this light, individuals are seen as malleable, and hence open to transformation.[10] However, knowing what we do about industrial communities and the morals of working-class culture (Lamont 2000; Ambjörnsson 1988), it becomes important to look closer at how aspects of self-realisation inherent in activation policies are received in traditional working-class milieus.

To Foucault, morality included,

> a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth. […] But 'morality' also refers to the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them: the word thus designates the manner in which they comply more or less fully with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or a prescription; the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values. In studying this aspect of morality, one must determine how and with what margins of variation or transgression individuals or groups conduct themselves in reference to a prescriptive system that is explicitly or implicitly operative in their culture, and of which they are more or less aware.
>
> (Foucault 1985: 25.)

Hence, according to Foucault, morality always entails 'forms of subjectivation' (1985: 29), in the sense that individuals may or may not subject themselves to a particular value system inciting particular behaviours. The neoliberal logic that Foucault alluded to in his writings on biopolitics sought to foster a character who saw it as his or her moral

10. Although Foucault's legacy has inspired critical studies exploring the effects of social and labour market policy on subjectivity, Foucault himself argued for an anti-essential position whereby, as human beings, 'we have to create ourselves as a work of art' (Foucault 1983: 137).

obligation to actualise 'the self' by succumbing to competition and market imperatives, thus bridging the gap between society and economy (e.g. Oksala 2013). In the next section, I turn to other perspectives on morality in the form of writings on the resistance and dignity of working-class subjectivity. Here, notions of loyalty and collectivity are what makes up the moral fibre of individuals, hence working contrary to the logic of self-realisation imbuing neoliberal society and present activation policy.

Unruliness, community and dignity: Conceptualising working-class culture

Whereas Foucault's legacy has left us with theoretical tools for understanding the rationality imbued in present labour market policies, I now turn to literature that highlights the ways in which the working-class has traditionally maintained self-worth despite occupying underprivileged social positions. I look at three such thinkers: Paul Willis (1993 [1977]), the Canadian sociologist Michèle Lamont (2000), and the Swedish historian of ideas Ronny Ambjörnsson (1988, 1992). When employing the notion of social class in the present thesis, I draw on the aforementioned authors by defining class not only in terms of one's social position, but also, active *positioning* in relation to the social structure of society. As pointed out by the sociologist Rosemary Crompton (2008), class may be viewed as a complex system of intersecting social relationships and hierarchies not reducible to a single variable, but as a construct including individuals' economic class position, as well as their social status and lifestyle. One of Willis contributions in *Learning to labour* (1993 [1977]) was the notion that social class is secondary to culture when it comes to the fostering of working-class identity. That is, an 'industrial mentality', if you will, is not received by way of passive heritage, but continuously cultivated in a particular social context. What Willis meant by this is that the social context in which social actors are situated may either enforce or hinder certain behaviours, depending on whether such behaviours concur to the norms that dominate the locality. As an example, Willis described how one of the 'lads' at Hammertown School, which was heavily dominated by working-class culture, was immediately put down by his

peers after expressing how he wanted to become a jeweller. To become a jeweller would require acting like an 'ear'ole'; that is, conforming to the requirements and ideology of school. Immediately making fun of such an aspiration enforced a 'collective line' of behaviours (Willis 1993 [1977]: 97). To depart from the 'fate' of doing manual labour at the industry would mean breaking with the norms of Hammertown School's culture. However, for the working-class pupils at the grammar school, which was dominated instead by a middle-class norm system,

> the lack of a dominant working class ethos within their school culture profoundly [separated] their experience from 'the lads'. […] No matter how hard the creation, self-making and winning of counter-school culture, it must […] be placed within a larger pattern of working class culture.
>
> (Willis 1993 [1977]: 58f.)

In *Learning to labour*, Willis viewed culture in terms of a synthesis of history (social class) and the present (practices), manifested as the behaviours that were allowed under situated norms of conduct. What Willis termed 'cultural practices' reflected the deeper contradictions of society. For example, the 'lads' counter-culture gave witness of Britain's class system, whereby his informants' self-worth was maintained by way of wit and ridicule of the middle-class lifestyle.

Although Willis' findings have had a great impact on the social sciences in general and pedagogy in particular, it has been pointed out several times that the counter-culture displayed by the 'lads' may have been somewhat excessive. As Willis himself may have represented the kind of authority ridiculed by the 'lads', they may have exaggerated their unruliness. Secondly, it is worth noting that Willis' primary object of study was young people, who often exert tendencies towards anti-authoritarianism. Nevertheless, the present thesis draws insights from Willis' study, especially in terms of how social contexts may condition what rationality guides individuals' sense of self and everyday conventions. As the typical Swedish industrial community is often secluded from more urban environments by being located on the rural countryside (Lundqvist 2001: 53; Ambjörnsson 1992), it becomes even more crucial to take into account the culture nurtured in these environments, and how it affects local activation policy, both in terms of translation and how it is received by unemployed.

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, historians and cultural geographers have described how a particular 'industrial spirit of community' was nurtured in traditional Swedish industrial environments. This concept has a particular connotation to the kind of 'patriarchal care'[11] developed in these milieus, where one single employer came to dominate the local labour market (Lundqvist 2001). Although this created a special bond of loyalty between workers and the company owner, whereby workers were provided basic forms of social security in return for their labour, it was a bond characterised by strong notions of paternalism. With the advent of trade unions in the late 1800s, such patriarchalism was successively challenged by workers' collectives, who shared a strong sense of community and social cohesion (Ericsson 1997: 20).

In this way, the 'industrial spirit of community' denotes a form of communitarian ethos developing in working-class environments, by which a collective identity was forged that was largely dependent on community relationships and shared values. As Anette Forsberg et al. has explained,

> The industrial spirit of community was formed through demands and counterclaims and meant that the industry took responsibility for the welfare of its employees and their families in return for the employees being loyal to the industry. A local 'employment guarantee' may here be said to have existed for the male population of working-class communities. Other companies, aside from the necessary local service industries, were potential competitors for the workforce and were considered unnecessary. As a result, entrepreneurship and start-ups were not promoted by the norms and values shaped by the industrial spirit of community.
>
> (Forsberg et al. 2001: 7f, my translation.)

Besides fostering a manual labour working culture, the above quotation illustrates the consensus that was formed between companies and workers in traditional Swedish industrial communities, which made it hard for smaller businesses to establish and attract workers among residents who showed loyalty to the industry. From this relationship, a firmness of character was created (cf. Sennett 1998), whereby workers felt responsibility not only towards the industry, but also among themselves.

11. According to Max Weber, patriarchalism represents the most 'primitive form of government', having 'its genesis in the piety of the children of the house toward the patriarch's authority' (Weber 1968: 645, 1050).

In general, orderliness, mutual rights and obligations were emphasised and maintained through a type of collective, social control (Lundqvist 2001: 60). However, this is not to say that Swedish industrial communities were deprived of scepticism towards authority as depicted by Willis (1993 [1977]); for sure, 'discipline and unruliness […] existed side by side' in these milieus (Ambjörnsson 1992: 6). However, compared to the shopfloor culture described by Willis, and by which pupils mimicked the jargon and outlook on life they learned from their parents, descriptions of the Swedish working-class may be said to focus more exclusively on the morals and work ethic cultivated in industrial environments. In his writings on 'the conscientious worker', Ambjörnsson described a hard-working individual who distinguished himself from the upper classes by practising a stoic form of trustworthiness, while at the same time guarding the interests of the workers as a collective,

> the Swedish word *skötsamhet* […] is very difficult, impossible in fact, to translate. It means sobriety and diligence, but has also other connotations, like dependability, orderliness, honesty, steadiness; in the old working-class culture it also signified a consciously controlled life – the awareness of the conditions of life needed to take a position vis-à-vis society; the control over one's own actions required to change society in an organized way and to develop as a person. Therefore, knowledge and education were integral parts in a notion that we could call 'conscientiousness'.
>
> (Ambjörnsson 1989: 59.)

What Ambjörnsson referred to as education in the quote above should be understood as the organisation of study circles, which was an integral part of the formation of the Swedish labour movement. Recurring themes around which study circles were organised here included the history of the labour movement, socialism, and knowledge of trade unions. By keeping informed and knowledgeable in relation to employers, the organisation of study circles may be said to illustrate Foucault's elaboration of Bacon's dictum *scientia potestas est* ('knowledge is power'), reflecting a particular form of self-regulation that would eventually form an active ingredient in the formation of the 'Swedish model' described in the previous chapter. Successively, this way of organising self-education among workers' collectives would come to challenge the patriarchal corporate world. However, this is not to say that theory exceeded practical knowledge. Similar to Willis' observation, to the

working class, 'Practical ability always comes first and is a *condition* of other kinds of knowledge' (Willis 1993 [1977]: 56). To 'the conscientious worker', practical knowledge was the foundation upon which the working-class built its orderly character (cf. Sennett 1998).

Ambjörnsson's depiction of the 'the conscientious worker' as a self-made individual is similar to the way that Lamont (2000) described working-class culture and identity. Although Lamont focused on French and American workers, her accounts concur with Ambjörnsson (1988, 1992) by emphasising morality as the main characteristic of working-class culture:

> Morality is generally at the center of these workers' worlds. They find their self-worth in their ability to discipline themselves and conduct responsible yet caring lives to ensure order for themselves and others.
>
> (Lamont 2000: 2f.)

In sum, Willis', Ambjörnsson's and Lamont's depictions of working-class culture are united by a general concern for the collective rather than the individual, and the notion that the working-class obtain self-worth[12] by ascribing dignity to the hardships and art of engaging in manual, honest work (Brismark 2006). Being a 'worker' means being part of a collective, where one must never put the self at the centre. By implication, individuals aspiring to realise themselves by pursuing higher education or doing careers, are deemed less worthy. In Lamont's words:

> morality plays an extremely prominent role in workers' descriptions of who they are and, more important, who they are not. It helps workers to maintain a sense of self-worth, to affirm their dignity independently of their relatively low social status […] When questioned on the traits they like and dislike most in others, the majority of American workers, blacks and whites alike, spontaneously mention moral traits: they like 'people who care', 'who are clean', 'not disruptive', and 'stand-up kind of people'; they dislike 'irresponsible people who live for the moment', 'people who get into fights', 'people who forget where they come from', and 'wormy kinds of people'.
>
> (Lamont 2000: 19f.)

What Lamont meant, in brief, is that the workers she interviewed reflected a different set of *valuations* (assessments of worth) than the

12. See also Beverley Skeggs (1997) on the notion of 'respectability'.

middle-class, who instead tend to concur more to a neoliberal rationality promoting freedom through self-realisation (Rose 1999). Rather than entrepreneurship, marketisation, and thus, competition between individuals, working-class culture here entails a collectivist rationality taking 'the shape of a strong camaraderie' (Lamont 2000: 166), not unlike the Swedish 'industrial spirit of community' (e.g. Lundqvist 2001; Forsberg et al. 2001).

Below, I will focus on valuations by homing in on a perspective that puts into words the process of justifying one's place in the world, and the ways of acting in it. By drawing attention to French pragmatism in the form of Boltanski and Thévenot, who identified six ideal-type value-systems that social actors may strive to align their actions to (2006), I will conceptualise not only the desire among unemployed Milltowners to remain in the locality despite a lack of employments, but the tensions rendered visible in the activation of unemployed as well.

Activating unemployed under competing 'worlds of worth'

To shed light on the fact that complex societies entail different outlooks on the common good (cf. Dequech 2008: 529), Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) formulated a framework highlighting how people order ideas or practices according to their moral requirements, or 'worth'. Worth is understood as anything that provides us with guidance and meaning in our everyday life. Worth also provides potential justification, so that when we are faced with questioning or examination, we may draw attention to that which is most 'worthy', or 'right' in any given situation. As such, Boltanski and Thévenot's 'worlds of worth' framework[13] is particularly useful when exploring the reasons why people choose or act the way they do. On a meso level, their framework has often been used to understand the tensions that imbue organisational life and how they are sought to be resolved (e.g. Rolandsson 2017; Jaumier et al. 2017; Oldenhof et al. 2014). In the present analysis, I use Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) framework to

13. People who refer to Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) framework tend to employ the labels 'worlds of worth', 'worlds of justification', 'economies of worth' and 'orders of worth' synonymously.

conceptualise the loyalty that unemployed Milltowners display in relation to their community, as well as the tensions rendered visible when observing Milltown's activation of unemployed.

Similar to Weber's (1958) notion that we organise our actions by way of making reference to different 'value spheres' in society, the 'worlds of worth' framework enables researchers to shed light on how various logics are *enacted in practice* by emphasising the competencies of social actors to recognise and seek to resolve 'disputes over legitimacy' (Patriotta et al. 2011: 1805). As pointed out by Lieke Oldenhof et al. (2014), the 'worlds of worth' framework is particularly useful when researching situations in which social actors strive to do right under situations of ethical plurality; that is, when competing outlooks on the common good coexist simultaneously. In the present thesis, this is reflected by the management of Milltown's Labour Market Unit, who – as we shall see – sought to resolve tensions between fostering employable subjects and maintaining institutionalised community obligations. Utilised in this way, Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) framework brings life to the notion of institutional logics, or *orders* as they were once introduced by Roger Friedland and Robert R. Alford (1991). Although the 'worlds of worth' perspective shares with institutional logics a conceptual apparatus able to account for the organising principle behind human behaviour (Thornton & Ocasio 1999), they differ in notable ways. Importantly, whereas institutional logics tends to focus on 'appropriateness' as a constitutive aspect of organisational behaviour (March 1991), the 'worlds of worth' framework instead directs our attention to 'righteousness' as a moral constituent of *ditto* (Cloutier & Langley 2013). This will be evident in Chapter 7, where the transformation of the 'industrial mentality' would result in consequences for Milltown as a community.

Based on a series of studies exploring the reasons given by social actors for holding various opinions or acting in certain ways under ambiguous conditions, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) ended up teasing out six 'orders' or 'worlds' of worth, and in continuation, justification. Briefly, these are (1) the *civic* world, characterised by objectivity, legality, rules and regulations, which pertains to the common good in society; (2) the *domestic* world, adhering to traditional values such as loyalty, responsibility and kinship, which pertains to chains

of obligations and dependencies; (3) the *market* world, adhering to competition and the desire to win; (4) the *fame* world, alluding to attention, recognition and public opinion; (5) the *inspirational* world of creativity, which, contrary to the fame world, is independent of recognition from others; and (6) the *industrial* world, adhering to science and technology, productivity and efficiency.

Importantly, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) emphasised that the rationalities depicted above are to be understood as ideal-type constructions, whereby no action or practice pertains to a single, clear-cut 'world of worth'. Similarly, academia, for instance, may be imbued by market rationality, fame and loyalty, all at the same time (cf. Stark 2009: 12). For example, a well-known professor might put her name on a colleague's article, both as a way of gaining more fame, which in turn makes her even more attractive in the field of academia, *and* as a way of boosting her less renown colleague's career, with whom she shares a research community. This would provide an example where a modality of fame, market, and domestic worth are at play simultaneously. In connection with presenting the findings of this thesis, it is therefore worth noting that as far as individual rationalities are referred to, such as a domestic worth in some instances, and market worth in others, it is not because they are the only value logics at play, but because, during analysis, they are the ones *breaking through* among various compositions of rationalities. That said, although several logics usually coexist, it is always an empirical question as to which logics are given primacy by social actors.

Hence, according to Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), actors navigate and discriminate between bundles of rationalities out of which primacy are given justifications that correspond with situational decrees. However, as emphasised by David Dequech (2008), who employed the notion of 'regimes' rather than 'worlds' of worth, it is only when confronted by an imagined audience that we start to wield justifications. That is, we may operate under certain norms pertaining to what is 'just' or 'right', without necessarily implying the decree of justifying such actions or practices. In sum, 'worlds of worth' guide us in everyday life; we are both subject to them (norms, culture), and become subjects through them (acting, making justifications).

Theoretical synthesis and contribution

Although the three theoretical inspirations fleshed out above differ in considerable ways, I argue that aspects of each perspective may work complementary to each other. It will be shown how the activation of young people at Milltown's youth activation centre pertained to an earlier Foucault, whereby the notion of disciplining rather than transforming subjectivity showed relevant. This included subjecting NEETs in the community to the importance of managing one's hygiene and disciplining the body through exercise, hence marking a rather literal interpretation of activation. I argue that such practices reflected an understanding of unemployed as needing to 'shape up' so as to become respectable and tidy workers much in line with Ambjörnsson's depictions of 'the conscientious worker' (1988, 1992). In this way, I argue that the coaches at the youth activation centre cultivated an outlook on life and the demands of the labour market that strongly related to a manual working-class culture, rather than the ideals imbuing the active society. Similarly, when it came to the Labour Market Unit's activation of unemployed of various ages, I will show how the management appropriated rather than transformed the local working-class culture by putting the unemployed to productive use in the community.

In line with the double meaning of the notion of domestication – that is, as connoting both the taming of unruly subjects (as in a Foucauldian form of disciplinary power) and the act of becoming *domestic* (as in being attached to a particular locality, or *domus*) – I then employ Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) to show how residues from Milltown's industrial history (the fostering of a disciplined working-class cultivating a strong sense of community) interacted in the present. The 'homeboundness' argued among coaches and supervisors in Milltown's activation schemes to haunt unemployed in the community, will here be conceptualised in terms of a 'domestic world of worth' valuing bonds of loyalty and community over marketisation and self-realisation.

In this way, there are overlaps in the three overarching theoretical perspectives outlined above. From a Foucauldian perspective, what Ambjörnsson depicted as the fostering of a 'conscientious worker' nurturing grit and orderliness (1988, 1992) may be understood here in

terms of what Dean (1995) termed an 'ethical form of self-formation'. This is different (although not opposed to) 'governmental practices of self-formation', which connotes subjection rather than agency. In this way, I reiterate Willis' notion that human beings are not 'passive bearers of ideology' (1993 [1977]: 175), but active selves navigating life according to different 'worlds of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006).

By combining the three overarching perspectives, throughout the analysis, a pendulum will swing between what may be regarded as *critical sociology* and a *sociology of critique*. That is to say, whereas the Foucauldian apparatus will be used as a critical lens through which I may understand present activation policies, Willis, Lamont and Ambjörnsson, together with Boltanski and Thévenot, highlight the critical competencies of social actors to themselves discriminate between different outlooks on the common good. For instance, I will show how the management at Milltown's Labour Market Unit tampered considerably between transforming a working-class identity and maintaining interdependencies and loyalties in the community, hence contrasting a neoliberal rationality that emphasised employability and mobility with a situated 'sociologic' instead valuing a sense of community.

In sum, the theoretical inspirations of this thesis allow me to home in on tensions between the malleable subject of governmentality and the more stable and firmer subject of social class and cultural reproduction. In continuation, this brings to light important tensions inherent in the activation of unemployed, whereby, as stated previously, policies increasingly aim to change people (Gilbert 2005: 15; Crespo & Serrano Pascual 2004: 7). Locally, the actors responsible for implementing active societies may here have to discriminate between situated 'worlds of worth' and the rationalities inherent in contemporary social and labour market policy.

4. Ethnography: The study's methodological approach

To be able to investigate, describe and perhaps even explain aspects or parts of social reality, we need a method of scientific inquiry that guides us in collecting, decomposing and reassembling data to make sense of it. In the present thesis, in which culture is central, I have chosen the ethnographical approach. There were several reasons for doing this. Firstly, setting aside the statements made by politicians and authorities in Milltown, I wanted to get as close to my empirical material as possible to be able to reflect on what actually took place in everyday life of activating the community's unemployed. This included the translation of activation policy locally, and the attempts to change the alleged 'industrial mentality' presumably lingering in the community. Simultaneously, I aimed to track the alleged 'industrial mentality' down on the street and explore what properties this presumed subjectivity entailed. After travelling back and forth to Milltown over the course of four years, I was eventually able to collect and analyse an empirical material comprising two competing rationales. The active society orientation was understood in a broad sense as entailing notions of self-realisation, cosmopolitanism and marketisation, and that was promoted by way of 'government through freedom' (Rose 1999), and a traditional working-class ethos instead valuing manual labour and a sense of community (cf. Willis 1993 [1977]; Lamont 2000; Ambjörnsson 1988, 1992).

By spending time in Milltown in order to observe the everyday life, both in and outside of the community's two activation schemes (its youth activation centre and the local Labour Market Unit), I adhered to the traditional aim of ethnographic inquiry, which is to reach an *emic* perspective on things. In my case, this meant that I sought to gain

insight in the local rationality underpinning the community's way of managing the active society locally, not primarily by asking the actors involved in this endeavour how they strived to obtain such aims, but by observing for myself how activation policy played out in practice. By residing in the community for extended periods of time, I have sought to produce explanations for the local translation of activation policy by relating to the particular context in terms of its internal elements and functioning, as well as the values and morals integral to it (e.g. Emerson 2001: 41; Werner et al. 1986). Throughout the thesis, I view culture in terms of practices, or more specifically, how social actors organise everyday life (cf. Willis 1993 [1977]) according to situated conventions (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), as explained in the previous chapter.

As Stephan Dahmen (2021: 12f) pointed out, when it comes to the implementation of activation policy, there is always the risk of 'portraying the process of policy delivery in an under-complex way'. I agree with Dahmen by viewing the activation of unemployed as practices of 'translating', rather than 'implementing' activation policy. There is no 'correct' or 'linear' way of going about such processes. The implementation of policy always takes place in an intersection of a range of confounders, such as cooperation between state agencies, and municipal social services. Local prerequisites, such as venues and what know-how is at hand, also affect the practice of making policy come alive (cf. Künzel 2012). Hence, as stated above, rather than relying on conventional interviews with supervisors and coaches responsible for implementing activation policy in Milltown – which, in a worst case, may produce a corrected image of various practices or operations – I have been more interested in observing, for myself, the everyday life of translating activation policy locally. This is not to say that what people say is not important. However, I do believe that knowledge about the local context from which narratives emerge may strengthen the researcher's understanding of the social reality in question. As the Chicago school sociologist Louis Wirth noted, 'One should not believe everything that people say, nor should one suppose they say it without reason' (Wirth & Reiss 1964: xviii).

When I had learned about Milltown's attempts to mitigate unemployment by organising a youth activation centre in the community,

the process of translating activation policy thus called for me to *be where it happened*. As I will show in the empirical chapters, had I not opted for the ethnographic approach, I would have missed out on important observations whereby, for example, policy concepts such as employability and life-skills translated into physical discipline and food-cooking, as well as the fact that methods such as motivational interviewing and supported education seemed to be applied more as a form of requisite shrouding the practices with a sense of professionalism, rather than being used as 'governmental technologies' fostering employable subjects (Rose 1999).

In the present study, I have made methodological use of the fact that I have experience from an industrial community in the south of Sweden and its way of life. This gave me a certain preunderstanding of the culture nurtured in Milltown. Without being engrained in the community's social relations, I am familiar with the place-specific *habitus* (cf. Uddbäck 2021: 39) fostered in similar environments, and what outlook on life it produces. In relation to the question of access, having ties to a similar milieu may provide the researcher with a sense of credibility in the field (Benney & Hughes 1956).[14] For example, in most of my contacts with potential research subjects both in and outside Milltown's activation schemes, I have made my personal ties to an industrial community in the south of Sweden clear. At times, this elicited more prolonged discussions on the fate of Milltown in the wake of industrial rationalisation. When talking with participants in the community's activation schemes, this could sometimes counterbalance the fact that I did not share the same accent, or mastered some specific references, as some of my informants.

Constructing a multi-sited ethnography

As stated in the introductory chapter, this study set out to explore what became of activation policies in a locality that has traditionally fostered a working-class, and thus presumably active people and ethos. Such a project requires delimitations. That is, if activation policy may

14. See also Holmqvist, who by turning his upper-class background into a research tool when studying a Swedish elite community, became 'a man one could do business with' (Holmqvist 2018: 11).

be regarded as a 'social world', meaning a particular universe of discourse entailing various 'activities, memberships, sites, technologies, and organizations' (Strauss 1978: 121), then one must decide which 'concrete locales' to study within that world in order to shed light on some problem, practice or interaction (Nadai & Maeder 2005: 9). Throughout the present study, I have employed a form of 'tracking strategy' (Marcus 1995), meaning that I have sought to trace encounters between the supranational discourse of activation and Milltown's alleged 'industrial mentality' to various sites throughout the community. Besides ending up in the municipality's two activation schemes, where discourses of activation, employability and entrepreneurship were to transform Milltown's unemployed into active and employable individuals, I also ended up in sites like the local library, cafeterias, and Milltown's industrial museum, where I have engaged with numerous locals in order to learn more about the situation and fate of the community. Thereto, I have reviewed textual documents, such as historical accounts, news articles, social media, and more academic reports written in relation to the community, in order to complement the observations.

Engaging with various locals and analysing textual material such as local historical reports has been a way for me to locate and understand the design and practices of Milltown's two activation programmes in their wider local context. In short, it has been considered important for me to come closer to Milltown's situated rationality; that is, the values and outlooks on life that dominate the locality, and thus, the organisation of activation policy locally. When residing in the field, I often did parallel work by conducting observations in the aforementioned activation schemes during the mornings, while engaging with locals or other actors in the community during the afternoons (or the other way around).

In this way, the data that are analysed herein consist of observations, conversations and various other material, such as interviews, textual documents and academic reports considered relevant in relation to the study's research questions. Table 1 provides an overview of the empirical material.

Table 1. Summary of the empirical material

EMPIRICAL MATERIAL	NATURE, QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION
Fieldnotes and memos	38 semi-structured observations	Half-day observations in Milltown's activation schemes; 18 conducted in or in proximity to the youth activation centre, and 20 in or close to the Labour Market Unit. This includes numerous ethnographic conversations with participants and coaches/supervisors.
	Approx. 30 unstructured observations	Various lengths conducted throughout various institutions in Milltown, such as the library, cafeteria, industrial museum, schools, and happenings. Includes ethnographical conversations with locals, librarians, café staff, voluntaries at the museum, etc.
Interview transcripts	9 recorded interviews	30–90-minute interviews; 3 with participants at the youth activation centre, 2 group interviews with the coaches at the youth activation centre, 2 with the manager of the Labour Market Unit, 1 with two caseworkers at the Public Employment Service, and 1 with Milltown's business manager.
Textual material	23 textual sources	Action plans for Milltown's municipal activation responsibility; programme descriptions and evaluations from projects running at the youth activation centre; various course material such as PowerPoint slides from local courses in household economy, documents on motivational interviewing for coaches, and descriptions from a validation project; employee surveys; academic reports exploring the community's history and unemployment.
Audio	2 radio documentaries	Radio documentaries following the fate of Milltown as an industrial community in post-industrial society.
Video	4 interviews	A local's personal archive of video-recorded interviews conducted with senior Milltowners during the 1990s.
Images	Numerous	Locals' personal photo albums, as well as official photo archives of Milltown from the late 1800s up until the 2000s.

Observations

Starting in the spring of 2018, I contacted Milltown's youth activation centre by sending an email to the person in charge of the operations, who was also the municipality's activation manager. I presented myself as a doctoral student from Gothenburg researching industrial communities transitioning to post-industrial society (by then, I had also initiated contacts with other municipal activation schemes located elsewhere, and was not sure of whether to focus solely on Milltown). After I had been welcomed to the centre, I met with the coaches and handed over written information about the study. I asked if it would be possible for me to follow the operations as part of my research project and I was warmly welcomed to do so. In line with the approval from the regional ethics board, it was agreed that the coaches would in turn inform the participants of the study, who I was, and then ask them if they agreed to take part in the study.

In the youth activation centre, I was interested in the everyday life of the operations; that is, I aimed to explore what became of policy concepts such as employability, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning, all of which are notions included in the activation discourses. I did so by simply being there and observing everything from the daily breakfast, to scheduled activities, such as group discussions and job searching, to afternoon drop-in sessions. I was interested in the relation between the coaches and participants, assuming that the latter were conditioned to spend their days in the premise in return for benefits or activity support. While partaking in the activities in the centre, I tried to intervene as little as possible in the operations. For example, if I was asked a question by one of the coaches, I gladly answered, but I never initiated any discussion during scheduled activities myself. During breaks and pauses, however, when the atmosphere turned somewhat more informal, I took active part in the discussions held between participants and coaches. During individual work – such as when participants were looking for jobs on the centre's computers – I would sometimes ask participants about what they were doing and what they thought of it. Successively, I felt that I was able to attend Milltown's activation centre whenever I wanted to, even when the person responsible for the operations was not there.

During the spring of 2018, I also initiated contact with Milltown's Labour Market Unit, which had been in operation since the 1990s and

was thus an institutionalised part of the municipality's activation of unemployed benefit claimants. Similar to the youth activation centre, I was made welcome to attend the LMU for an initial interview with the manager. After our first meeting, we agreed that she would hand out information about the study to participants and inform the other supervisors and participants activated in the unit's workshops that I would occasionally attend to observe the operations. I soon felt that I had full access to the LMU and that I was able to drop by whenever I wanted, although more close observations would require me to contact the manager. While observing the everyday activates at the LMU's premises, I usually stayed in a different workshop for approximately half a day, conversing with participants about what they were doing and what they thought of the tasks they performed. I also talked with the supervisors in the centre, who for the most part were also very welcoming.

In all, 38 semi-structured observations were conducted between 2018 and 2021[15] in Milltown's youth activation centre and the municipality's LMU. For each visit, I wrote down certain themes I was interested in or discussions I wanted to follow up on. Included in the observations are numerous ethnographic conversations with coaches, supervisors and participants in the activation schemes. These refer to a kind of 'go-along' talks, which are more formal than a chat but less formal than an interview (Kusenbach 2003: 480). Although these 'go-along' talks were characterised by their spontaneity rather than planned systematisation, I always kept in mind and introduced specific topics of discussion that related to my research questions. For me, working this way has brought many benefits. The conversations have had a strong connection to the institutional, physical environment, allowing me to pick-up on certain aspects of the activation of unemployed that I would have otherwise missed out on. As Margarethe Kusenbach argued, 'Ideally, go-alongs bring to the foreground the stream of associations that occupy informants while moving through social space, including their memories and anticipations' (2003: 472). In this way, they may elicit topics and associations that would perhaps not come to surface during

15. Due to restrictions following the COVID-19 pandemic, fieldwork in the activation schemes was halted during much of 2020 and 2021. Nevertheless, during this time I resided in the community periodically in order to engage with locals and avoid losing touch with the object of study.

a planned interview that is often conducted sitting face to face in an environment that is not always in direct proximity to the field of interest. Ethnographically observing the everyday life inside Milltown's activation schemes allowed me to engage more naturally in spontaneously occurring conversations that touched on everything from Milltown as a community to what the participants desired to do in the future and what they valued in life. Likewise, having coffee with the coaches in Milltown's youth activation centre in between group sessions, or chatting with the supervisors at the community's LMU in the afternoon, encouraged more relaxed and spontaneous conversations about their thoughts of the operations and Milltown's fate in post-industrial society. Moreover, from the outset I noticed that engaging in conversations rather than formal interviews enabled me to avoid the boundary that may exist between researchers and informants during more formal interview settings. As Johanna Sixtensson (2021), for example, has argued, especially young people may feel discomfort in formal interview settings. That is, when invited to open up under more formal conditions, even the most talkative interviewees may become quieter due to the situation's unnaturalness, as well as the often asymmetrical relationship between researchers and informants. I have also felt more relaxed by engaging in more spontaneous occurring conversations on my topics of interest rather than subjecting both myself and informants to formal interview settings.

In addition to the aforementioned semi-structured observations, I also made numerous unstructured observations throughout Milltown. As a way of getting to know the community in greater depth, I chose to reside in the locality for extended periods of time while conducting observations in the activation schemes. I usually stayed for a week at a time but the longest visits exceeded three months. Residing in the community here allowed me to more freely participate in Milltown's everyday life, such as going to the grocery, or spending time in the library. In this way, I got to engage with numerous locals, such as voluntaries at the industrial museum, and people working in and around the community. This included café personnel, social workers, and people working in the town hall. To reside in the community brought me closer to Milltown's situated rationality through which activation policy would be filtered, and translated to practice (cf. Mc Glinn 2018). As stated, it also allowed me to explore for myself what actors directly or indirectly

involved with governing Milltown's unemployed meant by attributing the community's unemployment to an alleged 'industrial mentality'.

In general, rather than relying on a linear methodology wherein each observation was well thought-through and systematically planned, I have borrowed inspiration from Holmqvist (2018), who sought methodological inspiration from such classics as Alexis de Tocqueville, Howard S. Becker and Marie Jahoda. This has meant that, while in the field, my curiosity has swept me along in various directions as a way of gathering observational data. For example, I have attended gym activities organised by Milltown's youth activation centre and a course in household economy organised by the municipality's social services; I was not sure what knowledge these sites for observations would render, but they seemed interesting in the moment. These were not activities that I had planned to attend beforehand (for example, I only learned about the course in household economy that same day), but they provided interesting findings relating to the activation of unemployed in Milltown, as well as tensions inherent in fostering economically responsible behaviours in a rural environment enabling certain forms of self-sufficiency.

Textual, pictural and audio-visual material

From the very first stages of the study, I began to immerse myself in various texts and reports as a way of getting to know Milltown's history and what challenges the community was facing in terms of mitigating unemployment and social exclusion. This work continued throughout the research process. As a result, the study draws on a range of miscellaneous empirical materials in order to gain understanding of Milltown's local culture and shed light on the study's research questions. This includes academic reports from the regional museum; action plans for the activation of unemployed young people; project descriptions and evaluation reports from activation projects; annual reports from collaborative projects between the municipality of Milltown and state agencies; various news media; private individuals' photo archives, videos and interviews; and radio outlets, such as news and documentaries covering Milltown in the wake of industrial rationalisation. Whereas reviewing older historical material gave me a deeper sense of the community's culture and how structural conditions have changed over time, more recent accounts of Milltown as

an industrial community have been important for helping me understand how local problems of unemployment were now attributed an alleged 'industrial mentality'.

I selected the aforementioned material both through strategic sampling (actively searching for various material) and through asking people involved with governing Milltown's unemployed what material they considered most important in their everyday work. Whereas the former strategy rendered news articles and strategic plans for implementing lifelong learning in Milltown, the latter produced, for example, various course material handed to me by coaches and supervisors in Milltown's activation schemes. In both cases, some of the material provided me with inspiration regarding what to keep a look-out for in the field; for example, how policy concepts such as lifelong learning were implemented and practiced locally.

Interviews

As a way of deepening the observations and analyses of the material discussed above, I also conducted nine formal interviews: three with participants at the youth activation centre, two with the coaches in the centre, two with the manager of the local LMU, one with caseworkers at the Public Employment Service, and one with the municipality's business manager responsible for encouraging entrepreneurship in the community. The interviews were planned beforehand, lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, and were conducted at a location chosen by the informant. The shorter interviews, which lasted around 30 minutes, were held exclusively with young people, who answered my questions briefly and concisely. Topics of discussion here included their background, future, what they thought of Milltown as a community, and what they valued in life. As discussed above, the formal interview settings with young people in particular disrupted rather than deepened my discussions, which is why I decided at an early stage to focus more specifically on ethnographic conversations with Milltown's young unemployed.

Although the formal interviews meant that participants could avoid being affected by the group when answering my questions, these were topics less related to my overarching research questions of what became of activation policy locally. In relation to the interviews I conducted

with actors involved in governing Milltown's unemployed, however, I gained important information relating to what challenges faced the community in post-industrial society, and what tensions were inherent in the fostering of more employable individuals. Besides views on Milltown in general, the questions were geared more towards opportunities and difficulties in their everyday work of implementing the active society locally. In this way, although the interviews were used more as a way of complementing the ethnographic data, rather than the other way around, they sometimes provided me with a more complex and multifaceted view of Milltown and its alleged 'industrial mentality'.

By allowing actors involved with governing unemployed to take their time to reflect on more formal interview questions, such as 'What challenges do you face in your work?' and 'What do you think are the biggest reasons behind unemployment in your municipality?', the otherwise individualistic approach to the community's problems of unemployment (a stagnated mindset lacking initiative; that is, the 'industrial mentality') allowed more nuanced answers. In turn, the formal interviews sometimes elicited reflections that allowed me to come closer to Milltown's local rationality, and the ways in which it had an impact on the community's translation of activation policy locally. However, I am well aware that the present study's relatively few formal interviews may result in me missing out on important perspectives, such as how the conditions for women and men may differ in relation to their position as unemployed in Milltown, as well as their everyday life inside the municipality's activation schemes. That is, the present study misses out on the subjective meaning that women and men respectively ascribe to the activation schemes depicted herein. However, what the formal interviews did not allow me to get hold of was the *social processes* of translating activation policy to practice – and all the complexities inherent in such an endeavour – which is the overarching objective of this thesis.

Constructing a collage of the empirical material

Ethnography is a messy business (Plows 2018). By nature, when the write-up is due, the researcher must often make sense of a wide range of empirical material, such as fieldnotes from observations, interview

recordings, textual documents, images, videos, and one's own diaries and memos. As I stated above, this results from the fact that the ethnographic process is traditionally characterised by way of 'muddling through' (Lindblom 1959), rather than a pre-conceived, clear-cut research design (Holmqvist 2018; see also Jahoda et al. 2014 [1933]; Becker et al. 1977). Hence, a challenge for me has been to select, analyse, and then present the empirical material in a way that constitutes a narrative of Milltown's attempts to implement the active society locally.

In order to illustrate how the supranational activation discourse was translated locally, I have taken inspiration from Geir Angell Øygarden's (2000) notion of snapshots and collages. By thinking in terms of a collage, I have sought to bring together snapshots from observations and conversations throughout Milltown and the everyday life of activating the community's unemployed that, in one way or another, illustrate the ambiguities of transforming the alleged 'industrial mentality' into an active and employable self. Drawing on Øygarden, I refer to snapshots as 'that which is small enough to be remembered in its entirety, and large enough to accommodate an action pattern' (2000: 30, my translation). That is, as it is practically impossible for someone employing fieldnotes as a research tool to record everything that is going on in the field, what is presented in the forthcoming chapters illustrates situations or conversations that have stuck with me emotionally and/or analytically. More often, the snapshots presented in the forthcoming chapters symbolise condensed situations in which something has been *at stake*. This includes sudden changes in atmosphere, or situations whereby individuals' dignity has been put to the test. In this way, textual and audio-visual material, as well as recorded interviews, are not to be regarded as snapshots, as these are not exclusively built on fieldnotes written during, or in close proximity to fieldwork.

The selection of what empirical material to eventually include in this thesis was then rendered visible by way of a two-step coding procedure conducted using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. As a first step, all fieldnotes, textual and audio-visual material, as well as the transcribed interview recordings, was subjected to a process of open coding whereby the material was labelled rather descriptively without much consideration of either research questions or theoretical inspira-

tions (e.g. Charmaz 2014). This resulted in codes such as 'feeling safe', 'manual work' and 'finish school', which were regarded as 'doors' that led me to the data. Then, as a second step, I applied a more focused coding procedure. By now, my initial theoretical inspirations were set in motion with the empirical material. In line with Herbert Blumer's (1954) idea of treating sociological concepts as 'sensitising' rather than 'definite', I sought to avoid taking an overly dogmatic approach to theory. Echoing Blumer's statement that 'sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look' (1954: 7), as discussed in the previous chapter, I have treated theory as a kind of navigational aids, or beacons, rather than charting exact compass directions to follow meticulously. While the Foucauldian apparatus remain a productive thinking tool for making sense of the neoliberal self-help logic inherent in present activation policies, Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) pragmatic sociology was brought into play as a way of making sense of a rationality imbuing not only the lifeworld of Milltown's unemployed, but the municipality's way of organising activation policy as well. As I aim to show later on, the latter here seemed to clash with the former in that the normative assumptions entailed in present activation policies did not seem compatible with the local, working-class culture cultivated by many Milltowners.

The codes that were rendered from the initial coding were then grouped into more overarching categories such as 'community' and 'belonging'. During the write-up process, these were categories then conceptualised in terms of a 'domestic world of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) argued to be cultivated in Milltown as a community.

In this way, a collage depicting the local translation of activation policy has successively taken form, whereby social snapshots from observing the everyday life inside Milltown's activation schemes have been supplemented with excerpts from other empirical material, such as textual documents, and interviews. This represents the study's analytical work, whereby I have aimed to put together a coherent narrative of Milltown's attempts to implement the active society locally.

In terms of the ethnographic aim of producing an *emic* analysis – meaning a perspective of social reality presented from within, as it were – it is relevant to say something in relation to the present thesis ontological and epistemological positioning. Here, I have drawn on Martyn

Hammersley's notion of 'subtle realism' (2001: 108), arguing for an epistemological middle-ground in-between naïve realism and anti-realism. To me, this has meant that while I recognised the assumption that 'social reality is multiple, processual, and constructed' (Charmaz 2014: 13), and hence, that it is practically impossible to 'avoid telling stories with ethnography that won't be lies to some people' (Duneier 2011: 10), I still hold the realist assumption that 'the aim of social research is to represent reality', acknowledging that this may be done in more or less accurate ways (Hammersley 2001: 108). This means that I have aimed to tell a story about translating activation policy locally that sheds light on tensions that may resonate with similar endeavours made in communities elsewhere. In sum, I argue that Milltown's industrial history makes it a 'statuary situation' (Eribon 2004: 96) of an environment whose norms, values and identity do not necessarily concur to activation rationales, hence imbuing the local translation of activation policy with various tensions.

Ethical considerations

All social research must take ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, into account. To strengthen the latter, details such as names, precise years, and certain locations have been either altered or left out of the present study. I have also reformulated statistics in relative terms. The name Milltown was chosen because of its generic character, as it is a typical name for industrial communities in the Anglo-Saxon world. According to Wikipedia, a 'mill town, also known as factory town or mill village, is typically a settlement that developed around one or more mills or factories'. Using Milltown as the name for an industrial community thus suits the purpose of this study. Also for the purposes of confidentiality, I sometimes make reference to certain regional and local news articles, as well as various official reports, without mentioning either author(s) or title(s).

As regards informed consent, the process was as follows: As stated above, the observations in the activation measures were preceded by a process in which the coaches and/or the supervisors/manager informed the participants of the purpose of the study and that the participation was voluntary. In connection with this, the coaches and supervisors/

manager also referred to written information about the study. This approach, which was approved by the regional ethics board, was considered sufficient for two reasons. Firstly, as the observations were intended to focus on social situations and interactions, rather than on individuals, sensitive personal data was not the focus of analysis. Secondly, as activation measures are characterised by a relatively high turnover of participants, it was considered more reasonable for the coaches/managers to continuously inform about the study, rather than for me to do this every time I visited the measures. In terms of individual interviews, informed consent was signed by each who participated in the study. In the case of ethnographic conversations with locals and other actors around Milltown, I always informed about the purpose of the study and asked if they agreed to participate.

Although this study received approval from the regional ethics board prior to its inception, it is however important to consider the fact that ethnographic projects are characterised by relatively extensive, and sometimes close to informal contacts with field members, which makes for ethical reflections beyond checking 'consent boxes'. As summarised by David Wästerfors, ethnography is a human activity built on human relations, which are always 'ethically impregnated' (2019: 179). For example, whereas research subjects filling out surveys at their kitchen table may throw the questionnaire in the bin if they perceive it as offensive, or if they simply get tired of it, field members may feel uneasy asking the ethnographer to simply cut them out of the study. While in the field, I have tried to be sensitive regarding where to draw the line between a professional and a personal relationship. For example, while I may have felt inclined to give a participant a ride in my car, I avoided doing so as this may have elicited a sense of obligation in the participant. Likewise, on occasion, I have noticed former participants in the local supermarket and felt inclined to approach them. While I have sometimes done so, at other times I have chosen not to because I have recognised the risk of other people overhearing our conversation, thus revealing the situation of participants. However, when I have met coaches or supervisors engaged in activating unemployed, I have always stopped to have a chat.

Especially when conducting observations among groups that are more or less conditioned to be part of a certain environment for a

certain amount of time, such as the participants in Milltown's activation schemes, one must respect the fact that these are informants already on the margins of society. Although human beings are all multifaceted and have different roles in different situations, people who are observed in terms of partaking in activation schemes may feel that they are reduced to being merely 'welfare recipients'. In order to minimise the unpleasant feeling that may come with being observed as part of being enrolled in an activation measure, I tried to consider all informants who participated in the activation efforts as individuals whose identity extended well beyond the confinements' walls.

Moreover, especially at the youth activation centre, I sometimes noticed that I had to balance the role between being an (involuntary) authority similar to the coaches, catching myself nodding along as they informed the participants about something important, while other times finding myself laughing along with the participants as they engaged in gossip. At times, I have taken on one role or another for strategic reasons, while at other times this transpired automatically. When I have found myself in-between two competing roles (cf. Merton 1976), I have sometimes felt inclined to 'act' as a researcher by, for example, hiding behind some sort of cover, such as my computer, in order to give the impression that I was busy working (cf. Katz 2018: 83). At times when not much was happening at the youth centre, I also acted busy in order to save the coaches' faces, whom I could almost sense thinking 'What if he thinks we're not doing anything important here?' At the same time, this illustrates the fact that translating activation policy locally is an ambiguous task that involves a lot of down time.

Furthermore, while in the field, I noticed that even such minor things as when to take notes posed ethical considerations. For example, a notebook may easily terminate an interesting conversation or social interaction by reminding participants that they are in fact being observed (cf. Øygarden 2000). This marks the dilemma of doing ethnography, whereby the ideal of being a 'fly on the wall' may not always be concurrent with the stricter demands of present ethical requirements (cf. Wästerfors 2019). In such cases I have generally followed my instincts by either asking if it was okay for me to takes notes or letting an interesting situation or conversation being left untouched by saving the notetaking for later.

Translating policy to practice: The importance of showing humility

From an organisational perspective, it is important to note that although some of the empirical snapshots presented in the forthcoming chapters may come across as ambiguous, Milltown's activation of unemployed is no outlier in this regard. Translating policy to practice is, by nature, an ambiguous activity (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). Hence, humility is required for the enormous task of activating unemployed locally. The activation of the unemployed is often characterised by rather unclear expectations about how policy should be translated into practice. Therefore, no negative aspersions should be cast on the people who are responsible for ensuring that strategies and policies are followed through on. I believe that all coaches, supervisors, and other actors involved in activating Milltown's unemployed had the very best of intentions, seeking to make the situation of the unemployed in the activation schemes depicted in the forthcoming chapters as bearable as possible. Scarce resources, combined with the influx of unemployed clients to the Swedish social services, has meant that Swedish municipalities face enormous challenges in organising labour market policy locally. Therefore, it is necessary to respect that the challenge of managing active societies locally may entail practices that do not necessarily concur to the often fleeting nature (cf. Garsten & Jacobsson 2013) of national and supranational policy recommendations. With small means, representatives from the activation schemes depicted in the present thesis managed to establish close relations with the participants, who clearly appreciated the help they received and, it seemed, cared at least as much for their coaches and supervisors' wellbeing.

In the end, I hope that I have managed to show respect to both participants and actors involved in the governing of Milltown's unemployed.

I now move to the second part of the thesis, wherein I present the study's collage of empirical snapshots and findings, and present the conclusions and implications that I derived from them.

5. Strolling Milltown: An industrial community in transition

> To describe a culture, then, is not to recount the events of a society but to specify what one must know to make those events maximally probable.
>
> (Frake 1964: 112.)

The emergence of the industrial community is not an isolated process; it is embedded in an historical context whereby institutionalised ideas and practices are mixed with new ideas (Lundqvist 2001: 65f). In order to understand the working-class culture cultivated in Milltown, it is relevant to also consider what transpired before its first industrial operation was established in the late 1800s.

Being just one of several industrial communities situated in the countryside in the south-east of Sweden, the area surrounding what would later develop into Milltown had depended on fishing and agriculture. Life was not easy and after several years of crop failure during the mid-1800s, many families in the area (and Sweden in general) emigrated to North America in the hope of a better future. For many who stayed, the fideicommissum system, an ordinance ensuring that more or less extensive agricultural property passed from one generation to the next without being divided and thus reduced, enabled people to be employed at a manor, which granted them opportunities to lease more fertile land. The rent was paid by way of *corvée*, meaning unpaid day-labour at the manor, which was often located far from the crofters' housing. Together with so-called *state*-families (Swedish *statare*), referring to a kind of unpropertied families who did not own their own home and had neither cattle nor land, they made up somewhat of an agricultural proletariat at the manors. In return for their tiering work,

the workers on the fideicommissa were provided with social security such as housing and sometimes free schooling.

When Milltown's industrial operation was set in place at the end of the 1800s, the workers at the manors were then successively tied to the emerging industry. Hence, although Milltown did not develop into an industrial community before the end of the 19th century, a similar form of patriarchalism characterising early Swedish industrial communities (Lundqvist 2001) existed in the form of the fideicommissum system. As such, the advent of the industry in Milltown may be said to mark a story of continuity, rather than a disruption with institutionalised social patterns.

At around 1900, pressure on housing had already increased as the industry's take-up area was expanding rapidly. Around 1910, the company had approximately 300 workers employed in the factory. However, construction was slow, making the situation increasingly untenable. Soon, new owners took over the factory and small utility houses were built gradually alongside larger villas dedicated to the industry's foremen and managers. A decade later, the office manager at the company formed Milltown's Own Home Association, which made it possible for workers to buy land and build their own homes. This was made possible by advantageous state loans for which the industry and the municipality together stood surety.

Similar to other industrial communities at the time, the emerging industry thus served as the community-building force on the site by taking active part in Milltown's formation into a modern society. Around 1920, talented engineers were being recruited to the factory, and successively came to make their own imprint on the community's infrastructure. From then on, old gravel roads were expanded into modern systems of asphalt, and sewerage was installed alongside the electrification and installation of water pipes. The company also contributed to the construction of nurseries, a sports stadium, a bathhouse, and Milltown's community house, functioning as a place for cultural events and activities organised by the labour movement. Following Milltown's municipal formation in the 1940s, approximately 600 single-family houses and 50 apartments in multi-family houses were built to provide for the community's increasing inhabitants. A strong community of shared values then developed among corporate

managers, union representatives and community officials, all of whom were 'driven by faith in a better future for all', as it is stated in a report. Around 1950, the industry completed its last major property project, a mall which housed apartments, a post office, a bank, and a movie theatre. Functioning as a kind of advertising pillar for the company, a report by the regional archives stated that the building appears to be both an expression of faith in the future and the last effort made by the industry to mould and shape Milltown. As a sign of the times, its functionalist architecture gives witness of a spirit of progress and modernity.

By 1960, Milltown had a population of approximately 10,000 inhabitants, a quarter of whom were employed by the factory. During this time, another industry was also being established on the outskirts of the municipality. Although the new factory would eventually develop into the largest employer in the community, by this time Milltown's culture and characteristic as an industrial community had already been well established. However, the new factory reinforced Milltown as an industrial community by consolidating the culture and lifeworlds of its inhabitants.

Milltown as a 'people's home'?

Since the early 1900s, the notion of the Swedish 'people's home' has served as a metaphor and vision in Swedish social democratic rhetoric, promoting a universalistic notion of basic security for all. Although the concept probably derives from the German *Volkgemeinschaft*, used as much by right-wing movements as socialist groups,[16] it was not until the leader of the Swedish Social Democrats, Per Albin Hansson, used it during his parliamentary speech in 1928 that it gained nation-wide salience:

> If Swedish society is to become the good people's home, the class distinction must be removed, social care must be developed, economic equality prevail; the workers ought to take part in the financial management, democracy ought to be implemented and applied socially as well as economically.
>
> (Hansson 1928: 11, my translation.)

16. The notion of the 'people's home' was probably first launched in Sweden by the German-friendly conservative and political scientist Rudolf Kjellén (Dahlqvist 2002).

References to social care and economic equality in this quote reflect ideas about the 'peoples' home' that was linked with the emergence of the Swedish welfare state. The 'peoples' home' connotes vast construction and urban planning, particularly in line with functionalist architecture, social engineering, and welfare. Milltown appears as an illustrative example. In a photo-book about the Swedish 'people's home', the community serves as its protagonist. Although the book aims to reflect the 'people's home' in 'all its event', it only contains images of Milltown. Using rich imagery from the end of the Second World War up until the 1960s, the book depicts the modern welfare nation in its essence, interspersing masculinely coded images of men working in dusty factory premises with pictures from family outings to picturesque environments on the community's outskirts. At the inauguration of Milltown as a municipality in the 1940s, a report from the regional museum stated that the director of Milltown's industrial operation announced that 'the possibilities of developing Milltown into a model society, are great'.

From booming to glooming? Milltown lags behind

Through the nurturing of work ethic and community, Milltown thus flourished as an industrial community that contributed to Sweden's prosperity as a modern welfare state. However, after waves of industrial rationalisation coupled with relocation of production elsewhere, the economic crises of the 1990s and early 2000s marked the end of an era. From then on, the community started to lag behind economically and, it may be argued, culturally.

At the time of writing, the register-based workforce aged between 16–64 who are openly unemployed or active in some kind of labour market programme, is two per cent over the national average. Notably, the proportion of highly educated individuals in the community is close to 13 per cent below the national average, reflecting the community's situated lack of study tradition. Likewise, in relation to entrepreneurialism and start-ups, the amount of newly started companies per 1000 residents in the municipality is about five per cent lower the national average.

What is left in the wake of industrial re-structuring is thus a workforce that is still adapted to an economy dependent on production.

This is how Milltown's local business manager, who was responsible for spurring entrepreneurship throughout the municipality, reasoned in relation to the lack of entrepreneurial spirit among the community's residents:

> We work hard to create conditions for businesses, both in the short and long term. It is important in an industrial community, of course, since there is no such tradition here, with entrepreneurship. Instead, you inherit ideas from your parents. […] I don't know how to define it, it has to do with values and attitudes and the like, which are often inherited. Or, it becomes a tradition. In Milltown, it has not been necessary to start a company, you know, there has always been an employer here who has ensured that you get a job. […] Starting your own business has not been an option here. […] So we also work quite a lot with getting young people to become more enterprising. Not that everyone should become an entrepreneur, but more enterprising, we think would be good.
>
> (Interview with Milltown's business manager.)

Although the business manager, who was himself a Milltown native, attributed unemployment in the community to a lack of start-ups, the above quote illustrates the idea that entrepreneurship is not necessarily linked to the undertaking of businesses, but to a particular personality nurturing eagerness and initiative (cf. Holmqvist 2015; Lemke 2001). In line with the notion of 'entrepreneurial learning' (e.g. Westlund & Westlund 2007), which is nowadays included in Swedish pre-school curricula,[17] being an entrepreneur means being curious and alert. The entrepreneurial self is one who is able to navigate flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998) responsibly, always aiming at self-reliance. In Foucault's words:

> the stake in all neo-liberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo economicus* as partner of exchange with a *homo economicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.
>
> (Foucault 2008: 226.)

This logic, described by Foucault, imbues present activation policies (cf. Mc Glinn 2018: 61). Therefore, the task for Milltown as a municipality

17. Läroplan för förskolan, Lpfö 98, revised 2010.

was to turn unemployed members of the community into active and responsible individuals ready to engage 'work on the self' in order to transcend a local labour market that previously offered manual labour.

For the last decade, Milltown's youth unemployment has been particularly notable. Around 2010, after the global financial crisis had hit the community, approximately 30 per cent of the municipality's young adults aged between 15 and 24 were openly unemployed, well above the national average of 18 per cent at the time. As a result, the relatively anonymous little community of Milltown started to gain national media attention. As an explanation to local problems of unemployment, news outlets often focused on the idea that Milltown was a 'typical' industrial community,

> [Name of project leader] tells us that the reason why Milltown has such high unemployment among young people is that it is an industrial community. In the past, people went directly from high school to the industry without studying anything in between, so the community lacks a study tradition.
>
> (National news 2015.)

> As an industrial community, Milltown lacks a given study tradition, and many graduate high school without complete grades.
>
> (Regional news 2018.)

In a regional news article published prior to the inception of Milltown's youth activation centre, the section manager of the municipality's Public Employment Service (which is nowadays closed-down) stated:

> We observe an industrial mentality here, where you have become accustomed to the fact that there have always been jobs at your home turf, and where the parents have worked the industries. Young people want to stay in the community, and many have difficulty passing the high school grades.

In the same article, a young man who had decided to leave Milltown in order to increase his chances of finding a place in the labour market, and who thereby personified the active and entrepreneurial self emphasised in the active society, explained to the journalist that

> Most people I know here are unemployed, and there are almost no jobs to look for here. Many do not want to move.

Likewise, the expectation among young adults in Milltown to bypass high school was also brought up to discussion in conversations I had with people working in the environment, such as this librarian:

> You know, I come from [town with strong study tradition] where I have worked for several years too, and it's actually a big difference, I would say. […] The industrial mentality is very present here; I don't think young people are that interested in reading [laughs].

When discussing Milltown's situation of unemployment with locals, they were generally less likely to draw attention to the lack of study tradition in the community. Instead, they made roughly the same point by emphasising that unemployment appeared to be connected to the expectation among young adults to 'get a job' at the industry:

> I don't know, young people think there will be jobs here. I think it's the industrial mentality, you know, 'there are jobs in the factory'.
>
> (Woman in her 50s, Milltown's cafeteria.)

> Milltown is a typical industrial community. There has been a lot of work to do here, not only in the factory. Much was tied to the factory. One could always find work. It's the industrial mentality.
>
> (Man in his 60s, Milltown's cafeteria.)

Overall, Milltown is representative of a typical Swedish industrial community struggling with high rates of unemployment and a situated lack of study tradition. Material circumstances have also affected the community's cultural life. When a Swedish news outlet reached out to its listeners in order to rank the 'saddest town in Sweden', Milltown ended up on its list.

Once a lively community, arranging many yearly festivals such as the yearly 'Milltown days' and the Lions Club Carnival in which loads of people cheered as caravans of embellished vehicles slowly paraded the main street, the people of Milltown now seem to have turned to nostalgia. Out of Milltown's few annual happenings, the community's 'Strongest Man' competition is noteworthy, containing events such as tractor pulling and the infamous 'farmer's walk', in which participants carry heavy equipment reminiscent of the old tools once used by farmers. The competition has little to do with modern forms of

weightlifting, and instead appeals to times past when physical work dominated everyday life. It may be argued that the competition here serves to recreate the identity of a working-class people not afraid of 'digging in' when required (cf. Davis 1979). By succumbing to nostalgia, Milltown may here be seen as cultivating an aversion to uncertainty and complexity of modern life (Johannisson 2001).

Although there are many farmers who work off the land in and around Milltown, the community has – unlike some of its neighbouring environments – been unable to reinvent itself as a rural idyll.[18] People who demand the 'genuine' and 'authentic' (cf. Reckwitz 2020) may instead want to travel an hour or so to more gentrified coastal environments an hour away, which in the rest of this section will illuminate Milltown's difficulties in adapting to post-industrial society.

Due to the once cheap land prices, Milltown's neighbouring environments have witnessed processes of rural gentrification in recent decades. Starting with artists populating the area in the 1970s and 1980s, similar to David Ley's (2003) observation of gentrification processes, some decades later an affluent and high-demanding upper middle-class started to perceive these areas as culturally superior, and outmanoeuvred both artists and the people who had lived off the land for generations. Today, these environments offer a rich cultural life, with many cafeterias and restaurants being listed in the Swedish *White Guide* (Sweden's equivalent to the international *Michelin Guide*). As a result, whereas Milltown went from booming to glooming, some 50 kilometres away, similar milieus were being transformed with art galleries, innovative restaurants, and interesting architecture. While those areas are adorned with French creperies and 'bistros' marketing themselves with locally produced food served in picturesque milieus, families in Milltown who want to go out to dinner may instead choose a recently opened 1950s-inspired burger joint modelled after an American diner, where the portions are ample, and the interior is adorned with Elvis figures, American cars, and slot machines. This contrasts with the gentrified neighbouring environments, where portions are

18. Recently, however, artists' collectives have tried to appropriate the worn-out factory buildings into galleries for all kinds of modern art. Locals in the area seem rather indifferent to the initiatives, which are almost exclusively exhibited by artists originating from urban environments, and which often require visitors to be somewhat familiar with the fine arts in order to be recognised as interesting.

generally smaller, hence reflecting the particular sense of self-control and 'aesthetic awareness' practiced by the active upper-middle class (cf. Holmqvist 2015: 122f, 129).

Having spent a lot of time in both milieus, based on my observations, Milltowners are generally more relaxed about how they choose to present themselves to each other. Similar to other industrial environments, it is not uncommon to see people wearing blue-collar clothes to the grocery, for instance. Compared to more middle-class-dominated milieus, the performance of gender is also less elaborated, with many couples dressing alike by wearing, for example, similar heavy metal merchandise, or clothes representing the local sports association. Rather than expressing one's identity by wearing exclusive brands which imply refined taste, Milltowners' blue-collar clothes, or local sports merchandise instead echo firmness and community.

Moreover, aside from the usual offerings, such as groceries, hairdressers, and a liquor store, Milltown consist of a football pitch, a sports arena, a motorcycle dealership, a garden machinery shop, and various hardware stores, reflecting residents' sports and motor-oriented do-it-yourself-culture. There is the standard municipal library where residents may surf the Internet or attend occasional cultural evenings. The library also holds courses on debt restructuring and household economy, which testifies to what problems are present among residents. For the intellectually thirstier, the culturally richer environments an hour away offer many second-hand book shops containing titles such as Roland Barthes' *Writing degree zero*, Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic theory*, and Walter Benjamin's linguistic philosophical texts, in turn reflecting a higher composition of what Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1984) would label cultural capital.

In all, the differences between Milltown and its gentrified counterparts are rather significant and expressed politically too. Whereas Milltown has traditionally been a stronghold for the Social Democrats,[19] residents in the more gentrified environments tend to vote towards the liberal-right, hence marking a division between labour and capital.

19. Recently, however, similar to Goodhart's (2017) observation, there has been a strong trend among Swedish industrial communities and rural societies to abandon the Social Democrats in favour of more populist, right-wing parties (cf. Hamrud & Qvarford 2010; Uvell & Meier Carlsen 2014; Lodenius 2015).

Concluding reflection

In sum, after processes of industrial rationalisation, Milltown now tampers with adjusting its residents to a changed labour market. Once a flourishing industrial community that had to attract its workforce from countries such as Poland and Greece, the last decades have been marked by continuous redundancies due to automation and relocation of production. What is left of the industry besides control and design functions are occupations reserved for individuals with higher education. The community's situated lack of study tradition has meant that many job-seekers do not meet the qualifications. Thereto, unlike the neighbouring environments sharing roughly the same history, Milltown has – presumably due to its industrial operations – been unable to reinvent itself into a rural idyll and tourist area. As such, the community appears as an 'invisible landscape in the symbolic gap between urban cosmopolitanism and rural romanticism' (Andersson & Jansson 2012: 40, my translation). Thus, tampering both economically and culturally with remnants of its industrial history, Milltown is a well-suited locality for exploring the local translation of policies aiming at implementing the active society locally, which I turn to next.

6. Un-learning to labour? Enter Milltown's youth activation centre

> Global competition and new technological opportunities are changing the requirements for knowledge and skills. Both organizations and individuals must increasingly adapt, people have to change their jobs more often, learn new things and learn more. People can no longer go through working life and manage with the education they once acquired. The ability to change in itself has become an important skill, both for the individual and for the workplace.
>
> (ESF n.d. a)

In this chapter, I present and analyse empirical observations of everyday life in Milltown's youth activation centre, which is financed by the municipality together with funds from the European Social Fund. The quote above illustrates the emphasis on changeability in contemporary working life. It portrays a volatile labour market characterised by constant changes and the idea that the age of lifetime employment and stability, is over. In other words, the time of the traditional industrial community has come to an end. With a labour market adapted to what Sennett (1998) described in terms of flexible capitalism, new markets have opened up, offering often precarious employment with little room to build loyalty between employees and employer (Standing 2011).

Consequently, working life demands individuals who are indifferent to locality; that is, who lack a sense of local belonging, and whose aspirations are geared towards self-realisation rather than stability and predictability (cf. Rose 1999). As a primary actor for supporting employment throughout Europe, the European Social Fund offers municipalities tampering with unemployment means to arrange inter-

ventions that home in on individuals' aspirations in life. In the name of policy concepts such as lifelong learning, the fund supports activation projects that encourage the unemployed to engage in constant analysis and re-evaluation of their current situation and life course (cf. European Commission 2010). If successful, activation projects foster individuals' engagement in self-inventory processes, asking themselves what they can do to improve their positioning *vis-à-vis* the labour market. Thus, activation projects may be understood in terms of 'governmental techniques' (Rose 1999) aimed at rendering unemployed young adults responsible for their own labour market prospects. In other words, the European Social Fund helps municipalities to, at the local level, prepare young adults for a life in the active society. Compared to the more predictable life that characterised industrial society (Sennett 1998), this life is characterised by constant learning, where individuals ought to become both more flexible and more mobile.

Gathering forces

As described in the previous chapter, during the last few decades Milltown underwent major structural transitions. In this regard, the municipality does not differ from other industrial communities on the peripheries of the Western welfare states. The 1990–93 and 2008–09 economic crises triggered major upheavals in business, hitting the competitive manufacturing sector most of all, which in turn was followed by sharp cuts in the public sector as a result of the significant deficits in public finances. In 2013, Milltown 'gathered forces', as it was stated in regional news media, by organising a youth activation centre in the municipality. The centre would extend the municipality's activation responsibility of getting school drop-outs back into studies, with the activation of so-called NEETs in the community. As a result, young people between 16 and 29 years old, who had either not finished high school or who were unemployed were welcomed at the centre. Locally, the term 'homebound' (Swedish *hemmasittare*) was used by the coaches when referring to young adults enrolled in the operations, and presumptive participants.

Modelled according to the *one-stop shop* concept, the centre would gather several actors in the field of youth unemployment under one

roof to provide a combination of preventive and interventive measures under a single interface. The one-stop shop model has gained wide attention throughout Europe as a response to poor cooperation and coordination between various levels of welfare services. With the aim of 'putting the citizen at the centre' (Askim et al. 2011: 1465), it is an integrated service model that appears as 'administrative solutions' in the wake of increasingly specialised welfare systems (Minas 2014: 41).

Anette, an energetic woman in her 50s was the centre's project leader. She had initiated the centre and got things up and running. As a local politician, she knew what resources were available at the EU level and saw that the financing of the centre was achieved by answering a call from the European Social Fund. Entitled *Initiatives aimed at young women and men who do not complete upper secondary school*, the call served mainly to increase participation in education:

> The call falls within *program area 2*, specifically goal 2.2 which reads: 'Facilitate the establishment in working life and increase participation in education for young (15–24 year-old) women and men'. […] The target group for the support measures is young women and men who have reached the age of 15, are resident in Sweden and risk exclusion. Efforts can also be directed at staff who in their professional role work with the target group, where competence initiatives and learning forums in various forms can be implemented.
>
> (European Social Fund, my translation.)

The funds not only enabled the transformation of young Milltowners into 'participating' young adults, but also opened up for the transformation of, in this case, two municipal youth recreation leaders into coaches at the centre.[20] In line with contemporary labour market policy, by which individuals themselves are increasingly seen as responsible for becoming employable (e.g. Garsten & Jacobsson 2004), the coaches' task was to guide the participants on their journey towards self-reliance. As I will show below, the fact that the coaches already knew several of the young adults who participated in the centre's activities had an effect on the social relations developing in the centre.

20. In Sweden, youth recreation leaders (Swedish *fritidsledare*) undergo two years of training at a folk high school. They are a kind of role model for children and young people and mainly work at leisure centres, schools, and in various youth projects.

In the first project run by the activation centre, the goal was to motivate and inspire young people to resume their studies after dropping out or never starting upper secondary education. The project application states that the specific goal was to 'increase employment and participation in education among young (15–24-year-old) unemployed women and men and other young people who are neither working nor studying'. In a supplementary application, three of the municipalities engaged in the project increased the target group to 16–29-year-olds.

In a first evaluation of the first project conducted at Milltown's activation centre, the activities offered to young adults at risk of social exclusion were summarised as follows:

> At the youth centre, young people could get individual support in the form of, for example, study and career guidance, help writing a CV, get in touch with employers, or visit various forms of educations and workplaces. The project also offered group activities such as study visits and theme evenings on topics such as job shortages, study techniques and health.
>
> (Excerpt from project evaluation, my translation.)

In this excerpt, we learn that the young adults attending Milltown's activation centre received important knowledge of the labour market in the form of what jobs are demanded, as well as what education was required for the unemployed young adults to come closer to it. As we shall see, when attending the activation centre for myself, I soon learned that the aspects of 'health' mentioned by the very the end of the quote took up a large part of the weekly activities. The final report quoted above also stated that the coaches 'had to collaborate with other actors, such as adolescent psychiatry' due to observed 'problems with drug abuse' among individuals enrolled in the centre. As commonly observed in former industrial communities tampering with unemployment, Milltown has seen an increase in criminality and drug-related issues among its young adults. According to some of the locals I have conversed with, 'gangsters' arrive to Milltown from nearby cities to sell drugs to the young people hanging out by the community's kiosk. Wearing Adidas tracksuit trousers with dark hoodies over their heads, the youngsters hanging out by the kiosk are reminiscent of so-called NEDs ('non-educated delinquents'), denoting young

people of low social standing with a violent disposition who spread fear in the northern parts of the UK. However, according to youth recreation leaders in Milltown they are less threatening than they look, and seldom act aggressively.

When I have met this group of young men outside the kiosk in the evenings, they have appeared as somewhat unambitious and introverted. In the sociologist Robert K. Merton's (1968) words, they come across as 'social dropouts', personifying what he labelled 'retreatism' as a sixth form of normlessness, or *anomie*, in modern society. Other places where the drug-dealing is said to take place are at the train station and the parking lot outside Milltown's main grocery. In an attempt to control the drug situation, the municipality called 48 parents of children who used or who were considered at risk of using drugs to a drug clinic in the municipality. However, only 10 of the 48 parents attended the meetings, presumably reflecting processes of social reproduction in the community. As one of the coaches at the centre stated, 'substance abuse and addiction often runs in the family here'. This gives strength to studies suggesting that problems with alcohol and drug addiction may follow in the wake of industrial rationalisation (e.g. Sadler & Furr-Holden 2019).

Although passivity in general may be said to have become perhaps *the* hazard of our time (cf. Elm Larsen 2005), the passivity of young people in particular has been portrayed as destructive for society. This is reflected in the debate surrounding the so-called *incel* movement, referring to a movement among young men who have directed their self-loathing at not being sexually active away from themselves towards women in particular, resulting in a series of acts of violence (Hoffman et al. 2020). Besides increasing labour market participation in society, the increasing practice of organising activation projects targeting young adults throughout Europe may here be seen as a way of also mitigating the presumably harmful effects of inactivity.

During the periods that I resided in Milltown to conduct the present study, I was able to follow two EU-funded activation projects running at the municipality's youth activation centre. Before I started to make visits to the centre, the first project quoted above had ended and been replaced by a project that would basically work as a continuation of the former. For the sake of simplicity, however, I have cho-

sen to refer to the two projects simply as Project 1 and Project 2 (see Table 2). Although the second project was geared towards a different target group than Project 1, I will show how the everyday practices operating in the centre's premise did not differ considerably between the two projects.

Table 2. Summary of the two ESF-funded activation projects observed in Milltown's youth activation centre

PROJECT	TIME FRAME	TARGET GROUP	MAIN OBJECTIVES
1	Autumn 2016–Spring 2018	Young adults aged 15–24 who were not in education, employment, or training. In a supplementary application to the European Social Fund (ESF), Milltown extended the target group to young adults aged 16–29.	To increase employment and participation in education.
2	Spring 2018–Autumn 2021	Young adults aged 16–29 with neuropsychiatric diagnoses, as well as potential employers with interest in the target group.	To increase social inclusion by motivating participants to take up studies, find employment or internships, as well as increase potential employers' knowledge of the target group.

The premise

Milltown's youth activation centre was located in one of the municipalities two secondary schools, not far from the town square. There, it made use of a large venue that normally functioned as the municipality's leisure centre, which normally offered young people a place to hang out during evenings and weekends. As such, it was a place that was familiar to the majority of young Milltowners, who had either passed it by when entering the school or engaged in activities such as billiards, e-sports, baking, board games, or various theme nights outside of school. Locating activation measures in leisure centres is

not uncommon in Sweden, especially if such measures have not yet been institutionalised, and provided with their own venue (Panican & Ulmestig 2017: 7).

Inside, a large room with a black-and-white chequered floor was used as the main meeting room. It was here, by a group of sofas, that the coaches met with the participants in the mornings. Along the windows facing the schoolyard, some tables and chairs were lined up where participants were able to receive help filling out various forms and applications and apply for jobs and internships. On the opposite side of the room, a collage of messages made by young Milltowners hung on the wall. Adorned with glitter and various illustrations, in bright colours they contained self-empowering messages, such as 'Love yourself', 'You're the best!', and 'You look great today!' By reminding the participants not to self-incriminate, the messages at the same time reflected the rationality inherent in the active society whereby individuals increasingly dislocate structural conflicts to the self and one's own shortcomings (e.g. Crespo Suárez & Serrano Pascual 2007; Mikelatou & Arvanitis 2018). Only one of the messages on the wall was geared towards an object outside of the self. By stating, simply, 'fuck drugs', the message adhered to the discussion above of increased drug usage in the community. In this way, while the messages were empowering, they were also aligned with socio-political rationales, illustrating how contemporary modes of government 'readily turn into self-government' (Garsten & Jacobsson 2013: 828). By turning the gaze away from structural conflicts towards the self, the messages may be seen as a first step in opening up for governmental interventions aimed at self-betterment in line with notions of employability and entrepreneurship (cf. Dean 1995; Sunnerfjell 2022).

By the spring of 2018, the centre also made use of venues in the school's basement, such as a group room with a whiteboard, and a small kitchen. Although the operations had been ongoing for some time when I first arrived at the centre, there seemed to be some confusion among some of the participants as to what venue in the school they were supposed to meet up in the morning, and what time. Sometimes the morning meetings and breakfasts with the participants were held in the larger venue upstairs, while at other times the participants met with the coaches downstairs and had their breakfast there instead.

On occasions, when we walked as a group through the school premises' venues in-between activities, I felt as if we were outcasts. Looking at us curiously, it was clear that the school's pupils knew that our group was not part of the regular operations at school.

During later visits at the centre, however, things became more organised and professional. By 2019, the youth activation centre disposed of its own group room, kitchen, and restroom, which were connected to each other by a corridor in which individual working booths had been set up. As such, it generally gave the impression of a more professional operation.

The atmosphere

Aside from Anette, who was the centre's project leader, the person in charge of the centre's frontline operations was Milltown's activation manager, Monica, a woman in her early 50s whose welcoming smile and concern for the participants contributed to a warm and relaxed atmosphere. Like the other coaches, her compassion for the participants was palpable. With Milltown being a small rural town, Monica and the coaches often had informal knowledge of the participants and their families, which, compared to observations I have made in similar activation projects elsewhere (Sunnerfjell 2022), contributed to more personal social interactions. Having worked as youth recreation leaders in the community, they had detailed information on whose parent worked where, and what social problems were found in different families. This reflects the social control often prevailing in Swedish industrial communities, which are often located in geographically rural, small-town milieus (cf. Ericsson 1997: 15). Similarly, caseworkers at the Public Employment Service explained to me that 'it was easier before [the local office was closed down] to locate unemployed'. By then, when they were still situated in Milltown, they were able use their informal knowledge of the community and its residents in their daily work:

> We could simply ride the car and holler at someone, like, 'Hey, Peter, what are you doing sitting there? Jump in the car and we can have a meeting at the office!'
>
> (Interview with caseworkers at the Public Employment Service.)

Despite contributing to a more personal relationship between actors involved with mitigating unemployed in Milltown, this form of social control is not always positive. On the contrary, it can also lead to stigmatisation, where collective memories of past generations' misbehaviours may sometimes live on and interact in the present. For example, I could sometimes overhear the coaches conversating about families in Milltown whose children they expected to enrol in the centre, stating that they 'should keep an eye out' for someone whose parents had been into trouble lately. The question of what becomes of such social categorisation – that is, whether it may actually contribute to shape misbehaviour among young adults in communities like Milltown – is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Although the activation centre and the municipal activation responsibility applies to both women and men, during my initial observations at the centre I noticed that only male participants were partaking in the scheduled activities. When I asked Monica and the coaches why this was, they explained to me that the young women were 'more homebound' and 'more difficult to get in touch with' than the young men. I soon learned that female participants who were enrolled in the centre instead often showed up at the centre's drop-in sessions, where they were able to receive individualised help with finding internships or jobs, or filling out various forms, but without partaking in the daily group activities.

The fact that young women were perceived as harder to locate and motivate to attend the group activities in the centre may have different explanations. Firstly, it is well-known that women with difficulties are more likely to suffer from depression than men (Cyranowski et al. 2000), hence shying away from social interactions. Compared to women, men on the other hand are more likely to 'act out' negative emotions by such means as acting in an unruly manner (e.g. Streitmatter 1994: 153). Consequently, this may have led to more young men being recognised as NEETs by Monica and the coaches. Secondly, as Willis (1993 [1977]) observed, working-class culture has an overtone of masculinity. Similarly, the atmosphere in Milltown's youth activation centre was characterised by a particular form of humour consisting of hard but hearty jokes among the young men who participated in the activities. This may explain why girls tended to attend the drop-ins

more than boys. However, the fact that there were initially more boys than girls attending the scheduled activities at the centre did change with Project 2, to which I return below. From then on, another tone was struck at the centre, downplaying the 'laddish' atmosphere in favour of a more caring and thereby paternal institutional discourse geared towards the participants' medical statuses.

From my first set of observations in the centre in 2018, it was clear to me that the relation between the participants and the coaches resembled that of unruly (yet charming) boys and their 'extra-mothers', rather than appearing to be strictly professional. This was also made explicit by the participants, who made such comments as 'They're like our mothers' when I asked what they thought of Monica and the coaches. I also noted situations in which the participants stated things such as 'Lotta, you're not my mother!' In both cases, by comparing the social relation to the coaches in terms of an abstracted family, sayings like this made reference to the realm of the domestic value sphere described by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).

On one hand, the observation that a domestic atmosphere seemed to be cultivated in the centre may be the result of a strategy among the coaches to build trust and thereby create bonds of loyalty with the participants. On the other hand, the family-like atmosphere in the centre may also have resulted from the fact that the coaches had worked as youth recreation leaders prior to the centre's inception, hence operating as a kind of grown-up role models rather than 'experts on subjectivity' (Rose 1999). Previous research has pointed out that is it not uncommon for young people to view youth recreation leaders as a kind of 'extra parents' (Grönvik 2015). This would indicate a difficulty of boundary-making among the coaches, who, as we shall see below, sometimes had trouble separating their previous work from being coaches in the centre.

As discussed previously, turning policy into practice is ambiguous work (e.g. Sahlin & Wedlin 2008). This is particularly so for individuals with no professional expertise or experience of turning the presumed passive into active and employable individuals. Creating an atmosphere in which the participants felt 'at home' appears as a reasonable tactic of activating Milltown's so-called 'homebound' young adults. As stated above, it was clear how the participants received a

warm and personal treatment from the coaches, who welcomed each participant every morning with humorous comments and laughter. Remarks such as 'Oh, someone looks tired today!' were an appreciated and effective form of social bonding that also gave witness of an interest and care for the participants' personal lives. By having the participants throwing something back at the coaches – 'Look who's talking!' – the morning ritual seemed completed, and the daily activities could start.

As Willis (1993 [1977]: 55) remarked, 'There is a real skill in being able to use this language [wit] with fluency: to identify the points on which you are being "kidded" and to have appropriate responses ready in order to avoid further baiting'. Humour in fact served several purposes in the centre. For example, it served to ease the sometimes tardy transition in the centre's morning meetings, wherein the participants had breakfast while waiting for the day's scheduled activities to begin. Making remarks about something someone said or playing practical jokes on each other and the coaches could make the time go faster.

To engage in rituals of baiting each other, a particular sense of trust was created between the coaches and 'their' participants. Importantly, participants could also use humour as a way of counterbalancing situations in which the atmosphere turned a bit 'too' formal in the centre. This included instances in which the coaches sought to steer or end discussions that had departed from scheduled activities. In order to restore authority in the group, on such occasions, the atmosphere could then suddenly turn 'stiff', which sometimes created a sense of uncanniness, not only among the participants, but also among the coaches:

> [A recently cheerful atmosphere is suddenly interrupted by a question] Lotta interrupts the conversation [between Christian and the other participants sitting around the table]. She leans over him as he is sitting by the computer, asking if he is 'finding any jobs?' Christian scrolls the webpage. All is silent now. Suddenly, he says 'Well, music teacher, that one I can apply for!' The group starts to laugh, and Lotta can't help but smile also.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Here, the idea that Christian, a tall 27-year-old Milltowner with a PT education, who allegedly had no musical talent, would apply for a job

as a music teacher helped counterbalance a moment whereby the atmosphere in the group had suddenly strayed too much from the jokingly spirit that otherwise prevailed in the group.

During my visits to the centre, I could also notice how jokes, puns, and above all, irony, were used as ways of enforcing a 'collective line' of appropriate behaviour in the group (Willis 1993 [1977]: 97). For example, if the group considered that someone was acting 'silly' (usually in the form of expressing some pretension which deviated from the Bourdieusian aesthetics of necessity), this was corrected with a loud laugh or a stinging comment. Thus, humour served both as a way for participants to correct each other and the coaches, and to relieve each other from decrees of acting in ways that were not consistent with the working-class culture that they otherwise lived and breathed.

Humour in general also seemed to be an organising principle at the centre in terms of how it distributed status within the group. For example, Lenny, a somewhat introverted and quiet young man who partook in the centre's activities during 2019, received as much status as his co-participants despite not sharing the same interest as his comrades. Being the group's intellectual, he was liked within the group on the merit of his 'funny bones',

> when we're sitting in the main venue (waiting out the time, it feels like), one of the coaches asks which celebrity each of us would like to meet in person. Magnus answers Arnold Schwarzenegger (Magnus is interested in body building). Lenny, who is one of few in the group who is interested in politics, silently answers 'Donald Trump'. 'How come?', Lotta asks, now enthusiastic. 'I would thank him for all the memes [internet jokes] he contributed to', Lenny quickly replies. The coaches laugh.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

An hour or so later, coach Maggie explained that she would 'not be in tomorrow' as she was going to a nearby city. 'Great', Lenny stated bluntly, 'then it'll be quiet here'. Although this may seem somewhat harsh, Maggie laughed out load (so did the participants), as she knew Lenny did not mean her any harm. Had it not been for the domestic atmosphere in the group, it was my firm impression that Lenny had not felt comfortable addressing Maggie's absence in this way. As such, the instance marked a result of successful integration, whereupon Lenny's

recognition in the group made him confident enough to push boundaries by delivering mischief as above.

Monica and the coaches thus did what they could to create a welcoming atmosphere for Milltown's 'homebound' young adults. However, I soon noticed that the centre's activities and expectations on the participants seemed somewhat unclear, which as previously mentioned is not surprising considering the ambiguous nature of such an enterprise. A typical morning at the centre could play out as follows:

> We were sitting at the sofas. Monica and the others have prepared breakfast, consisting of baguettes with ham, cheese and paprikas, together with orange juice and coffee. I wonder where the participants are. Shortly after 09:00, however, Magnus entered through the door, wearing his worker's jacket. The coaches turned around: 'Oh, hi Magnus!', Maggie shouted, 'Coffee and sandwich for the gentleman?' Magnus had his big smile on his face, and without taking his jacket off, he sat down besides us in the sofa. 'How did things turn out with the car?', asks Maggie. 'Still some things to be fixed, but I had to get here, right?!' he replied charmingly, and we all started to laugh. In this way, the morning transpired by us having a good time, chatting and drinking coffee. When I left at lunch however, I felt as if we had sat through time.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Having observed locally organised activation schemes elsewhere (Sunnerfjell 2022), I had expected to encounter a more formal setting, with fixed hours and a more pronounced hierarchy between the coaches and the participants. However, at Milltown's activation centre, particularly the coaches' relation to the participants seemed to make it hard to facilitate an organisation similar to the aforementioned schemes. In truth, the relation between some of the coaches and the participants in the centre sometimes resembled that of friends rather than anything else. For example, one of the coaches could sometimes join participants who wanted to smoke a cigarette in-between activities. The coach herself sometimes initiated smoking breaks by suddenly looking at the participants, saying things like 'perhaps it's time for some fresh air?', or 'Well, first I am going to have myself a poison stick [Swedish *giftpinne*], wanna join?' On one hand, I interpreted such instances as a way for this coach, who shared a similar jargon and sense of humour as the participants, to let off steam by stepping out of her professional role, which she was not that comfortable with.

When having a smoke with the participants, she entered an informal organisational zone (cf. Bolton 2005: 142), wherein she became one with the participants.

Being a product of the same working-class culture as her participants, this coach may be seen as gravitating towards what Erving Goffman, using his infamous theatrical metaphors to conceptualise social interactions, labelled a backstage area, devoid of decrees of having to engage in acts of impression management by performing the role as an activation professional.[21] On the other hand, initiating smoke breaks with the participants may also be understood as a way for her to create bonds with the participants. Although the coaches' relation to the participants was generally admirable, this coach seemed to have a special relation with the young adults in the centre. Nonetheless, encouraging smoke breaks can rarely be seen as a way of achieving active societies promoting the fostering of employable citizens nurturing a healthy and self-controlled lifestyle (cf. Cederström & Spicer 2015).[22]

Routines

As Milltown's activation manager, Monica was responsible for making sure that the municipality followed the activation responsibility regulated by the *School Act*. As stated previously, this is an obligation to offer young people who have not completed upper secondary school appropriate individual measures, aimed firstly at resuming studies and secondly at finding internships or employment. Monica explained to me how, at the beginning of each month, she reviewed all the names of young people who were registered as NEETs in the municipality. Together with the other coaches, she initiated contacts with each new name on the list according to the routine illustrated in Figure 1 below.

21. Although Goffman's dramaturgical sociology has been criticised for tending to oversee notions of class, he did in fact remark that, compared to people of higher ranks in society, who tends to gravitate and feel comfortable in frontstage areas, the working-class usually do the opposite by gravitating towards backstage areas (Goffman 1956: 77, 81).

22. The fact that the coach initiating smoking breaks with the participants did not seem to be bothered by my presence during such instances may reflect the fact that I had become an accepted part of the group without suspicious motives, as it were.

WHAT	HOW	WHEN	RESPONSIBLE	FOLLOW UP
Telephone; text message; Facebook or other social media messages	All young people who end up on the municipal activation list we try to reach via phone call, texting or Facebook.	Regularly as new names are actualised.	Staff within the municipal activation responsibility.	This is followed up with Postcard 1: the young people we did not get hold of; Postcard 2: the young people with whom we have established contact.
Postcard 1	All young people we cannot get hold of will receive a postcard sent home with info about the municipal activation responsibility.	When we have been unsuccessful in trying to reach someone without results for four weeks.	The municipal activation manager.	Postcard 1 is followed by Postcard 2 after about 4 weeks, containing information about current activities.
Postcard 2	All young people on the municipal activation list receive information on current activities.	One month after the first postcard was sent home.	Staff within the municipal activation responsibility.	The postcard is followed up with home visits after yet another month.
Home visit	Home visit with two people from the municipal activation responsibility. If the person is not at home, a third postcard is issued, stating that the municipal responsibility has been there and the youth is again asked to initiate contact.	Within one month of the second postcard being sent home.	Staff within the municipal activation responsibility.	Young people under the age of 18 are reported to the social services if the municipal activation responsibility fail to get in touch. The municipal activation responsibility continues to look for other young people based on the routine.
Letter	All pupils with study certificates receive a letter with information about the municipal activation responsibility.	In connection with graduation.	High school staff in consultation with the municipal activation manager.	This letter is followed up with Postcard 1 after about three months.

Figure 1. Milltown's routine for managing the municipal activation responsibility, translated by myself.

According to the municipal activation responsibility, there needs to be a detailed action plan that states each step in the process of activating young adults. When I asked Monica if each step in the process detailed in Figure 1 was followed meticulously, her answer was that they 'did their best'. As explained above, the relatively small municipality of Milltown here made for a particular form of social control enabling the coaches to locate 'homebound' young adults at an early stage. With experience of working as youth recreation leaders in the municipality, Monica and the coaches had informal knowledge of what young people to keep an eye on in the community, and that were at risk of social exclusion. By possessing this type of informal knowledge, they could engage in social control, based on monitoring the youth-at-risk in line with the current social investment approach promoted by the European Commission, aiming to prevent unemployment and inactivity at an early stage (Dahmen 2021: 9f). In line with the active society orientation, the idea here is to break destructive patterns in time by getting young adults more engaged in society (cf. Elm Larsen 2005).

During my observations at Milltown's youth activation centre, the weekly routines were largely the same. At 9 a.m., Monica and the coaches prepared to receive the participants, who dropped in one by one to the large common area that otherwise functioned as the municipality's youth leisure centre. As described above, when the participants arrived, a few light-hearted comments were usually exchanged between them and the coaches. When the expected number of participants for the day were in place, breakfast was offered. Thereafter, the daily activities started, consisting of both joint group activities such as discussions on various topics, study visits to local businesses, gym activities, and food cooking, as well as more individualised tasks whereby participants received help with searching for jobs or internships, doing school homework (for the ones who were still enrolled in school), and filling out so-called activity reports that enabled economic means.[23] In the activity report, the coaches helped each participant construct a coherent narrative of what was going on in the centre,

23. The activity report was introduced on September 1, 2013. Every month, a registered jobseeker at the Public Employment Service must document what she or he has done to end their unemployment based on five options: number of jobs applied for, declarations of interest/CV, interviews, recruitment meetings, or other activities, such as participation in activation projects financed by the European Social Fund.

when, in reality, some of the activities included a lot of time when not much was happening. Nevertheless, the activity report objectified a joint meaning definition between the coaches and participants of what had transpired during the week.

In the next section, I turn to the concrete practices of activating Milltown's young adults. In the various subsections, I will show what became of policy concepts such as lifelong learning, employability, and life-skills when translated to practice by four individuals with no professional expertise of preparing unemployed people to enter the labour market, yet charged with warmth and compassion for the participants with whom they shared belonging to the community.

Milltown's quest for lifelong learning

In order to adapt Milltown as a former industrial community to a changed labour market, one of the municipality's overarching objectives was to increase 'the proportion of girls and boys in year 9 who have reached at least the grade E [pass] in all subjects in compulsory school'. The goal was formulated under the heading of 'Lifelong learning', which in contemporary policy recommendations emphasises high-quality education and the pursuit of knowledge important for individuals' competitiveness and employability (European Commission 2019). The concept is primarily aimed at adapting people of working age to a changed and flexible labour market by increasing individuals' participation in education and constant updating of theoretical skills. Nevertheless, in Milltown the notion of lifelong learning was employed to pupils in undergraduate school as a way of managing the challenge of mitigating unemployment locally. This illustrates how discourses may start to disperse into areas where they were not supposed to be applicable in the first place (cf. Sahlin & Wedlin 2008). In Milltown, the concept of lifelong learning appeared as a reasonable way of preventing the working-class from reproducing itself at an early stage. In other words, the municipality entered lifelong learning as part of the its work to adapt the community's alleged 'industrial mentality' to a changed labour market.

From the outset of my fieldwork in the activation centre, I noticed how most of the participants activated therein desired jobs similar to

those held by previous generations; that is, jobs enabling them to 'work with one's hands', as it was often put. Whereas male participants here mentioned occupations such as welder, carpenter, or electrician, the young women in the centre, whom I met during later phases of fieldwork, instead, for example, mentioned hairdresser and animal handler as desired future occupations. A few also mentioned other jobs, such a young woman who partook in the centre's activities in 2020, and who reasoned that 'being an economist would be interesting'. Her mother had worked with 'something like accounting', she told me, hence her 'horizon of expectation' (Koselleck 1985) may be said to be somewhat wider than that of her co-participants, whose parents often occupied manual jobs or worked with nursing support in public health care. Interestingly, in all my contacts with participants at the centre, no one mentioned the local industries as a possible employer. This suggests that the participants enrolled in the youth activation centre were well aware that the industries nowadays rarely employed people anymore, and that if they did, they were looking for people with knowledge acquired through higher education. Therefore, those who desired to do manual labour had other workplaces in mind, such as small businesses in and around Milltown, or industries in nearby communities (sometimes, however, they had no concrete examples of where they could apply for manual jobs).

Below is a personal letter attached to a job application authored by a participant who was enrolled in the centre's operations during 2019. By reflecting the desire to work manually, the letter illustrates the kind of job aspirations that were nurtured among male participants in the centre:

> Personal letter
>
> Hi,
> My name is […] and I'm almost 23 years old. I live in Milltown with my family. My latest education is as a welder. I am a person who is always willing to work, I am always ready to learn something new, I am punctual and preferably in place a little before appointed time. Those who know me say that I am persistent, calm and social. Now that I have finished my education, I want to get started working; preferably, I want to work in industry, warehousing or assembly, where labour is needed. I can start as soon as possible.

My interests are hanging out with friends, my family and now I have also started working out.
I look forward to hearing from you. I also attach my CV.

Sincerely yours,
[Name]
[Email]
[Phone number]

(Personal letter authored by participant at Milltown's youth activation centre.)

Somewhat contrary to the presumed passive young adults heard of in media and among actors involved with governing Milltown's young unemployed, this participant indicated an eagerness to 'get to work'. So did many of the young adults I conversated with both inside and outside of Milltown's activation schemes. An illustrating example of work ethic displayed by young adults was Liam, a 19-year-old enrolled in the youth activation center due to falling behind in school:

LIAM: For three years, I have worked during all school breaks and so on. At a construction company in [place near Milltown], for example. In ninth grade, I had the choice of going on an internship, or basically being dropped out of school. Then it became the internship, and I got a foot into that company.

[…]

ME: Compared to your friends, would you say that it's normal to be working in the summer here in Milltown?

LIAM: Yes, I would say that if you want a summer job, you can get it. There are many small businesses, and many who are open to young people who want to work. But … if there are many [jobs], I do not know. But I would probably say that if you want a summer job, you can get it.

ME: Do you think that your friends have the same work ethic as you?

LIAM: Well, not the majority, anyway.

ME: What do they do, in the summer, while you are working?

LIAM: Well, then they probably lay on the beach.

ME: Oh, that doesn't sound too much fun for you?

LIAM: No, but I usually say that, like, I'd rather have three really fun weekends, you know, when I have got the money.

In this quote, Liam offered a more nuanced picture of Milltown's situation than the one described in the media and among politicians. On one hand, he testified to the fact that young people in the community could display both work ethic and initiative, while on the other hand,

he gave somewhat inconsistent statements as to whether there were actually jobs to find in the local labour market.

By emphasising notions of punctuality and work ethic, the above depictions of participants' approaches to work reminded me of a conversation I had with voluntaries at Milltown's industrial museum, who attributed the notion of an 'industrial mentality' to things such as timeliness and morals:

> ME: In newspapers and the like, one often hears that the problem of unemployment here in Milltown has to do with what they call a persistent industrial mentality. Do you think this is true? What is an industrial mentality?
>
> VOLUNTARY 1: Oh, well, an industrial mentality, that is … I would say it involves morals. Coming to work in time, working hard. That sort of thing.
>
> VOLUNTARY 2: To be willing to work. To not be afraid of 'digging in'.

In this conversation, the voluntaries' depiction of the 'industrial mentality' echoes Ambjörnsson's (1988, 1992) 'conscientious worker', who has pride and dignity in taking work seriously, and who are orderly. As such, it was an understanding of the 'industrial mentality' that was in stark contrast with understanding of the 'industrial mentality' as a passive and somewhat lazy subject lacking initiative and drive. In Milltown, the 'industrial mentality' thereby seemed to have different meanings depending on which generation applied the term (most of the voluntaries at the industrial museum were in the retiring age). Among the voluntary enthusiasts in the industrial museum, the joint meaning definition of the term applied to the days in which Milltown flourished, and whereby a strong work ethic and comradeship prevailed among those who worked the industry. This, I suggest, also reflects the shifting meaning of the term mentality itself, which in many cases today is used in a rather pejorative way to describe the mindset of individuals or groups considered to display a 'wrong' set of attitudes or behaviours. This is seen with certain strands of contemporary management literature, for instance, by which 'having a mentality' often implies that individuals are in need of some kind of transformation (cf. Brodsky 2002). Likewise, typing the word 'mentality' into the online *Cambridge Dictionary* renders results such as 'I can't understand the mentality of people who hurt animals', 'He hopes that closer links between Britain and the rest of Europe will change the British mentality towards foreigners',

and 'They buy everything on credit – they have this play now, pay later mentality'. Seen through this light, the idea of a stagnated 'industrial mentality' causing unemployment by lacking take-on-ability, fits neatly with the neoliberal discourse of individual responsibilisation entailed in the active society.

Although the participants at the youth activation centre most often attributed the idea of work to doing manual labour (cf. Brismark 2006), among the participants who imagined futures other than pursuing blue-collar jobs, many surprisingly mentioned 'youth recreation leader' as a desired future occupation. Hence, they aspired to occupy the same job as the coaches had previous to the centre's inception. Lasse, a 20-year-old male participant who were enrolled in the second EU-funded project running in the centre, is an example. During an interview, I asked Lasse why he was interested in taking this particular path,

> ME: What was your specialisation [in high school]?
> LASSE: The child recreation program.
> ME: How come, you think?
> LASSE: I think it has a lot to do with Denny [youth recreation leader in Milltown, nice guy]. That he, like, they [Denny and the coaches at the centre] were my recreation leaders when I was young, and I looked up to them a lot. And I have always felt that I am social and the like, and that I wanted to become a youth recreation leader.

It is impossible to know for sure whether Lasse had in fact always nurtured the desire to become a youth recreation leader, or if this choice of occupation was influenced by the coaches in the centre. However, the fact that several of the young adults mentioned this occupation as a reasonable alternative to manual labour points to the influence of the coaches. Likewise, in a news article covering the work done at Milltown's activation centre, another young adult enrolled in the operations explained to the journalist that it suddenly 'came clear' to him that he wanted to become a youth recreation leader. This may reflect the fact that participants at the youth activation centre still viewed Monica and the other coaches as youth recreation leaders rather than professionals whose task was to bring them closer to the labour market. In the cases where the participants gave expression to alternatives other than manual work, it thus appears as if the transformation of the

alleged 'industrial mentality' seemed to have worked through unintentional processes of identification with the coaches, rather than through governmental attempts of forming subjectivity (Dean 1995).

The dilemma of a theoretical education

In light of the local understanding of lifelong learning in Milltown, one of the overarching aims of Project 1 housed in the youth activation centre was to motivate participants to pursue or resume education. However, I soon noticed a tension involving the incongruence between the coaches' task of motivating participants to depart from previous generations' life courses by taking up school, and how they reasoned in relation to more theoretically oriented programmes in upper secondary school. During one of my initial observations in the centre in 2018, the coaches explained to me that a 'common mistake', particularly among young women enrolled in the centre, was choosing the social science programme in high school, as this 'would lead them nowhere':

> They [the parents] probably think it [the social science programme] will help them get a job, you know, but it's really not that easy.
>
> (Monica.)

What Monica and the coaches referred to here was the fact that the Swedish social science programme is a college preparatory programme, something which they argued was seldom reflected upon among participants and their parents. The idea that the social science programme was 'broad' and could 'lead to many different things' was also confirmed in interviews I conducted with caseworkers at the Public Employment Service, who – like Monica and the coaches at the activation centre – felt it was problematic that an increasing number of young Milltowners chose theoretically oriented programmes as part of upper secondary school:

> CASEWORKER 1: They start, but drop out. Then there are many who have chosen the wrong specialisation, you know. They have chosen the social science orientation, or music, but then they don't move on [to higher education]. They stop there. 'No, I don't want to study, I want a job'. And it's a very long distance to a job.
>
> […]

ME: But the fact that they [young Milltowners] choose a social science orientation in upper secondary school, how does this go together [with the discourse on the 'industrial mentality']?

CASEWORKER 2: I think that perhaps they didn't get their first choice … you know. Maybe there is also this idea that if you take the social science programme, you can always do something else, because it is such a broad education, you know.

It is interesting that the social science programme has appeared as a reasonable orientation as part of Milltowners' upper secondary school. On one hand, it is testament to the imprint that the discourse proclaiming present society as a 'knowledge society' has had, even in a pronounced industrial community like Milltown. One may argue that this contradicts the view that Milltown struggles with a persistent 'industrial mentality' by which young people mainly desire to occupy blue-collar, manual labour. On the other hand, the orientation towards the social science programme may be understood in light of the fact that many viewed it as a 'broad' education in the sense that it would still enable them the chance of bypassing higher education. This is a flawed idea, however, since, as stated, according to the Swedish National Agency for Education, the Swedish social science programme is a college preparatory programme.

Although Sweden is often considered an illustrating example of a knowledge-based economy, being ranked number one in a random sample of 45 countries using the Index of Knowledge Societies (UN DESA 2005: xiii), some scholars have argued that the view of contemporary society as a knowledge society is somewhat skewed. For example, the management scholar Mats Alvesson stated that 'the strong need for a highly educated workforce appear quite grandiose in relation to a labour market that hardly seems to be crying out for employees with academic degrees' (Alvesson 2013: 83). Alvesson made this claim on the basis of studies showing how, particularly in the Unites States, occupations such as retail sales, nursing, cashiers, general office staff, truck drivers, waiters, children's nurses and cleaning personnel are the jobs that have increased the most in recent years. Similarly, despite today's need for professions with theoretical educations, such as teachers, psychologists and engineers, forecasts made by the Swedish Public Employment Service and the Swedish County Administrative Boards

now show that several of the jobs that are expected to be lacking in the coming years, are in fact relatively low-skilled work, such as cooks, bricklayers, assistant nurses, construction sheet metal workers, truck mechanics, truck drivers, insulation installers, floor-layers, installation electricians, ventilation and sanitation installers, roof layers, concrete workers, woodworkers and carpenters, painters, tool makers, construction workers, tilers, control systems technicians, and medical secretaries (Arbetsförmedlingen 2019; SCB 2022). Nonetheless, the notion of lifelong learning, which implies the updating of theoretical competencies, has taken root in both national and supranational policy recommendations. As a result, the Swedish Industry and Employer Organisation for Construction Companies is now concerned about the future, as an increasing number of upper secondary schools with more practical orientations has now started to close down as result of a lack of interest (Mohammadi 2019).

Likewise, in Milltown, the caseworkers at the Public Employment Service above explained to me that practically oriented specialisations are increasingly neglected among young people in the municipality:

> ME: So, it [the social science programme] leads to everything and nothing? Because I have also understood that vocational training programmes are very popular here?
>
> CASEWORKER 2: Yes, but for a while there was talk about closing [an upper secondary school with a practical profile] down. However, it [the discussion] has swung now. It was the same in [another nearby small town] a few years ago; they only had one single student in the vocational training programme there, but it has changed now. […] it [the talk] was like, 'no, you should not work at [the industry], you should get a theoretical education!'

When I asked the participants at Milltown's activation centre who had chosen more theoretical programmes as part of upper secondary school why they had made such decisions, they often explained to me that it was their parents who had influenced them to do so. In light of the presumed 'industrial mentality' in Milltown, this may appear somewhat counterintuitive. However, considering that the same parents had often worked at the local industries themselves, and had thereby often experienced periods of insecurity in the wake of the last decades industrial re-structuring, such advice appears logical.

Among the minority of participants that I conversed with at the centre who were determined to pursue higher education after finishing upper secondary school, Olof, a young man in his 20s who aspired to become a landscape architect, made an example. The excerpt below is a snapshot of Olof and Christian discussing the future during a typical morning meeting at Milltown's youth activation centre:

> Olof and Christian discuss the future. Christian is the typical Milltowner, as I have got to know him. He dreams of a 'quiet life' in the community, just like the participants I talked to at the Labour Market Unit. He wants a family and a house in Milltown. Milltown is 'safe'. […] Olof also thrives in Milltown, but has higher ambitions than Christian. Olof wants to study [landscape architecture], and thinks that Christian should study also, albeit perhaps with a more practical education. 'You still need more education if you are to work with it [electrician]', he explains to Christian. At the same time, Olof reasons that he will 'have to see what the education may in fact amount to'. Christian's horizon is narrower: 'Family, house. I'm soon 30, you know. At the same time, I may have to move to where I may be able to find work, you know'. Olof and Christian agree that big cities like Stockholm have to be avoided 'at all costs'.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

As seen in the excerpt, although Olof represented something of an outlier in the group, expressing more far-reaching ambitions than his co-participants. However, he agreed with Christian that venturing too far away from Milltown was not desirable:

> 'What the hell is one supposed to do in Stockholm?', asks Olof rhetorically, smiling. 'Well, I don't know. I guess there must be *something* to do', Christian answers laughingly. 'Oh, no!', Olof replies.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

The excerpt above illustrates what Michael Agar (1996) would perhaps refer to as a 'rich point', meaning a shared experience salient to the lifeworlds of the present study's informants; namely, a sense of loyalty towards Milltown as a community. Reminding of Ferdinand Tönnies' remark that 'One goes into *Gesellschaft* [urban society] as one goes into a strange country' (1957 [1887]: 34), the discussion above gives strength to Uddbäck (2021), who showed that young adults' decision to remain in rural, small towns may be rooted in a desire for stability and security in life (cf. Giddens 1991).

Mobility as learning

Among the participants in Milltown's youth activation centre, Stockholm often came to symbolise the pinnacle of urban restlessness. In comparison, Milltown offered the young people I spoke with a sense of overview and community in life. This is how Liam, the 19-year-old participant who we met previously, described Milltown as a place of residence:

> ME: Have you lived in Milltown for all your life?
> LIAM: Yup! I have lived in two places here.
> ME: What's it like, living here?
> LIAM: It's great!
> ME: Can you tell me something about what it is that you like about Milltown?
> LIAM: Well, safety … To know who most people are. You never feel alone here. You always meet someone you know when walking through the village. I think that's just fantastic.

What Liam referred to during the interview I conducted with him in 2019 was that life in Milltown was *manageable*. In Milltown, he experienced the particular sense of belonging that may come with residing in rural, small towns (whose other side of the coin is of course the particular form of social control developing in milieus where 'everyone knows everyone'). Notions of safety, predictability and the importance of family and close relationships were in general recurrent during conversations I had with young Milltowners about their future.

This is in line with Uddbäck's (2021) findings. Interviewing young people choosing to remain in the small town Uddbäck called Skarvsjö, as mentioned above, they expressed how relationships, knowledge and predictability contributed to a general sense of security in life. What possibly distinguishes Uddbäck's study from the present study is that Uddbäck's informants, who were all 22 years old and above, stated that teenagers in Skarvsjö tended to be more negative about remaining in the locality than they themselves were. This concurs with Svensson (2006), who has argued that a strong middle-class norm in contemporary society associates teenagers with urban rather than rural environments. In the present study, however, a majority of the teenagers I spoke with, both in and outside of Milltown's two activation measures, stated that

they wanted to remain in Milltown. Whereas urban environments such as Gothenburg or Stockholm were here considered 'nothing to bother with' – as one informant in the youth activation centre stated during a discussion with his friends – Milltown was considered a decent place suitable for a future family life. This way of reasoning was also illustrated by a young woman who was interviewed on national radio as part of series covering the fate of Milltown in a post-industrial age. Like many women growing up in former industrial communities, she had left Milltown after high school (cf. Uddbäck 2021: 76). After spending some years studying and working in more urban environments, she had now chosen to return to her home community, stating that Milltown 'was a good place to raise a family'. Like most of the participants in Milltown's activation centre, the young woman's line of reasoning here resonated with the 'domestic world of worth' described by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) as valuing stability, loyalty, and community over self-investment and mobility.

As discussed previously, when speaking with the coaches, however, the notions of safety and security that young people in Milltown associated with the community was problematised as 'homeboundness'. By this, the coaches referred to young peoples' immobility and the fact that they showed little interest in the 'world outside'. As an example, the centre's project leader Anette, explained how she saw it as troublesome that the undergraduate school no longer compensated for the fact that many young Milltowners were so 'attached' to their home community:

> Before, the [primary] schools here used to organise school trips to places outside the municipality. So even though parents wouldn't take their kids to see something else, young people still got to see places other than their home turf.

Problematising place attachment in this way illustrates the mobility imperative inherent in contemporary society, urging young people in particular to be on the move rather than identifying with any particular locality (e.g. Farrugia 2016; Svensson 2006). What Monica and the coaches expressed in terms of 'homeboundness', was here at least as much connected to the community's developmental inertia as were the community's lack of study tradition and young adults' favouring

of manual labour over education and occupations more suitable to flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998). The importance that Anette placed on seeing 'something else' other than Milltown reflects how mobility has come to be seen as a 'learning opportunity' in the active society (Garsten 2008: 4). For example, the EU's Lifelong Learning Platform states that 'mobility is a powerful learning experience' that increases peoples' employability by forcing individuals 'to open up and adapt' to the demands of today's labour market (LLP n.d.). That is, mobility may stir peoples' subjectivity by interjecting new perspectives on the self (cf. Benson 2008; Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018). By developing peoples' 'social, intercultural and interpersonal competences', mobility is here thought to 'promote a sense of common European belonging' (LLP n.d.), fostering individuals who consider themselves to be citizens of the world rather than the community (cf. Goodhart 2017).

With the expansion of the economy to a worldwide level, mobility has thus become more crucial. In his writings on neoliberal society, Foucault emphasised that mobility was central to the formation of the entrepreneurial self as *the* subject of neoliberal governmentality:

> In the elements making up human capital, we should also include mobility, that is to say, an individual's ability to move around, and migration in particular. Because migration obviously represents a material cost […] What is the function of this cost? It is to obtain an improvement of status, of remuneration, and so on, that is to say, an investment. Migration is an investment; the migrant is an investor. He is an entrepreneur of himself who incurs expenses by investing to obtain some kind of improvement.
>
> (Foucault 2008: 230.)

I argue that it is in this light that the aforementioned mobility imperative should be understood; that is, as part of a biopolitical aim of fostering productive citizens associating freedom with investments in the self (cf. Rose 1999). Consequently, transforming the alleged 'industrial mentality' presumably lingering in Milltown entailed coaching the participants in the youth activation centre to widen their 'horizon of expectation' (Koselleck 1985). In line with the quote from the EU's Lifelong Learning Platform above, this meant motivating the participants to occupy new vantage points, opening up the possibility of 'not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it'

(Gadamer 2004: 301).[24] Milltown's rundown factory buildings may here be said to quite literally distorting the participants' horizon. Apart from motivating the participants to resume or take up studies, Monica and the coaches therefore initiated recurrent conversations with the participants about the future, making sure that they navigated towards job placements or folk high schools that were also located elsewhere. As such, they attempted to loosen the participants from the 'domestic world of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) that dominated their lifeworlds. I argue that promoting mobility among young Milltowners here reflects the biopolitical rationale entailed in the active society, by which the participants in the youth activation centre learned that 'a better life' (Puumeister 2014: 301) was to be found outside of the community's perimeters (cf. Svensson 2006).

Beyond the discursive level, however, other actors in the community were able to recognise the fact that the discourse on mobility counteracted more material problems that Milltown tampered with. For instance, the municipality's business manager reasoned that too much emphasis on mobility risked worsening the community's problem of depopulation and increasingly ageing residents. According to him, the fact that young Milltowners were somewhat 'homebound' could also be viewed as a result of successful community building:

> ME: Despite close commuting distance to the Universities and so on, things seem slow. Why is it so?
>
> BUSINESS MANAGER: Well, maybe it's the industrial spirit of community. I don't really know […] it could be that a notion of safety is linked to the industrial spirit, but then at the same time, it could be a sign that they are quite happy in the municipality. Maybe it is linked to self-image, and self-confidence too. Perhaps this little society built something good.

As seen in this excerpt, by using the term 'industrial spirit of community' rather than 'industrial mentality', the business manager reiterated the more positively connoted view of the industrial community as a locality characterised by a strong sense of collectivity and local

24. To Gadamer, 'The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth' (2004: 301).

integration (cf. Lundqvist 2001). I also came across other, albeit few, examples by which the 'industrial spirit of community', as opposed to the 'industrial mentality', was highlighted as something positive for the community to hold on to in times of uncertainty. Monica, the aforementioned project leader of Milltown's activation centre, for example used the notion of the 'industrial spirit of community' in a local news article in which she argued that this spirit could be transformed into entrepreneurship. This suggests a tension in the understanding of the way in which Milltown's industrial history affect its residents.

Among the participants activated in the youth activation centre, a few had experience of having ventured elsewhere. However, similar to the young woman interviewed by national radio above, all had eventually decided to move back to the community. Here, Stephan, an approximately 25-year-old participant, makes out an illustrating example. After meeting a girl from Stockholm, Stephan decided to move there with her and stayed there for little over a year, working as a telemarketer. Although he disliked his job, Stephan stated that Milltown was 'narrow-minded' compared to Stockholm. After moving back, he said that he was no longer able to express himself the way he had done while residing in Sweden's capital city:

> STEPHAN: When I came back to Milltown, you know, I could no longer, like, wear jeans and a white shirt at [the local supermarket] you know, because people looked at me funny.
>
> ME: Did you have to change your style of clothing when you came back here?
>
> STEPHAN: Yes, I had to stop wearing a shirt here, and stuff like that.

Being a guitar player who liked to express himself by dressing in particular clothes, showing up at the activation centre in his black biker jacket and rugged jeans, Stephan implied that he felt the pressure to 'dress down' after moving back to Milltown. Although Milltowners of all ages are often seen wearing rock-and-roll merchandise, such as heavy metal band t-shirts, Stephan's style of choice was somewhat tidier – a clean, long-sleeved white shirt under a shiny leather jacket was more his style. He felt that this was too 'dressed' to gain acceptance in Milltown. As Bourdieu once remarked, working-class men 'especially are forbidden every sort of "pretension" in matters of culture, language, or

clothing' as 'a surrender to demands perceived as simultaneously feminine and bourgeois appears as the index of a dual repudiation of virility' (Bourdieu 1984: 382). It is reasonable to argue that Stephan's inclination to dress down after coming back to Milltown, may have reflected the community's traditional working-class culture and disfavouring of too much pretention.

However, to Stephan, not everything was good with living in Stockholm. For example, during our conversations, he explained to me that he had felt a pressure to lose weight while living in the big city: 'I spent days at the gym there, because in Stockholm, no one is fat. I lost about 10 kilos there'. Although Stephan was unable to explain why he thought that there was a decree of 'looking slim' in Stockholm, he attributed the idea to notions of success; successful people are slim-looking people. This observation is not unfounded. As I showed in Chapter 2, the notion of employability has come to connote not only formal qualifications, but increasingly also exterior attributes (Garsten & Jacobsson 2004; Holmqvist & Maravelias 2006; Cederström & Spicer 2015). Below, I show how the connotation of employability with health in a wider sense was picked up by the coaches at Milltown's youth activation centre.

Bio-ethical aspects of activation

Exercising employability

Sociologists and management scholars alike have noted that marketing oneself by way of formal qualifications alone may not be sufficient in searching for a place in today's labour market (Garsten & Jacobsson 2004; Cederström & Spicer 2015). Those who express employability by showing a healthy and alert appearance have brighter chances of succeeding in today's working life (Holmqvist & Maravelias 2006: 19).

In Milltown's activation centre, the fact that health in itself has increasingly become an entry ticket into the labour market was evident in the coaches' activation of unemployed young adults. Besides motivating participants to widen their horizons by pointing to the importance of education and the possibility of moving elsewhere, I learned that a standing feature of the projects driven at the centre included physical exercise and nutrition. At the centre's inception, the coaches

had initiated contact with the local swimming hall and gym, asking whether it would be possible to arrange for the participants to access the facilities freely as part of being enrolled in the activation centre. Since Milltown is a typical rural community where residents and locals are well aware of what is going on the community, both the swimming hall and gym were willing to cooperate with the centre in order to assist in the mitigation of 'homeboundness' and unemployment among the community's young people. In a way, this reflects what Jørgen Elm Larsen labelled the 'new communitarian ethic' emphasised in the active society, whereby social inclusion is achieved by way of community participation (Elm Larsen 2005). I suggest that in Milltown, such 'communitarian ethic' was already institutionalised in the form of the community's 'industrial spirit of community', which in the active society thus appeared as a more positively connoted remnant from the community's industrial history.

When asking the coaches what purpose psychical exercise served in the projects housed in the activation centre, it was explained to me that it was included as a way of getting Milltown's 'homebound' 'more active'. In other words, the local understanding and translation of the policy concept 'activation' was adopted literally. As the discourse on activation tends to portray unemployed as presumed passive individuals, somewhat unreflectively, I had almost expected to witness some form of resistance among the participants against physical exercise such as gym and swimming activities. However, many participants seemed to appreciate the opportunity to work out as part of the being enrolled in the centre. The fieldnote excerpt below illustrates that young men in particular seemed able to reproduce notions of masculinity and grit by indulging in the gym activity:

> Although everyone thrives in the gym, Christian [who is in fact close to a trained PT, having chosen the PT orientation as part of upper secondary school] is the one who knows his way around, talking about what machines to use, what they do, and so on. The guys go out hard. Oskar directly sits up on an exercise bike and soon starts sweating profusely. […] Afterwards, they headed towards the dressing room as a group, walking slowly with their backs straight, looking tired but proud of their achievements.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Compared to some of the other activities I observed in the centre, which appeared somewhat abstract to some of the participants (this included polishing CVs or having group discussions about what to do in the future), the gym activity provided participants with a concrete hands-on task where results in the form of bodily soreness and the psychological rush of endorphins were immediate. While working out on the machines, the young men encouraged each other loudly, sometimes by helping each other out at the machines, while other times seeking to impress one another by making jokes. In such a way, it seemed as if the gym activity allowed for the male participants' masculinity, or image thereof, to not be withheld (it was only male participants who attended the gym activity during this time). While contributing to increase the participants' health, the gym activity at the same time encouraged the young men to be recognised, among themselves, as working-class people not afraid to 'dig in' (cf. Willis 1993 [1977]).

Although the inclusion of exercise as part of an EU-funded activation project may appear somewhat ambiguous, in light of the active society's wellness ideology (Cederström & Spicer 2015), it is a reasonable activity if the aim is to increase the employability of individuals. As Christina Garsten and Kerstin Jacobsson (2013: 826) argued, the notion of employability may be viewed as a 'floating signifier' connoting everything from education, qualifications, and experience to people's bodily appearance. Seen through this lens, by being incorporated alongside practices of motivating participants to finish school or apply for jobs or internships, the disciplining of participants' bodies marks what I label 'bio-ethical' aspects of activation. That is, whereas the advent of the industrial community in Milltown may be said to have entailed a process of domesticising crofters and *state*-folk into labourers at the factory, the kind of disciplining of unemployed described in the present section instead marks a process of *re*-domestication in the form of fostering tidy and respectable individuals aligned to an increasingly service and text and talk-oriented labour market. Considering Carl Cederström and André Spicer's argument that one might replace the notion of 'work ethic' with the 'workout ethic' (2015: 32), the gym activity organised in Milltown's youth activation centre becomes logical. However, as I showed above, contrary to its intention, the activ-

ity seemed to mark the reproduction rather than transformation of Milltown's alleged 'industrial mentality'.

'Now, what's in a lasagne?' Cooking life-skills

Another way for the coaches at Milltown's youth activation centre to foster orderly and employable young citizens included teaching so-called life-skills. By referring to 'psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems [and] think critically and creatively' (WHO 2003: 3), life-skills are essential in the active society. The concept has become paramount in the policy discourse of lifelong learning, where personal development and adaptation to change is key (Butterwick & Benjamin 2006). However, similar to what we saw above, when put into practice in Milltown's youth activation centre, the notion of life-skills took more earthly proportions. For example, it took me some time to realise that the rather prolonged breakfasts held prior to getting on with the daily activities, and its emphasis on hygiene as part of its preparations, was included as a way of teaching life-skills at the centre. As the coach Lotta explained to me during a breakfast in 2018:

> This is all part of teaching life-skills. […] Washing your hands before handling bread, butter and cheese, it's a way to get the participants to value the importance of hygiene.

In a memo I wrote adjacent to this observation, I could not help thinking about the bathhouses that were established in Swedish industrial communities at around the turn of the twentieth century. Life-skills at Milltown's activation centre appeared here as a continuation of the practice of fostering a tidy and respectable workforce. It appeared to me at this stage that the breakfast itself was not necessarily the main activity; it was the preparations that served as a test of participants' cleanness and hygienic discipline.

Other aspects of teaching life-skills included food cooking. During observations conducted during the winter and spring of 2019, I noticed that a substantial part of the week's activities centred around planning a meal that the group was supposed to cook every Thursday. With a budget of 25 SEK per participant,[25] the notion of life-skills translated

25. As of 2021, approximately 2.3 EUR.

into participants' ability to plan for a meal that was both financially sustainable and nutritious. The activity required three half-days' work: Tuesday mornings were devoted to planning for which meal to cook, Wednesday morning to grocery shopping, and the execution of the group activity was carried out as part of Thursday's activity, where the participants cooked their own lunch as a group. Below is a snapshot from a Tuesday morning planning session playing out after breakfast, depicting a prolonged discussion between the coaches and the participants regarding what ingredients were considered nutritious, and what was needed in order to cook the meal in question:

> The discussion on what to cook resembles a homework interrogation. 'And what do we have in a lasagne, Peter? Come on, think!', Maggie urges. Peter, with his significantly mischievous look, smiles, and then looks at Mike. They both smile in agreement. 'Well, you have minced meat … tomato … lasagne sheets …' 'Good, Peter, good!', Maggie praises, now laughing along as if she was suddenly struck by the somewhat paternal situation.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

The excerpt above portrays a situation whereby the regular chitchat and jokingly atmosphere normally prevailing in the centre suddenly turned uncanny. The sense of paternalism referred to in the excerpt relates to the fact that Maggie, whose relation to the participants I discussed previously as being more informal than formal, suddenly demanded that the young men in the group should answer her questions correctly. Maggie's warm and caring character now brought about a disturbance in the otherwise stable atmosphere prevailing in the centre. After breaking the team spirit, as Goffman (e.g. 1956) would have phrased it, the irony in Peter's listing of ingredients served to counterbalance the situation's sudden uncanniness, whereafter things returned to normal. Maggie, who appeared to suddenly be overwhelmed, having entering a role she did not fully master – that is, that of the activation professional – was thereby able to let out steam herself, as illustrated by her suddenly starting to smile at the situation. Thus, the participants' humour has again helped ease tensions in the group.

The lasagne situation described in the present section illustrates the hardships involved in translating supranational policy lingua to practice (cf. Mc Glinn 2018). Although some of the activities included

in the weekly activities in Milltown's youth activation centre may appear odd to an outsider, I never observed any outright resistance to the activities employed to activate the young adults. At no point did any of the participants question any incongruence between what one might expect when enrolled in an EU-funded activation centre – that is, coming closer to the labour market by learning to be more employable – and what was in fact part of the scheduled activities. Instead, as illustrated by the lasagne situation above, in situations when the strain became too much to handle (that is, when activities were on the verge of the bizarre), participants would instead sigh, or make witty remarks to restore balance in the group. When such remarks were also recognised by the coaches who were caught off guard, as it were, I encountered what Sharon Bolton labelled 'moments of truth' (2005: 102), referring to situations by which some irrationality or contradiction was suddenly addressed and revealed. Due to the established bonds of trust between the coaches and the participants – which, I argue, had been nurtured through years of the former working as youth recreation leaders in the community – the participants' remarks here served as much as a way of saving the coaches' faces as their own.

As Berkel et al. (2010) pointed out, frontline workers' discretion has increased significantly in tandem with welfare state reforms bringing the activation of people at risk of social exclusion closer to the local level. However, 'given the low level of institutionalisation of the profession of activation work, activation frontline workers still seem to be professionals without a profession' (Berkel et al. 2010: 447). What this means is that frontline workers such as the coaches at Milltown's activation centre, have little guidance when seeking to make sense and put policy to practice. The coaches I observed at the centre here did their best to translate the ambiguous discourses of lifelong learning, employability, and life-skills to practice. Due to the rather fleeting nature of these concepts, I argue that most people would struggle to adopt such policy concepts in ways that are considered productive. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, lifelong learning is, for example, not meant to be applied in undergraduate school, but a policy formulated to ensure that individuals of working age nurture a mindset whereby they are willing and able to update their competencies in tandem with fluctuations in the economy. Ultimately, it is

often very difficult to discern who is *employable enough* (Cremin 2010; Garsten & Jacobsson 2013).

Whereas discourses on employability and entrepreneurship seemed too ambiguous to adopt productively at Milltown's youth activation centre, in the next section I will show how Project 2 entailed a new institutional discourse that Monica and the coaches seemed to master rather well. Compared to policy concepts such as lifelong learning, employability and life-skills, a neurobiological discourse locating the community's problems of unemployment to the brain and its neurochemical processes seemed to have more power when it came to transforming the participants' subjectivity.

Learning to be disabled? A change in institutional discourse

During observations conducted in Milltown's activation centre between 2019 and the beginning of 2020, I noticed that the operations seemed to be endowed with more professionalism. Firstly, over time, the centre had gained access to more premises, and was no longer consigned to a single venue and some spare rooms in the school premise basement. In addition to the larger group room that normally functioned as Milltown's leisure centre, the activation centre now made use of its own kitchen and some smaller group rooms that were adjacent to the centre's main venue. Whereas during my first visit to the premise in 2018, I had to ask around among teachers in the school where I could find the activation centre, during 2019, large-scale signs had been put up that clearly pointed out the operations. Now, brochures were also scattered inside the school entrance that advertised presumptive participants to initiate contact with the coaches. By being placed right at the school entrance, the centre was now clearly separated from the school.

Inside the centre's premise, individual working booths had been placed in the corridor connecting the main venue with the centre's kitchen and group rooms, giving the participants somewhere to focus on individual work:

> By small means, the coaches have been able to create a professional looking milieu, with each booth containing a notepad and some pencils organised in

> straight lines. As such, the booths give the impression of a professional government environment similar to, say, the Public Employment Service. Here, participants are given the opportunity to search for jobs, housing, and education, although the main activity seems to centre around filling in activity reports to the Social Insurance Agency in order to receive economic benefits, which is called 'activity support'.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Over time, the centre thus seemed to have found its place as a professional activation measure. Anette, the aforementioned project leader who made sure to secure funds from the European Social Fund, did a good job at marketing the centre in newspapers and the like, making the centre even more visible. In terms of the concrete practices of activating young unemployed, however, little seemed to have changed from Project 1 to Project 2. Being entwined with the municipal activation responsibility, Monica and the coaches still activated the so-called 'homebound' by way of assisting enrolees with answering job applications, writing CVs, applying for internships, and organising various group activities. Hence, even though Project 2 was geared at another target group of participants, to an outsider not much appeared particularly new, apart from the apparent changes in exterior.

However, there was one aspect that had changed with the advent of Project 2, and that would spur rings on the water in terms of the participants' sense of self: the centre's institutional discourse. With the actualisation of Project 2, I noticed that the coaches' *approach* to the participants had started to change. The hard but hearty tone that had prevailed in the centre was now successively being replaced by a softer, slightly more paternal approach, by which the coaches had become more interested in the psychological wellbeing of the participants. Similarly, the morning meetings, for example, had transformed into something of a 'therapeutic room' (cf. Dahlstedt 2008: 52), whereby the participants were encouraged to share their state of mind with the rest of the group. By being incited to answer questions relating to, for example, whether they felt depressed or worried, or if their medication worked as it should, the atmosphere had turned confessional:

> The conversational climate is open, and there is no doubt that 'the medical side' is at the centre of [Project 2]. Maggie, who I find somewhat blunt

> (although she might also be a little tense in my presence?) asks Lenny in front of everyone how things are going with his new medicine: 'How's the medicine, then, Lenny? Have you tried to cut it down somewhat?' Lenny stares down at the table, and then answers softly: 'Yes, I have cut it down a bit now.' The rest of the group is silent; the humour is gone, and in unison, the participants lower their shoulders and avoid eye contact. It puts me in mind of prey avoiding its predator.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

The excerpt above is derived from what I experienced as an emotionally dense situation whereby Maggie inquired on the participants psychological state of mind, which clearly troubled the group. Neither Lenny, a 27-year-old whose introversion was palpable, nor the rest of the group was comfortable with Maggie talking so openly in the group about his medical status. The group's silence was telling, and it was clear that they were now under a medical gaze.

I learned that the change of atmosphere in the centre had to do with Project 2 now receiving financial support from the European Social Fund's new Tear Down Barriers to Participation programme, which was geared towards a whole new target group:

> The project focuses on young adults aged 16–29 with neuropsychiatric disabilities, as well as prospective employers. The young adults will receive the support required to enter work or studies in parallel with employers being offered broad support for employment and competence-enhancing initiatives. The goal of the project is to achieve social inclusion for all participants (studies, work or internship), while simultaneously increasing employers' knowledge about the target group, thus affecting their attitudes towards employing these young adults, who possess enormous strengths.
>
> (Official ESF-description for Project 2, my translation.)

The excerpt from the programme description above reflects the EU's aim of achieving active inclusion of *all* citizens; in this case, people who were diagnosed with neuropsychiatric functional variations. The focus on this target group is logical in light of the vast increase in neuropsychiatric diagnoses all over the Western welfare states. According to the National Board of Health and Welfare's Statistics, only in Sweden, the number of children diagnosed with neuropsychiatric disability increased by more than 300 per cent between 2006–2016. The increase may be explained by a range of factors, such as more precision

in neuropsychiatric assessments, as well as processes of norm displacement. As a result of increasingly competitive labour markets, and the increase of jobs within the service sector, many who do not fit in to the demands of today's labour markets may resort to diagnosis-seeking behaviours (cf. Conrad 2007).

Writing on the increased focus on neurobiology in contemporary society, Nikolas Rose and Joelle Abi-Rached pointed out that there is a notion nowadays that 'Mind is nothing more than what the brain does' (2013: 8). Our comprehension of human conduct has thereby been redirected from the domain of the social into that of the brain and neurobiological processes. In this way, the discourse of the brain has trickled down from the medical sciences to the collective conscious where it now imbues our way of understanding ourselves and what kinds of beings we take ourselves to be, as Rose has often put it. Hence, in light of what Peter Conrad has labelled the 'medicalisation of underperformance' (2007: 62), by which social phenomena such as unemployment are increasingly understood in light of medical expertise, it is not surprising that Milltown heeded to a call aimed at people with neurobiological diagnoses.

Project 2's focus on neuropsychiatric disability was motivated by the fact that young individuals diagnosed with conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism often fall between different chairs in relation to the welfare system, thereby running the risk of ending up outside of it:

> This is partly due to the fact that young people with neuropsychiatric diagnoses may have extra difficulty understanding how different authorities and society function, but also that they actively choose not to contact authorities due to mental illness. […] The overall goal has been to break the exclusion that these individuals have found themselves in.
>
> (Excerpt from final report of Project 2, my translation.)

Hence, with an infrastructure already in place, it was time to achieve active inclusion of a new group of participants, whose difficulty in finding a place on the labour market I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (cf. Sunnerfjell 2017; Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018).

Interestingly, not only were the concrete practices employed in the centre to activate Milltown's 'homebound' merely transferred to

Project 2, so were some of the participants. As Maggie explained to me, 'the projects, they go together, all the projects, and the participants are basically the same'. However, this did not necessarily imply that the participants who were transferred from Project 1 to Project 2 had been diagnosed with neuropsychiatric disability. When comparing the European Social Fund's official project description above with Milltown's local one, found on the municipality's website, a slight reformulation, marked in italics below, seemed to have found its way into the text:

> The project focuses on young adults aged 16–29, who have *or may be suspected of having*, neuropsychiatric disabilities.
>
> (Excerpt from Project 2's local project description, my translation.)

Being a relatively small municipality, I learned that this subtle rephrasing of the project description allowed Monica and the coaches at the activation centre to fill the required quota of participants needed in order to secure funding from the EU. As a result, it was crucial for Monica and the coaches to scan for symptoms of neuropsychiatric conditions among individuals ending up on the municipality's activation responsibility list, as well as among participants activated in previous projects at the centre. Although none of the coaches had either the expertise or experience of conducting neuropsychiatric assessments, when I asked whether they knew of any presumptive participants, I received responses such as:

> 'We know several [of the pupils in Milltown's schools] who probably have [neuropsychiatric] diagnoses. We take early notice of that.' She [Maggie] turns to the other coaches in the room, asking loudly: 'Hey, what diagnosis do we think Jennie has?'
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Compared to discourses of activation, employability, and life-skills, which are all notions circulating in the active society, the confidence with which the coaches wielded medical statements seemed to differ quite considerably from the former policy concepts. In fact, the medical parlance surrounding Project 2 appeared to come almost naturally. During one of the centre's afternoon drop-in sessions, I asked Lotta and

Maggie what medical condition a young woman who attended the session had. Lotta, whose personality was otherwise rather frisky, suddenly became serious, explaining to me that this young woman 'probably' had 'Asperger's syndrome', stating that 'She cannot read faces, she doesn't understand facial expressions and the like'. Such statements reflect that Lotta had some knowledge of the symptoms associated with autism. Likewise, the confidence with which the coaches, who had no medical expertise, asked the participants questions such as 'How's the Ritalin working for you?', may reflect what Conrad (2007: 62ff) referred to as the 'lay-professional alliance' between schools, parents, and pharmaceutical companies, who have financial interest in individuals who aspire to decipher and understand themselves through biomedical knowledge. On the other hand, the coaches' confidence in wielding neurobiological parlance may also be understood as a way of dedramatising the medicalisation of unemployment. In relation to playing down the stigma of 'having' (for example) a neuropsychiatric diagnosis, what I label as 'subjectivity reminders' here was a form of requisite with which to achieve the transformation of the participants' self-understanding.

Subjectivity reminders

It is well established that institutions and subjectivity are entwined (e.g. Goffman 1961). As Miller (1994: 288) pointed out, institutions may be understood as 'situated conventions' that contribute to make 'some ways of talking and interacting available', whilst 'making other ways of assessing or orienting towards each other seen inappropriate or undesirable' (Hansen Löfstrand & Jacobsson 2022: 7). Likewise, Fredriksson (2022: 137) showed that the physical design of activation centres has significance for which discourses the unemployed are intended to adopt. How furniture is placed, and what job-advertisements are hanging on a wall may signal what kind of behaviour is encouraged, as well as what clients are supposed to populate programmes of activation. As I argued at the beginning of the present chapter, the self-empowering messages hung in Milltown's activation centre's main venue are an example of what discourses were allowed in the premise; that is, discourses neglecting structural circumstances.

As Michael Lipsky has pointed out, particularly when it comes to people-processing organisations, an important part of the processing

of people into clients involves 'the way people learn to treat themselves as if they were categorical entities' (Lipsky 2010: 59). With Project 2 running in Milltown's activation centre, I noticed how various requisites hailing concrete, neuropsychiatric subjectivities had been scattered around the premises. So, for example, were framed posters mixing neuropsychiatric diagnoses such as ADHD and Asperger's syndrome with positively connoted adjectives such as 'passionate', 'pioneering', and 'enthusiastic' hung on the centre's walls (see Figure 2 below).

I call such requisites subjectivity reminders, referring to visual cues that hail various ways of understanding oneself and the outside world. Subjectivity reminders in this sense help to objectify the characteristics associated with groups targeted for intervention, such as in this case, various neuropsychiatric conditions. The collages in Figure 2 served as a strategy among the coaches to get the participants to re-evaluate themselves in light of neurobiological knowledge. This is an example of governmentality by the way it highlights how power may work through subjects themselves, who may start to decipher themselves and their situations in light of certain discourses. Among participants activated in Milltown's youth activation centre, subjectivity reminders were used as a way for the coaches to evoke processes whereby periods of unemployment or failure in educational achievement could be attributed to individual, medical conditions.

As seen with the positives listed together with ADHD and Asperger's syndrome in Figure 2, the coaches in the youth activation centre found strength in what I, together with Kerstin Jacobsson, have labelled the current 're-negotiation' of neuropsychiatric disability (Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018). This refers to the work of interest organisations and ambassadors of neuropsychiatric diagnoses of making visible the assets that may come with these conditions. An example is the Swedish Wonderful ADHD organisation, which at the time of writing has nearly 60,000 followers on Facebook. Rather than portraying neuropsychiatric diagnoses in terms of symptoms such as disorganisation and hyperactivity, notions of creativity and drive are instead emphasised as part of diagnoses such as ADHD. This was reflected in the aforementioned study, whereby one informant explained that she was 'disappointed' with the Swedish Public Employment Service for

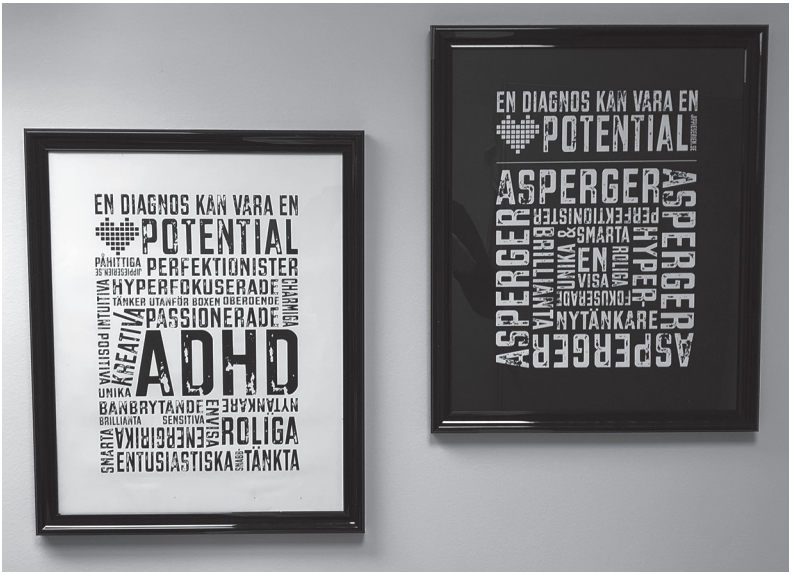

Figure 2. Subjectivity reminders hung on the centre's wall. Author's image.

receiving a so-called disability code in their administrative system due to being diagnosed with ADHD:

> The code says that I am worse than what I actually am. Really. You know, I don't see myself as disabled. Rather, I see my ADHD as a superpower, you know. Sure, it's a pain in the ass sometimes, but mostly it's absolutely wonderful. My diagnosis, that's what I am, you know. It's my personality. As I don't see my diagnosis as an obstacle, then it's hard to be labelled as disabled, you know. Because I'm not hindered. Maybe I need clearer structures, and less idle time.
>
> (Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018: 318.)

In Milltown's activation centre, the general tendency of renegotiating neuropsychiatric disability[26] was utilised as a way of achieving the

26. See for example 'What I would never trade away', published in the quarterly consumer publication *ADDitude Magazine* in December 2020, where it is stated that the 'positives of ADHD are numerous and mighty – creativity, empathy, and tenacity'.

organisational aim of fostering disabled subjectivities. As seen in the European Social Fund's official description of Project 2 above, the renegotiation of neuropsychiatric disability is reflected in the last sentence, which states that individuals diagnosed with neuropsychiatric conditions 'possess enormous strengths'. This was also reflected in the coaches' talk of the participants diagnosed with ADHD and/or autism (or 'Asperger's', which was the term most often used by the coaches). So, for example, could the coaches describe participants as 'fun and energetic' (ADHD), or 'thinking' (autism).

Although the participants enrolled in Project 2 seemed somewhat uncomfortable with the new prevailing atmosphere in the centre, this is not to say that they refused to be enrolled on account of being deemed as functionally varied – formally or informally. Whereas sharing their medical statuses to the coaches and each other worked against their working-class culture, the majority seemed to have no problem being enrolled in the centre due to, for example, having ADHD. I argue that this again reflects the normalisation of contemporary biomedical discourses, whereby individuals are increasingly urged to 'recode their moods and their ills in terms of the functioning of their brain chemicals, and […] act upon themselves in the light of this belief' (Rose 2003: 59). In other words, to describe oneself as 'having ADHD' or some other neuropsychiatric diagnosis was not a big deal amongst the participants in the centre. However, for those who were clinically depressed, 'coming out' (cf. Holmqvist 2009) in front of the group was much harder. I suggest that this illustrates that individuals with neuropsychiatric diagnoses are subjected to less stigmatisation than other medical statuses, such as personality disorders, or problems of anxiety, to which positively connoted adjectives are seldom attributed.

During the regularly breakfasts, I also noticed how a whiteboard stating 'We were born to be real not to be perfect' was hung just above the place where participants prepared their sandwiches and got their morning coffee (see Figure 3 below). Again, this served to remind the participants in the centre that there was nothing wrong with having neuropsychiatric diagnoses.

In an individualist society by which deviating from the norm may be part of one's identity formation, I argue that the message contained on the whiteboard served to un-dramatise the idea that periods of

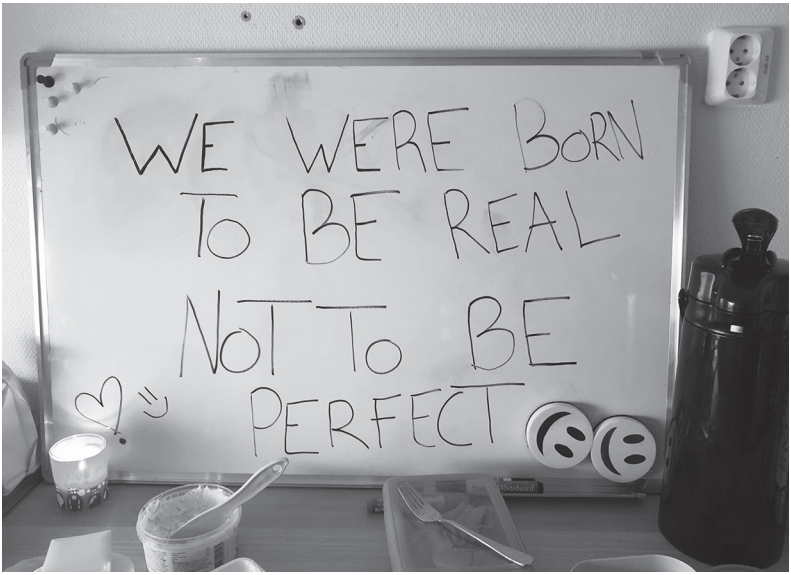

Figure 3. Subjectivity reminder in kitchen. Author's image.

passivity among the participants could stem from neuropsychiatric conditions.

However, not everyone in Milltown's activation centre was willing to subscribe to biomedical identities. An example of resistance to neuropsychiatric subjection was made by Diana, the young woman mentioned above who, according to the coaches, was conditioned by autism. By being portrayed as being somewhat grumpy and – as I interpreted the coaches – generally 'difficult', the coaches waited patiently for her to 'understand' that a diagnosis would help her transition into the labour market more easily by enabling, for example, a subsidised employment. I decided to spend an afternoon with Diana in order to learn more about her struggle to find a place in the labour market:

> After a while [of observing an afternoon drop-in session in the activation centre], Diana comes in. […] She is wearing a shiny jacket and has red curly hair. She smiles. I notice her red spectacle frames, which are quite modern and provide her a trendy look. I immediately note her sense of humour. […]

> Today, she is filling in the Public Employment Service's 'career ladder', a 42-item questionnaire that will generate a job profile. […] I'm sitting beside her, leaning against a wall pretending to read a brochure. Diana reads the text aloud for the coaches to hear, and she does it excellently. With considerable cynicism, she exclaims with quiet laughter while ironically reading out what she considers to be strangely worded questions: 'If you could choose to be a helpful nurse, or … [she interrupts the reading], no, you want to be a mean and unhelpful nurse, right?' I can't help but smile as I continue to read the brochure. […] Diana finishes the 'career ladder', which rendered the gerunds 'Theorising and analysing' to her so-called 'job profile', which to me seems congruent with her persona.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

After spending the afternoon with Diana, I was unsure about whether the coaches' assessment of her as suffering from autism seemed plausible. Despite the coaches' attempts to encourage Diana to understand herself in biomedical terms, she refused to subject herself to medical scrutiny. I later learned that her resistance had paid off and that she had managed to enrol at an independent adult education college where she could fulfil her dream of becoming a professional game designer. Diana's example may reflect the notion that although the coaches at Milltown's activation centre did seem to master the discourse surrounding so-called attention disorders, this did not necessarily mean that their assessments of participants at the centre were on point. In addition, it is important to take into account that there were organisational incentives to consider participants as disabled. Without the right number of participants, it would not have been possible to receive financial funds from the EU, and thus continue to work as a coach in the centre.

In sum, utilising subjectivity reminders as a way of encouraging participants in Milltown's activation centre to re-evaluate themselves in light of medical parlance and embrace their diagnoses – presumed or already established – reflects the medicalisation of unemployed. Paradoxical as it may seem, the practice of bringing participants closer to employability here encouraged disability (cf. Garsten & Jacobsson 2013; Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018; Holmqvist 2009). Similar to the gym activity above, the process bears its own logic, as being classified with ADHD, for example, may render a so-called disability code at the Public Employment Service, in turn creating possibilities for

unemployed people to receive subsidised employments. A diagnosis (and thereby, a disability code) is certainly necessary for many people who have difficulty finding a place in today's labour market. However, in a time when structural transitions are ongoing, and many young people with aspirations of working manually are left outside of the labour market, the focus on neuropsychiatric disability may appear as a solution 'looking for issues to which [it] might be the answer' (Cohen et al. 1972: 2). It is important to consider that being classified as disabled is an enormous intervention in peoples' subjectivity, not least considering how other factors, such as industrial re-structuring, may have at least as much explanatory power when it comes to periods of unemployment.

Activation through projectification: When funds have run out

In March 2020, I had to take a longer break from my fieldwork in Milltown due to the way in which the COVID-19 restrictions affected both private and public sector activities. From then on, I could no longer visit the activities in Milltown's activation centre, which was now converted from psychical group activities into digital, individual meetings with participants. However, I continued to spend time in Milltown, where I visited the community's cafes, grocery stores, and other open institutions in order to keep talking to locals and work on this thesis. In 2021, when the activities in the activation centre started to open again, the time period for Project 2 had ended. This meant that Monica and the coaches now tried to incorporate selected parts of the projects into the municipality's regular operations of activating NEETs. As the municipal activation responsibility applies to all municipalities regardless of EU funding, the work of identifying so-called 'homebound' between the ages of 16 and 24 in order to mitigate passivity thus continued, albeit without the resources previously enabling group activities and the possibility of also including people up to the age of 29.

When I visited the centre after its reopening in 2021, I met Maggie and Lotta in the corridor leading to the large group room. Their future as coaches in the centre was now uncertain. When I asked

what other EU-funded projects were to be organised in the centre, Maggie replied:

> Oh no. No, we've stopped doing that now. In the end, it was just a lot of collecting names, to fill the list, you know. Hunting people, almost. We were going to apply for another project together with [other municipality], but we decided not to do that. It would be the same thing over again. As soon as you start to get things in order, it's over, and you have to start over again, you know. So now we try to keep what we thought was good, there's still a lot to do.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Maggie expressed what has been pointed out by Alexandru Panican and Rickard Ulmestig (2019: 123), namely that activation driven in project form is seldom successful, simply due to the fact that such projects are often over before they have had time to find their form and work effectively. In this way, Milltown's attempts to mitigate social exclusion by way of heeding to the European Social Fund have illustrated what has been labelled 'project society' (Lundin 2016). This is a society whereby proactive, long-term political planning has been replaced by short-term, reactive projects (cf. Rosa 2009: 106). So-called projectification has even been described as the 'The trojan horse of local government' (Fred 2018), referring to the notion that a 'project logic' has come to challenge more classical forms of bureaucracy by offering more flexibility than what the public sector can achieve by itself.

The fact that Maggie and Lotta did not express any negative criticism of the projects while they were still up and running may be understood in terms of pure self-preservation. The funds that Anette secured from the EU enabled both Maggie and Lotta to be employed as coaches in the youth activation centre, a job that gave them both status and inciting opportunities to learn methods such as motivational interviewing and supported employment. Now that the centre was no longer financed by the EU, however, they were able to let their guard down and spell out what they had kept to themselves; namely that much of the work as coaches entailed scanning Milltown for presumptive participants able to fill the quota of people required to keep the centre financed.

Although the project evaluations of Projects 1 and 2 testified to a relatively good job of delivering the services that NEETs in the

municipality had been offered,[27] the unemployment rates in Milltown have, since the centre's inception, followed the same fluctuations as witnessed at the national level. As such, it is difficult to determine whether the municipality's organisation of the youth activation centre had any significant effect on breaking with local patterns of cultural reproduction (Willis 1993 [1977]). What is clear is that, with Project 2, there were participants in the centre who, as result of being enrolled in the operations, became subject to neuropsychiatric assessments after encouragement from the coaches. Hence, I argue that local measures of activation may have a strong impact on individuals' self-understanding and future life chances in the way that municipalities may have to *produce* certain participants aligned with the target groups formulated by actors such as the European Social Fund. By granting municipalities economic support in mitigating social exclusion locally, these are important actors in the active society. It is therefore important to consider what consequences such financing models may have for individuals subjected to local schemes of activation.

Concluding reflection

In this chapter I have shown what became of policy concepts such as lifelong learning, employability, and life-skills when 'tugged down' and translated to practice by former youth recreation leaders operating as activation professionals. Apart from supporting the participants with individualised support in finding internships and filling out activity reports, it has been shown how the fostering of active citizens included physical activation in the form of gym activities, and knowledge in nutrition. Translating activation into physical exercise and life-skills into food cooking, reflects how the implementation of

27. In the final reports for the respective programmes, goal fulfilment of the programmes is measured in slightly different ways. With regard to Project 1, it appears that out of roughly 100 participants, approximately 90 were activated in the project's activities. Furthermore, the fact that the unemployment rate was lowered during the project period is used as a proxy for the project's success, however, it does so without taking into account either economical fluctuation, nor the national level of unemployment at the time. As for project 2, just over 60 per cent of the enrolled participants (exactly how many were enrolled at Milltown's activation centre is unclear) were able to move on to work, study or practice after the project had ended.

policy is no linear working. Instead, the translation of policy to practice involves processes of editing, whereby the 'meaning and content' of policy formulations may change and lead to unintended consequences (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin 2008). As practices such as cooking food and going to the gym may seem somewhat ambiguous ways of fostering active citizens, it is important to again point out that discourses such as life-skills, employability and entrepreneurship are, by their nature, ambiguous. Considering that the EU-funded activation centre depicted in this chapter relied on three youth recreation leaders to mantle the role of 'experts of subjectivity' (Rose 1999), I have argued that Monica and the coaches in the centre did impressive work with the participants, who in turn expressed their liking for the coaches by making sure that the operations ran smoothly. This was done by, for example, making jokes that saved the coaches' faces in situations wherein not much was happening in the centre, or by which the coaches suddenly felt uncomfortable in their role as activation professionals.

The family-like atmosphere cultivated in the centre has been understood in terms of a 'domestic world of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), meaning that a sense of reciprocal loyalty and care prevailed between the participants and the coaches spending their days together inside the premises. When it came to transforming the alleged 'industrial mentality' blamed for causing unemployment in Milltown, the atmosphere and practices employed to activate unemployed young adults in the centre seemed to work contrary to such intentions. The gym activity in particular instead seemed to make room for the young men enrolled in the operations to reproduce the same working-class identity that the centre was supposed to create pathways away from.

This gives strength to Sebastian Künzel (2012), who showed how local rationalities may influence the organisation of activation policy locally. Hence, Project 1 seemed to have little effect in terms of transforming the participants' subjectivity. With Project 2, however, I showed how a new institutional discourse entered Milltown's youth activation centre. Although the concrete practices of activating the community's 'homebound' did not change significantly from Project 1, I showed how Project 2 entailed a more paternal, biomedical discourse

inciting the participants to disclose their psychological and medical statuses to the group. Compared to the ambiguous notions of life-long learning, employability, and life-skills, I showed how the coaches at the centre seemed to master the neurobiological parlance relatively well, appearing confident in terms of how they aligned the participants with neuropsychiatric diagnoses. This, I have argued, reflects the strong impact that the neurobiological truth-discourse exert in today's society (e.g. Rose & Abi-Rached 2013; Conrad 2007), by which many seek to decipher themselves and others through biomedical knowledge. At the same time, I have shown how the coaches admitted to a practice whereby they had to locate, and in a sense *create* the target groups needed in order to secure funds from the EU. This reflects the consequences of the active society, whereby long-term political interventions have increasingly been replaced by short-term projects locating structural conflicts at the level of the individual (cf. Crespo Suárez & Serrano Pascual 2007).

7. Returning to labour? Enter Milltown's Labour Market Unit

Another important site wherein I conducted repeated observations in order to explore Milltown's governing of unemployed, was at the municipality's Labour Market Unit (LMU). As stated in Chapter 2, LMUs are found in almost every Swedish municipality, working to promote benefit claimants' establishment in working and social life through 'active' efforts with a strong labour market focus. The aim is to equip people who are deemed to be positioned far from the labour market with the qualities they require to be able to eventually acquire a job. The overarching objective is to reduce the expenditures on social benefit claimants, which, according to the National Board of Health and Welfare's official statistics, has increased in recent years. Unlike the Swedish Public Employment Service, which, as stated in previous chapters, has the overall responsibility for the implementation of labour market policy in Sweden, LMUs here offer their own, locally based activation initiatives. This means that they are subject to less control than national labour policy measures. As a result, the local activation of social benefit claimants may look very different across different municipalities (cf. Künzel 2012; Jacobsson et al. 2017).

The premise

Milltown's LMU was located at the far end of the municipality's Workshop Street, next to a car repair shop, a special joinery, a cleaning business and what used to serve as the community's train station. As such, the unit lay somewhat hidden from Milltown's town centre, which is similar to Holmqvist's observation that sheltered employments are

often separated from the wider community by being located in more work-intense milieus on the periphery of society (Holmqvist 2013: 51). In a large one-story building with attached barracks, the LMU meandered like the letter 's' through parking lots and the aforementioned other businesses.

Hence, rather than resembling a municipal operation dedicated to supporting unemployed welfare recipients, the building appeared like any other labour-intensive environment often found next to the main road on the outskirts of many societies. Had it not been for the sign on the door, which informed that this was the municipality's LMU, it was thereby easy to mistake the operation from other businesses in the area. This related to the participants activated by the LMU as well. Wearing blue-collar clothes when they stood outside the premises smoking a cigarette, they tended to blend in with other people working in the area.

Having been in operation since the 1990s, I learned that Milltown's LMU activated unemployed benefit recipients by way of organising various workshops in the premise, such as a carpentry, a sewing department, a kitchen, and a garage. This was the explanation as to why many of the participants activated by the LMU wore blue-collar clothes. At the far end of a corridor behind the entrance to the premises, the unit's manager, Margareta, had her office. When I met Margareta for the first time in 2018, she had been employed as the manager for two years. After showing me around, she explained to me that benefit claimants of all ages were activated in the workshops according to gender and interest:

> We have everything from young people here who have dropped out of school to those who are soon to retire, and who are worn out both here and there [laughs]. […] Those who have been directed here by the social secretaries, they are here on activity support. There are a few. Then there are those who are here on internships or work training, they have activity support from the employment service. […] And then we have quite a number who are here on various labour policy employments. Most of them are employed on so-called extra positions.[28] […] There is a lot going on here, trust me. We're busy! We have a small sewing workshop where we provide municipal institutions with services such as sewing curtains, for example, and other things that they might order. It might be costumes for preschools and schools, bibs for the elderly care, a

28. See footnote 6 on page 36 above.

> little bit of this and that based on what they order. Then we make patchwork quilts, pillows, and bags that we sell here, so we ask for [private households to stop by and hand in] fabrics, so there are quite many who, when they clean out at home, come here to hand in old jeans and other clothes and fabrics. Right now, as far as I understand, we have a shortage of denim. Then we have to consider that we must not compete with the private businesses in the community, so this means that we are not out and market ourselves and our sales. Instead, people who know about us come here, and shop and so on.

What Margareta described during our initial interview was an operation that was well established in the community. In the corridor adjacent to her office, shirts, trousers, backpacks, and pillows were put on display and sold to economically challenged people in the community. During fieldwork in the LMU, I sometimes observed for myself how elderly people visited the premises to buy cheap clothing, or to order gardening services from Roger, the supervisor of the so-called outdoors' group.

As the LMU was an institutionalised service provider in the community, no marketing was allowed or needed for customers to show up. Margareta continued:

> Then we have the gardening group. We have been doing gardening services for many years and we have a political decision to make it easier for the retired to stay in their properties and houses. So, we drive around and mow lawns and hedges. Serve the seniors. And some of those seniors come here and pay cash, and then maybe when they come here, they also buy something in the sewing workshop, which we sort of market while they're here. We probably have about 250 households in the municipality that we serve.

In this way, Milltown's LMU provided both municipal institutions and locals throughout the community with various services.

As we shall see, the fact that the unit was indeed a trusted service provider in the community, activating approximately 60 participants on a daily basis, however implicated on the LMU's aim to bring participants closer to the regular labour market. Since the economic crisis during the 1990s, the LMU seemed to have developed into something of a parallel labour market in Milltown, offering participants who used to occupy themselves with manual labour at the industry a chance to continue to nurture practical competencies, thereby restoring the self-worth lost after periods of unemployment.

The sewing department

Having been in place since the early 1990s, I learned that, as with the rest of the LMU, not much had changed in the sewing department during the past 30 years. In a fanzine produced by some of the LMU's participants in 1994, the sewing department was presented along with an urge for Milltowners to stop by and support the operation by handing in old clothes and various fabrics so that the sewing department would get more material to transform into clothes and other items needed by locals with constrained economic situations. Next to a black-and-white picture of a female participant showing two children's costumes featuring Zorro's 'Z' and Batman's bat-emblem, it read:

> *The Sewing Service: A Place where Imagination and Creativity flows*
>
> The sewing service is also located at the Workshop Street, next door to the carpentry. There, seven people are busy sewing curtains for school, clothes for the day-care and the leisure centre. This may include clothes for Punch-and-Judy puppets. In order to get the right inspiration, they borrow books from the library. They [the participants] have mixed experiences, and it is important to use one's imagination. There are washing machines here, which are used to wash clothes for institutions in the municipality, and which the property management manages. The room is quite small, and more space would have been desirable. They also want fabrics, glitters, and other things that can be used in their operation. So go through your drawers and cabinets, because what you don't use is warmly welcomed to the sewing service.
>
> (Article in the LMU's fanzine, 1994, my translation.)

Some 30 years later, the sewing department still operated in much the same way as described in the fanzine-excerpt above, providing the community's elderly and less affluent with cheap clothing and accessories made from leftover fabric and clothes handed in by locals and municipal institutions, such as day care centres. Even the colours on the LMU's premise's walls seemed to match with the pictures in the 1994 fanzine.

Eventually, the room housing the sewing department was replaced by a larger venue. The new room was well lit by fluorescent light, and a long worktable enabled a social atmosphere whereby the participants could socialise. This accorded to the rehabilitative logic of LMUs, whereby individuals who have been unemployed for prolonged periods of time are offered environments which enable a gradual return to

a working life and socialising with colleagues. The chairs around the worktable were modern reclining office chairs that were ergonomically suited to the task. Likewise, the sewing machines that the participants used were modern. In this way, the department gave a professional impression.

When I interviewed Margareta, however, she did not believe that sewing services helped make employable individuals ready to approach the labour market:

> [the sewing department] is a relatively large part [of the operations]. But maybe it's more, like, rehabilitation. It's not that easy to market [the sewing department] as a place where one can work train, nowadays. Because sewing, either you are interested in it, or you are not.

The manager was referring to the fact that relatively few jobs on today's labour market require sewing competency. Consequently, Margareta continued, the start-up of similar operations elsewhere, would probably be difficult to justify. Nevertheless, as an institutionalised practice of activating unemployed in Milltown, the sewing department served a rehabilitative purpose by providing long-term unemployed a chance to socialise with others, and thereby build routines.

During my observations in the LMU's premises, the sewing department was able to activate approximately 12 participants. Not surprisingly, it was mostly populated by women, reflecting the reproduction of a gendered division of labour. In the 1994 fanzine article cited above, the former manager commented on this fact, stating, 'It's probably only a matter of time until men want to work here in the sewing department'. Some 30 years later, however, only one man was activated therein. Arriving in Sweden from Syria, where he had worked as a tailor, Hamid was responsible for the more complex assignments in the department. As such, he disposed of his own workspace, consisting of a small table placed at the far end of the longer working table that were occupied by the women. According to the supervisors in the LMU, Hamid preferred to work on his own, although I sometimes observed him helping other participants with various tasks, or making the women in the department laugh as he passed them by. Interestingly, Anna, who was the supervisor with the main responsibility of overseeing this department, stated that 'Hamid had to argue to be

placed in the sewing department […] And we had a woman here, who had to argue in order to be allowed in the gardening group'.

Being recently employed, Anna explained to me that she saw it as her main mission to even out the gendered division of labour in the workshops,

> Among the other supervisors here, there is a will to even out the gender division. And when I was interviewed [for the job of supervisor], I asked a lot of difficult questions about gender equality and stuff like that, they took it very well.

What Anna referred to in the conversation above was the fact that the other supervisors, who had been employed for many years in the LMU, had no problem with her aim of introducing 'more gender thinking', as she phrased it, in the workshops.

Despite the fact that the sewing department hardly contributed to increase the employability among participants, the women activated therein seemed satisfied with their placements:

> It's good, we sit here and chat with each other. Today it's silent though because there are some who have caught the flu, but otherwise it's great.
>
> (Woman in her 40s.)

> I think this is a good job. And for the immigrants, it's good too because they get to learn the Swedish language. I just wish they could stop talking in their own language, you know, because then you don't know what they are saying, and what they are laughing about.
>
> (Woman in her 50s.)

> I like it here, it's a lot to do, we're always busy!
>
> (Woman in her 40s.)

What these women's comments illustrate was the rehabilitative aspect of the sewing department. That is, despite being out of fashion as a way of fostering employability, the workshop provided the participants with a place where they were able to break isolation. The fact that it was an appreciated placement was reflected in the cheerful atmosphere prevailing in the group. As an informal aspect of the operation, the department also bridged the gap between Milltown natives, and

immigrants activated in the LMU. Importantly, although the manager explained to me that the workshop primarily provided a social context for unemployed benefit claimants, the community-building aspect of 'helping out' by selling cheap clothing, doing repairs and the like, was not negligible. As seen in the third quote above, to 'be busy' implied a demand for such services among residents and institutions in the community. Hence, although the sewing department rarely fostered self-reliant individuals in line with the active society orientation, it provided a context for the participants to feel useful which in turn contributed to some degree of meaningfulness. Down the hall from the entrance door, participants activated in this department were often seen moving swiftly back and forth between the many sewing machines and working tables placed in the venue:

> Hamid […] apologizes as he passes me to pick up something on the shelf in front of us. Two women of his age are sitting at the sewing machines, deeply immersed in what they are up to. I see one of the sisters apparently working in the sewing department, and hear that her sister is also here somewhere. I ask what she is up to, and she describes how she works with the first step on what will eventually become a patchwork quilt. She has carefully sewn two small pieces of fabric together with each other, which she tells me will later turn into jeans pockets. I ask her if what she's doing is hard, but she just shakes her head, 'it's only fun!'
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Whereas Hamid was a trained tailor, the sisters mentioned in the quotation above had decades of experience working at the state-owned Swedish Railways company, where they had sewn fabric for seating. After losing their jobs due to redundancies and automation, they both eventually ended up in the LMU. Together with Hamid, they had competencies needed for carrying out more advanced work tasks. As Anna, who oversaw the sewing department, had no competency in sewing, Hamid and the two sisters had turned into somewhat of informal supervisors in the workshop. This contributed to a sense of pride and self-worth, not only among Hamid and the two sisters, but in the sewing department generally. In this way, like the other workshops organised by the LMU, the sewing department gave proof of self-sufficiency, whereby the participants mastered the tasks they were expected to perform in exchange for receiving economic benefits.

The garage

Down a corridor from the sewing department was the LMU's garage. The premise was an extension to the LMU's original establishment, which was noticed by the increase in ceiling height as well as the fact that the premise was not as insulated as the original parts of the building. Similar to other industrial workplaces, the garage was adapted to handle exhaust and dirt. The floor was made of concrete and the walls were made of sheet metal, which increased the noise level from compressors and other machinery used in the premise. In the middle of the premise stood a car lift, and along one of the walls, large shelves stored the tires belonging to the municipality's service cars. Similar to the sewing department, the tools and equipment used by the participants contributed to a professional atmosphere, which to the untrained eye was more or less indistinguishable from a professional car repair shop. The participants' tasks included making sure that the service cars were in good condition, both aesthetically and technically. Aside from tire exchanges, this meant everything from car washing to simpler forms of maintenance work. Particularly during early spring and autumn, it was high season for the garage department. Then all tires on the municipality's service cars had to be replaced, washed, and stored.

Similar to the sewing department, the participants activated in the garage seemed to be able to maintain a sense of dignity and self-worth by being able to continue nurturing the practical competencies that they had acquired prior to being enrolled in the LMU. When I visited the premises in the spring of 2021, one of the participants testified to the garage's heavy work load, 'Oh, well, we're very busy [laughs]. But it's good too, to have a lot to do'. Although things were sometimes busy in the garage, in general, the premises were usually not populated by more than two participants at a time. More often than not, the participants activated in the garage had foreign backgrounds, and most of them had previous experience from working in similar milieus. Wearing blue-collar clothes, their hands were often soiled with soot and the participants warned me not to shake their hands.

When I spoke with two participants in the garage in 2019, they both told me that their 'job' was 'good', as it allowed them to cultivate their interest in motors, although only one of them had experience working professionally as a car mechanic in his country of origin. The

garage thus enabled both participants to occupy themselves with tasks aligned to their interest.

As stated above, one could easily get the impression that the garage department was a professional workshop. However, more complex assignments, such as motor repairs, were handled elsewhere at a procured car repair shop. When I visited the premises in the spring of 2020, for example, a man in his 50s whom I often encountered in the garage complained about the complexity of contemporary cars' digitalised mechanics:

> [Sven] is in the same good mood as last time I saw him, shaking his head as he catches me looking at one of the municipal service cars that is parked in front of us, 'Oh, the hybrid', he states, 'It's just a big damn computer all together!'
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

By shaking his head, Sven here subtly made reference to a time when the parts under the hood were purely mechanical, thereby revealing the limits of his knowledge in contemporary motors. At the same time, he maintained a sense of self-worth by putting pride in practical competency over today's computerised car industry.

The carpentry

Next to the garage was the carpentry area, where another group of men were activated with maintaining and repairing various municipal facilities. This included everything from benches placed around the community to overseeing playgrounds and public buildings, sanitising walls from graffiti and mowing public lawns. If something needed to be inspected and/or repaired at the carpentry, participants with the right knowledge and experience would use one of the municipality's service cars to pick it up and drive it to the workshop, which was the largest venue in the LMU. Holding several robust work benches and various more or less advanced carpentry tools, the carpentry section was a well-equipped facility that activated participants who were somewhat older than those in the other workshops. During my observations in the premises, the department was populated with men whose competencies ranged from interior and furniture joinery to electricians and industry workers. During one of my initial visits to the carpentry, somewhat symbolically, a group of three participants were repairing

doors that belonged to Milltown's historical industrial houses located in the community's main street:

> Björn, a silent man with moustache in his 60s, and whose thick-glassed spectacles looks as if they're about to slip off his nose, is showing me the doors that he and his co-worker, who has worked as a furniture carpenter, is working on. 'I have worked with these doors here for a few weeks now, it's the old industrial houses' doors that we renovate. It's a good job', said Lars.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

The renovation of the old industrial houses' doors was commissioned by Milltown's local community association (Swedish *hembygdsförening*), which displays the houses as a museum during the summer months. Being given the responsibility to renovate the doors bestowed the participants with a sense of worth by recognising that their practical competencies served to curate memories from Milltown's industrial history.

Rather than increasing the employability of these men by subjecting them to, for example, exercises increasing their communicative skills, the renovation of the industrial houses' doors was a task embedded with Milltown's local history. This illustrates a tension between the organisation's formal goal of equipping participants in the LMU with employability, and utilising participants' practical competencies in order to maintain community obligations. The participants also recognised that the carpentry contributed little to prepare them for the regular labour market. For example, a supervisor told me that Björn, who had spent most of his life working in a large-scale industry in another municipality, now enjoyed 'working here while waiting for his retirement'. The supervisor seemed largely unbothered by this fact, and by using the term 'work' rather than 'placement', he (unintentionally) helped legitimise the idea that the participants saw the LMU as an alternative to an increasingly ambiguous regular labour market.

By being recognised for their practical competencies, I suggest that the participants activated in the carpentry were able to maintain their 'dignity'. Notably, the men who populated the carpentry seemed to nurture a sense of integrity, which was reflected by their calm and composed manner, and by the way they moved habitually between the various work benches and tools that hung along the walls. Maintaining

self-worth among the participants was here facilitated by the way the LMU *appropriated* rather than transformed the alleged 'industrial mentality'. As I will discuss in more detail later on, this created a dilemma for the management of the LMU.

The outdoors' group

Another important part of the operations organised by Milltown's LMU included serving the community's elderly with various gardening services, such as mowing lawns and grooming hedges. Participants activated in the outdoors' group spent most of the time outside of the unit's premises, stopping by only to get tools, or to have breakfast or lunch in the cafeteria. I soon noticed that, similar to the other workshops, this group was notably self-sufficient, with no supervisors joining them as they were out doing their duties in the community. This observation was also confirmed by Roger, the group's supervisor, who spent his days in the office answering and planning assignments from private people and other municipal institutions in need of the group's services. During one of my first visits to the LMU's premises, Roger wanted me to witness the group's effectiveness for myself:

> Oh, you should come here on Monday morning when they are handed the weekly assignments! Then, there is a queue in front of my door here, because they come here to get the car keys you know. And then they're out!
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Watching the daily operations unfold, the tempo and urge among participants in the outdoors' group to get started was noticeable. After lining up outside Roger's office to receive their car keys and directions, the participants rushed out to the municipal pick-up trucks that the LMU used and were soon on their way. Most of the participants I spoke with seemed to enjoy the individual responsibility that came with working in the outdoors' group. This was illustrated by Ahmed, a man in his 40s who had worked in the group for a long time and had received a certain informal responsibility for making sure that things ran smoothly. When I met Ahmed one morning and asked him how things were going, he gave me a big smile and replied, 'Oh, it's work, work, work!'

In Milltown, the silver trucks that the outdoors' group had at their disposal were frequently seen driving around the community's streets.

Loaded with various kinds of garden machinery and other tools that might come in handy, the group easily passed as 'regular' municipal service workers.

When conversating with senior citizens in the community, many stated that they had received help from the outdoors' group at one time or another:

> Yes I call them when I need them to take care of my mown, and fix with bushes and things like that. They're really great.
>
> (Milltowner in her 70s.)

> They are so funny too, because not all of them work, its usually only one or two doing the job, and the rest is sitting in the car waiting [laughs].
>
> (Milltowner in his 80s.)

> One time when it was raining heavily, they came here to groom my hedge and I felt so bad for them, so I prepared some coffee on the stove. And when I came back, there was one poor bastard doing the grooming while the others avoided the rain in the car. The windows were completely fogged up, you couldn't see the rest of them [laughs]!
>
> (Milltowner in her 80s.)

The quotes above shows that the outdoor group is an appreciated function in the community, but also one that locals sometimes allowed themselves to talk about in a joking manner. The notion that the group sometimes appeared unproductive may be explained by the sheer number of participants joining forces on their missions. It was not uncommon for me to see four people sharing one truck while being out on their daily operations.

Similar to the sewing department and the carpentry, it remains questionable whether being activated in the outdoors' group helped increase participants' employability. However, it enabled the participants to socialise and practice their ability to cooperate. Thereto, the fact that the outdoors' group offered the same kind of services as 'regular' gardening businesses, although at less of a cost, made it a widely appreciated function in the community, which in turn made it a meaningful activity for the participants.

The demography department

A newly organised workshop in Milltown's Labour Market Unit was the so-called demography group. This was the only department composed of equal numbers of men and women. The workshop was organised in collaboration with Milltown's local community association, which had asked the LMU for help translating old church books into new digital media, again showing that the LMU was a trusted institution in the community that was willing and able to assist with various services. Once again, this included curating Milltown's local history. The group was housed in a large group room at the opposite side of the sewing department. Inside, participants who desired to do administrative tasks, or who had previous experience from working as secretaries, for example, disposed of their own computer and various lexicons, encyclopaedias, and dictionaries. While most of the male participants I spoke with here stated that they nurtured an interest in history, the women explained how they had occupied administrative jobs, and that this was the reason for ending up in the demography group.

An illustrative example of a participant activated in the demography group on the merit of his interest in history was Micke, a man in his early 50s, who had ended up on prolonged sick-leave due to periods of sleep deprivation and a loss of energy after working the industry for nearly 30 years. 'Now, no one wants to hire me', he stated. After receiving an extra position in the LMU, he often showed up well before the others in the demography group, playing heavy metal music from the miniature monitors he had brought with him and placed on his desk. As soon as the others stared to arrive, Micke redirected the music's output to his earphones, 'I'm awake in the morning, so I might as well come here early', he stated. Micke continued to explain that he had a great interest in history, arts, and music. In his spare time, he took the train to a nearby city where he was active in an amateur theatre group. He explained to me that working in the demography group allowed him to dwell deep into family histories, tracking the fate of various 'interesting individuals' in the church books. 'As you can see here', he said one morning, putting his fingertip against the computer screen, 'this little child only got to live for a few weeks, he was born close to where I grew up!' I asked Micke if deciphering the writing was difficult. 'Well, at first it's hard', he stated, 'but then you sort of get the gist of

it, and you start to recognise various ways of writing letters, and stuff'. Another time that I visited the workshop, another participant called to me, 'Hey, come here, let me show you something!' 'What we do here is important', the man stated, 'and it's also fun to help [names of two individuals from the community association] and listen to their stories. I really hope that my employment [extra position] will be prolonged'. In addition to translating the handwritten registers in the church books, this man had tracked a family's journey from Milltown to the United States in the 1800s. In his investigations, he had managed to find a picture of the schooner that had taken them across the Atlantic. 'Fantastic, isn't it?', he asked rhetorically.

The fact that he called on me to witness his investigations showed that he took pride in what he spent the days doing. That is, keeping Milltown's history alive was considered an important task. In fact, the interest in history among some of the participants in the demography group was contagious, and I often felt it easy to be swept along in various depictions of families living in Milltown pre-industrialisation. At the same time, the demography group helped strengthen the sense of nostalgia that seemed to have paralysed Milltown in the wake of industrial re-structuring. Reflecting escapism and a longing for something other than what reality had to offer (cf. Johannisson 2001), the demography group can thereby be said to counteract Milltown's implementation of the active society locally.

In this way, similar to the snapshot from the carpentry area above, where a group of participants found pleasure in renovating the old industrial houses' doors, it was again clear that the LMU's formal aim of preparing participants for the regular labour market clashed with the fact that the tasks performed in the workshops were embedded with an aim of also keeping the community's history alive, hence strengthening the participants' interest in the past rather than directing their gaze to the future, and a working life outside of the LMU's premises.

The cafeteria

Finally, next to the carpentry area was the LMU's cafeteria, where unemployed women prepared and served other participants and the unit's management with breakfast, lunch and afternoon coffee. The participants activated in the cafeteria also took care of catering assignments

throughout the community, such as preparing food to employees at the town hall during meetings or conferences. Similar to the type of slightly dilapidated roadside taverns you can still come across along certain highways, the cafeteria's interior bore deep red colours that had not changed since the LMU was established in the 1990s. The food was also reminiscent of a roadside joint, containing saturating rather than nutritious meals, such as hash with fried eggs, or sausage with potato mash served on fake wooden trays. On a bulletin in the corridor between the sewing department and the carpentry hung a menu containing the weekly offerings. Apart from the daily special, the menu offered relatively inexpensive yet filling dishes, such as pizza (Billy's pan pizza and, sometimes, homecooked pizza slices). Evidently, these were no meals concurrent to the public image of the active and employable self who is conscious about health and makes sure to express bodily discipline. However, for those who desired a somewhat more nutritious lunch, the cafeteria sometimes offered a chicken or tuna-based salad. There was also the opportunity for participants to bring their own food, which some did. Interestingly, the only beverage found on the menu was milk, which cost 3 SEK per glass (approximately 0.3 EUR). Although Swedes drink the most milk in the world per capita, which is a result of having a surplus of milk during industrialisation, milk is rarely served as a beverage to adults at cafes and restaurants anymore. At Milltown's LMU, however, it appeared to be a sought-after beverage among the participants activated in the workshops. Once again, this pointed to remnants of the past, if you will, rather than today's lactose-free and wellness-oriented, active society (cf. Cederström & Spicer 2015).

Before lunch, a queue often formed outside the cafeteria, and inside, participants sat at tables according to which workshop they were activated in. Next to the entrance sat the sewing and demography groups, which stood out from the rest by not wearing blue-collar clothes. These were also the only tables composed of mixed genders. Further inside, the participants from the garage and carpentry workshops engaged in somewhat more load conversations. While participants from the blue-collar workshops consumed their lunches while occasionally bursting out into laughter, participants belonging to the sewing and demography departments spoke more silently, smiling at each other rather than laughing out loud. In particular, the women

activated in the demography group distinguished themselves from the clientele occupying the tables further inside the cafeteria by behaving more in line with the self-controlled culture prevailing in white-collar workplaces. Sitting at tables covered with oilcloths, the demography group in particular looked somewhat misplaced in the cafeteria, whose shopfloor-like culture was notable.

The atmosphere

In the depictions of the workshops above, I have shown how Milltown's LMU tended to blend in with other work-intense businesses located on Milltown's Workshop Street. Although there was no doubt that some of the participants activated in the LMU's premise had various difficulties resulting from prolonged periods of unemployment, sickness, or substance abuse, the general impression of the operations was that it resembled any other shopfloor-like workplace.

Although the atmosphere in the LMU was generally in high spirits, as seen above, there were some discernible differences in behaviour and jargon between the various workshops. Whereas the jargon in the carpentry, outdoors' group and garage resembled that of any other shopfloor-like workplace (cf. Willis 1993 [1977]), the demeanour that prevailed in the sewing department, and particularly the demography group, instead reflected the more restrained manners connoting white-collar working culture. That is, whereas the atmosphere in the carpentry, outdoors' group and garage were characterised by a mix of wit and cynicism, the participants activated in the sewing department and demography group were somewhat less talkative and more concerned with focusing their discussions on work tasks than private life. However, the sewing department seemed more open to discussions about things happening outside the LMU's premise than the demography group. I suggest that these differences may have reflected the LMU's division between participants who had occupied manual labour prior to ending up in the workshops, and participants previously occupied with more administrative-like work tasks. Hence, rather than breaking such institutionalised, and to some extent gendered patterns, the LMU here seemed to imitate the somewhat stereotypical work environments associated with industrial society.

As shown above, the majority of the participants seemed to put pride and dignity in serving the community by performing various forms of manual work. This was reflected in the participants' punctuality, and thus work ethic. Before the doors opened in the mornings, men and women were scattered around the parking lot, waiting to go to 'work'. Contrary to a neoliberal discourse that attributes unemployment to individuals' lack of morality, the punctuality displayed by the participants were reminiscent of the characteristics that seniors in Milltown associated with the 'industrial mentality'. When starting to conduct observations inside the LMU's premises, it was striking how the atmosphere prevailing in the workshops was largely absent from the shame and stigma that may come with being enrolled in a municipal (or national) activation measure. As I have shown above, the participants here seemed to go on with their daily tasks with little involvement and motivation from the supervisors, who often minded their own business in their offices, making calls to customers who made use of the unit's services, or planning the weekly schedules.

The notion that the participants in Milltown's LMU seemed to ascribe self-worth to serving the community by performing manual work, rather than expressing feelings of embarrassment or stigmatisation in relation to being activated in a municipal activation measure, was also confirmed by the management. During the first interview I had with Margareta, the LMU's manager, she testified to the fact that the participants activated in the workshops seemed to appreciate their placements a little more than was desirable:

MARGARETA: They thrive so damn well here, they don't want to leave!
ME: The average participant, then, how long are they usually enrolled?
MARGARETA: [Now somewhat troubled-looking] Well, do you want me to be honest?
ME: Yes.
MARGARETA: Too long. [Laughter]

The pause in the interview reproduced above reflects how the manager, who up until this point had been positive and somewhat proud of the LMU's operations, was suddenly troubled. As it turned out, some of the participants activated in the workshops had been enrolled in the operations for over a decade. This was the case despite the fact

that the LMU was geared towards what Nybom labels as 'job activation', meaning that the operations aimed to deter welfare clients from passively receiving benefits (Nybom 2014). However, as seen in the excerpt, the deterring effect that 'job activation' aims to achieve seemed largely absent here.

On the contrary, Margareta and the supervisors in the workshops testified to the aforementioned punctuality and thus work ethic among the participants (cf. Sennett 1998; Lamont 2000). The fact that the participants' willingness to work complicated the LMU's aim to bring the participants closer to the regular labour market, however, seemed to go unnoticed among the majority of the supervisors. Besides Margareta, who, as I shall discuss more below, recognised that the operations would perhaps 'not look good' in the eyes of certain audiences, only one supervisor confirmed my initial impression of the LMU as seemingly devoid of the kind of stigma and shame that may come with being enrolled in similar operations. Anna, a woman in her mid-40s, who prior to coming to Milltown had been employed as a middle-manager at the Public Employment Service in a larger city, stated to me that:

> There is no shame here, you know, if I compare with measures we delivered at the Public Employment Service, people don't mind ending up here, you know. […] No one wants to get out of here. […] They see it as a privilege, being here!

Rather than reproducing the positivity prevailing in the LMU's workshops, the tone in which Anna stated her opinion was worrying. Being employed by Margareta in order to bring 'new eyes' to the operations, Anna was notably frustrated by the fact that many of Milltown's unemployed seemed to thrive in the workshops.

Anna stated to me how unemployed people in the community tended to gravitate towards the LMU's workshops of their own will. 'I had a young guy here, whose father had received a placement in the outdoors' group, you know, and he wanted to join his father!', she explained. Anna did not mince her words when describing the prevailing situation in the LMU, and its function as a kind of parallel labour market in the municipality. Anna continued to explain how she was 'frankly shocked' when arriving to the unit's premises in 2016:

> When I came here, I thought that several people here were, like, weakly gifted you know, but then I realised they have nothing from home, that's the thing, they have no influences or inputs at all! They're depressed, they have no facial expressions, you know, when you look at them, they express, like, nothing, an effect of prolonged untreated depression. I have never met such people before, like, I'm a middle-class woman from [big city] [laugher]!
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Having knowledge of what rules characterised the regular labour market, and importantly, what was required from unemployed to enter into it, Anna reiterated the problem formulation described in the previous chapter, whereby a lack of knowledge about the 'world outside' was as much associated with the community's alleged 'industrial mentality' as the desire among unemployed to occupy blue-collar jobs. At the same time, the laughter at the end of the excerpt reflected a somewhat exaggerated description of the participants, who she explained took much responsibility in the workshops, and were not particularly depressed at all. That is, successively, Anna came to the realisation that it was perhaps *she* who deviated from the norm, and that her initial contacts with the participants had rendered somewhat of a cultural shock, both for her and them. Having got to know the local culture in Milltown after moving in from one of the larger cities in Sweden, she explained to me how she successively came to re-evaluate the situation in terms of class. That is, nurturing an interest in the social sciences, Anna reasoned that it was perhaps her own class position that had clashed with the working-class identity cultivated in the community. Successively, she had thus come to view the participants from a more sociological perspective, seeing them more as a product of the local history and culture, rather than psychologising their existence in the workshops. 'Everybody wants to end up here', she stated during a follow-up conversation, 'because here they are able to do what they have always done'. What Anna referred to was the idea that the LMU's workshops enabled the participants to again perform manual labour. With time, Anna had recognised that Milltown's industrial history may have contributed to a culture valuing 'other things in life', as she phrased it. 'People are quite happy here', she stated, 'like, at peace. In Milltown, you are proud!'

Anna's initial encounter with Milltown and its LMU may be said to have represented a clash between a neoliberal rationality emphasis-

ing freedom through self-realisation (Rose 1999), and a local 'sociologic' that downplayed individual status in favour of social cohesion and a sense of community. This, I suggest, is in line with Lamont's study on the lifeworlds of French and American workers, who, in line with a 'domestic world of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), found meaning in life not by redirecting their gaze outwards, but in preserving social relations and the collective:

> many of the men I talked to find meaning, value, and worth in their own lives, and they achieve this in part by stressing moral criteria of success that are available to all (such as personal integrity and good interpersonal relationships) and by downplaying the status criteria that are the dominant currency of the upper middle class world.
>
> (Lamont 2000: 99f.)

However, although Anna had come to reflect on the fact that her own position in the social strata might have inflicted on her understanding of Milltown and its unemployed, whom she initially experienced as introverted and closed-minded, she nevertheless saw it as problematic that no one in the LMU had responsibility for bringing the participants closer to the regular labour market. She specifically mentioned the lack of more coaching-oriented practices as problematic, referring to practices motivating unemployed to take up studies, or find jobs outside of the community. Consequently, Anna explained to me how she saw it as her mission to bring 'new thinking' to the operations.

Among the participants displaying a genuine interest in leaving the LMU's workshops, I was told by the management that such aspirations were more often found among the group of 'foreign-born' individuals activated in the premises. As stated by Anna:

> And here you see, there is a difference between Milltowners and the foreign-born participants; they [the foreign-born] want a real job, not just sit here and sew. There are no sewing jobs out there!
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

The management's observation that 'foreign-born' participants displayed more interest in the world outside the LMU's premises may reflect the fact that some of them had academic backgrounds, and thereby experience with more high-skilled labour, hence striving to

'reproduce their previous position in the social structure' (Bourdieu 2010: 70).

Restoring self-worth

Although it would be reasonable to argue that Milltown's LMU reflected what some would label a 'welfare trap', implying that participants had become accustomed to a life of receiving benefits, I argue that the everyday life inside the unit's premises did not match well with such a hypothesis. On the contrary, I suggest that the 'learned helplessness' and, according to some, 'inauthentic' way of life associated with welfare traps (cf. Dixon & Frolova 2011: 3), was largely absent in Milltown's LMU. In the workshops housed in its premises, participants seemed to exert both meaning and self-fulfilment by engaging in fixed-hour, manual labour. As I showed in the previous section, the participants' willingness to work was palpable. To be able to provide various services to municipal institutions and private people, mostly elderly and economically challenged, here seemed to ascribe the participants with meaning and self-worth.

Although there were different reasons why the participants had ended up in the workshops, such as rehabilitation, work training or extra positions, I was not able to discern any notable differences in motivation to work among the participants. This is notable. As there are different compensation levels tied to different forms of placements, there may be different incentives among participants in LMUs to show up to the operations and do what they are required to in order to get access to economic benefits. For example, those who hold extra positions – which, in a sense, may be likened to a 'regular' employment with a higher compensation level than other placements – may be more motivated to be activated than those who are activated on the basis of receiving social benefits from their municipalities. In Milltown's LMU, however, the team spirit observed among the participants in the workshops seemed to outmanoeuvre such differences. Similar to how a 'normal' workplace often functions, irrespective of their forms of placement, the participants operated as a collective in the various departments and seemed to approach their work tasks with a similarly stoic 'work-is-work' attitude. This, I argue, may be understood in light

of the fact that the LMU allowed for a traditional working-class culture to be reproduced in the workshops. As described by Willis (1993 [1977]: 96), 'Work has to be a place, basically, where people are "alright" and with whom a general cultural identity can be shared.' That is, together with being appreciated for the practical knowledge that many of the participants had acquired in a previous working life, they actively reconceptualised their placements as 'work', which, despite being less economically rewarding than jobs in the regular labour market, provided them with an opportunity to reproduce a traditional working-class identity (Lamont 2000).

Importantly, many of the participants I spoke with in the workshops ascribed worthiness to the idea of being part of a trusted institution throughout Milltown. Rather than aligning the activation of unemployed with the mobility imperative entailed in the active society (Farrugia 2016; Garsten 2008; Svensson 2006), I suggest that this helped strengthen the participants' bonds to the community as a whole. Reconceptualising the opportunity to serve the community as part of one's *responsibility*, as something one 'needs to do', was here a way for the participants to maintain a sense of dignity. This gave participants who desired to remain in Milltown a justifiable reason for doing so, hence forming a counterweight to the 'cosmopolitan ethos' (Rozpedowski 2010; Durante 2014) cultivated as part of flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998).

In line with a domestic rationality (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), to stay is thus to be responsible. When speaking with a man in his 30s who had received a placement in the LMU's outdoors' group, he expressed that what was most important in life was to be able to continue to nurture his social relations, something which his 'job' allowed him to do:

> I like it here. It's a lot to do. It's a good work environment. […] I like Milltown. You feel safe here, you know. I've got my girlfriend here, and family and stuff. […] It's just fine, working in the outdoors-group. I've got friends here, and all.

Echoing conversations described in the previous chapter, this man thus made reference to a domestic value sphere by which safety, collectivity and interrelationships were deemed more *worthy* than the cost-benefit calculations and notions of self-realisation making up the entrepreneurial self (Rose 1999). Reminiscent of the traditional

industrial community as a household in the abstracted sense (cf. Lundqvist 2001), the self was here inseparable from the unit. As described by Charlotte Cloutier and Ann Langley (2013: 365):

> [The 'domestic world of worth' adheres to] The realm of the 'family' in its symbolic sense. In this world, what is valued is that which is firm, loyal, selfless, and trustworthy. Hierarchy and tradition play central roles. Superiors are informed and wise, and must care and nurture those who are lower in the hierarchy. Great importance is attached to one's upbringing, as upbringing and good manners reflect where one 'comes from'. The priority of actors in this world is on preserving, protecting, and nurturing the unit (family, guild, group, etc.) to which one belongs, as without this unit, one is nothing.

Drawing on this quote, the LMU's workshops fostered a spirit of community similar to the 'industrial spirit of community' (e.g. Forsberg et al. 2001) described in previous chapters, hailing loyalty as the main moral principle (cf. Jagd 2011). Moreover, by making reference to a 'domestic world of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), many of the participants in Milltown's LMU constructed themselves as 'self-made'; that is, as people who provided for themselves and their families by way of performing concrete, hands-on labour (cf. Brismark 2006; Willis 1993 [1977]). However, as stated above, having pride and dignity in serving one's community put spokes in the wheel of the municipality's aim of achieving the active society locally.

Ambivalence at the shopfloors

The fact that many of the participants activated by Milltown's LMU seemed to thrive in the workshops was also confirmed quantitatively. One morning, Margareta presented me to an employee survey that had been introduced in the workshops in order to prepare the participants for procedures and routines at play in the regular labour market:

> Margareta hands over a large, double-folded paper that turns out to contain a graphic summary of the participants' results on the employee survey. 'Look, I've never seen anything like it, in any workplace I worked at', said Margareta. The graph showed that the vast majority of the participants are very satisfied with being activated in the workshops. 'So, we have a lot to work with here', she told me.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

The results of the survey spoke for themselves. Through self-assessment questions measured with a Likert Scale, the survey responded to seven overall areas: perceived workload, work organisation, room for discretion, leadership, support, knowledge and development, recovery, and other important questions. The results showed that the participants were generally very positive about the operations. 70 per cent answered 'strongly agree' to the question of whether they that felt they had sufficient competence to get the work done. Likewise, 70 per cent answered 'strongly agree' to the question of whether they experienced support from their fellow workers in their daily work. However, the participants were relatively less satisfied with questions related to follow-ups and development. Only 35 per cent answered 'strongly agree' to the question of whether they had the opportunity for continuing education and vocational training. Still, approximately 70 per cent of the participants strongly agreed that that the work was both meaningful and interesting. One way to interpret these somewhat contradictory answers could be that the participants lacked the sense of 'flow' that one may experience when a substantial mastery of a certain skill is balanced by new challenges in work (Csíkszentmihályi 2014). That is, despite being recognised for their practical competencies, which in turn made everyday life in the LMU perceived as meaningful, the daily routines were not challenging enough to generate the kind of well-being that comes from having overcome and mastered new challenges.

After conducting a series of observations in the LMU's workshops, I started to realise that Margareta's problem of getting participants out of the operations into the regular labour market was about more than merely reflecting a question of transforming the mindset of participants. The LMU's formal aim of fostering employable selves able to compete on today's labour market was here withheld by the organisation's internal rationality of maintaining institutionalised community obligations throughout Milltown. 'People count on us [to carry out services]', Margareta stated, thereby giving priority to a domestic value sphere (Weber 1958) when faced with the fact that the institutionalised routines of the LMU seemed to clash with the decree of fostering active and employable individuals.

In her role as the LMU's manager, Margareta here faced a moral multiplicity whereby 'doing good' meant different things depending

on what vantage point was taken. From the perspective of policy orientations aligned with the active society orientation, such as lifelog learning, employability, and active citizenship, doing the right thing entailed more coaching practices whereby the supervisors motivated the participants to change their attitude towards work, freedom and self-fulfilment. This would mean stripping the operations of the kind of 'job-activation' (Nybom 2014) that was now employed as a way of activating welfare beneficiaries in the community, and instead focus solely on coaching unemployed to 'work on themselves' (cf. Sunnerfjell 2022). This would align the operations to the regime of 'civic' and 'market' worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) making up the ideal of the entrepreneurial self.

Hence, in her struggle to resolve the tension between fostering employable individuals and meeting the expectation among participants and residents in the community to keep business as usual, Margareta drew justificatory power from two modalities of worth interchangeably. The domestic value sphere institutionalised over generations here encountered a normative pressure to adjust the operations to better fit with flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998). In seeking to resolve this dilemma, Margareta had hired Anna, who was supposed to bring a new perspective into the organisation. However, changing course in the workshops by employing a more empowering and coaching activation strategy would run the risk of losing legitimacy locally. In this way, Margareta had found herself in a 'dispute over legitimacy' (Patriotta et al. 2011: 1805), whereby, from a local perspective, the practices employed in the LMU lived up to the expectations of both participants and locals throughout the community, while appearing less legitimate in the wider organisation field of welfare services. As Margareta explained:

> It's a dilemma for me and for us working in the management, because we have tasks here that we do for the municipality and private people, which we need to carry out, you know. And some [participants] have been here for a very long time. If we let some of them go, it's actually competencies that disappear!

The above quote illustrates the kind of frustration I experienced when speaking with Margareta and Anna during my observations in the LMU. As we saw in the descriptions of the workshops above, many

participants were treated as having key competencies in the various departments, holding positions in the workshops important for the operations to run smoothly. For example, after Margareta explained to me that she was 'no longer going to prolong any placements' in the workshops (according to her, this was an all-too-common practice in the LMU), she could say the same day that 'We do not want to get rid of her [referring to a participant in cafeteria], we cannot do without her!'

With the expectation on her to implement the active society locally, Margareta thus not only showed loyalty in relation to the community, which relied on the LMU to deliver services, but individual participants as well. By recognising the participants' underlying competencies, Margareta accorded them the worthiness they needed to maintain dignity in the workshops. Once again, the 'domestic world of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) prevailing in the LMU here complicated any attempt to achieve change in the workshops.

In all, despite instilling new routines, such as weekly visits from the Public Employment Service who informed on new jobs available, I was not able during the present study to discern any notable imprints of the active society in Milltown's LMU. Instead, after COVID-19 struck the municipality, it came to my attention that the LMU's practice of providing services throughout the community became even more relevant than it had perhaps ever been.

Mobilisation in the wake of COVID-19

When COVID-19 hit between 2019 and 2021, Milltown's LMU was forced to organise its operations in partly new ways. In October 2020, the LMU put an end to all visits at the workshops, meaning that Milltown's economically challenged residents were no longer able to stop by the premises to order various services or buy clothes and other items sold by the sewing department. Moreover, Milltown's community association, which oversaw the demography groups' translation of old document and church books into digital media, was no longer allowed to enter the premises. As I was myself no longer allowed to visit the workshops, I was forced to take a break in my fieldwork. Meanwhile, during periods of less restrictions, I continued residing in

Milltown so as to not lose touch with locals and what discussions circulated within the community. Eventually, I learned that the LMU's workshops had undergone a temporary re-organisation whereby participants from various workshops had been mobilised in order to make home deliveries of groceries to the community's elderly, who were recommended to stay at home so that they did not expose themselves to the virus. In cooperation with the community's wholesale, senior and functionally varied Milltowners were able to call the LMU, whereafter the supervisors ordered what groceries they needed home by placing orders via the wholesaler's website. Participants in the workshops then picked up the groceries and drove them home to the customers.

Below is what a participant who was usually activated in the demography group thought about being re-organised to instead deliver groceries:

> It was a very good job. You felt, you know that you helped out. That you were able to contribute. The elderly really appreciated what we did. Then [laughs], you know, some of them were very social, like, they really wanted to talk to you, because with us they finally met someone they could talk to. I felt bad for some of them, with no relatives and stuff. It was not just about delivering goods, it was also a social thing.

According to Roger, who usually supervised the outdoors' group, the new service was very popular among Milltowners. The first ones who received the service, he told me, were elderly who were already receiving help with gardening. From then on, the word spread to others as well:

> Oh yes. It was also, you know, I think that they [the elderly] liked it when we came, to be able to socialise a little. We actually still deliver food to some of the customers [despite ended restrictions]. I think we will continue doing that for a while.

The delivering of groceries was another way of maintaining community obligations at the LMU. Again, the priority given to serve the community over fostering active and employable selves reflects the moral fibre prevailing in the workshops whereby participants took pride and dignity in 'helping out', as it was often phrased to me. In line with decrees posed by a regime of domestic worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006; Dequech 2008), this testified to a moral character by

which the participants ascribed dignity in self-sacrifice for the 'greater good'.

Concluding reflection

In this chapter, I have noted that Milltown's Labour Market Unit, which was responsible for rehabilitating and activating unemployed welfare recipients in the community, was more reminiscent of a work-intense shopfloor-like workplace than a municipal activation measure. To an outsider, it was hard to distinguish the LMU's operations from other businesses located on Milltown's Workshop Street. By activating around 60 participants of different ages in various workshops, such as a carpentry area, sewing department and a garage, the operations were aligned to what Nybom (2014) labelled 'job activation' (see Chapter 2), meaning practices aimed at deterring unemployed from passively receiving benefits by way of organising various semi-jobs, rather than activities aimed at upskilling. As I have shown herein, however, the deterring effect of 'job-activation' seemed by and large absent. I instead showed how participants in the workshops viewed their placements as 'jobs', taking pride and dignity in serving the community by way of manual, 'honest' work (Brismark 2006).

By putting unemployed to productive use in the community rather than organising educative and competence-enhancing activities – that is, a social investment approach, or what Nybom (2014) labelled 'resource-activation' – I have argued that Milltown's LMU appropriated rather than transformed the working-class ethos cultivated during the community's heydays. This finding strengthens Nybom's observation that unemployed who are deemed to be position the furthest away from the labour market are often the ones who lack the kind of upskilling measures required for them to have better chances of eventually entering into it.

Importantly, as we saw in the depictions of the workshops above, the self-sufficiency among participants activated in the LMU was palpable. Hence, rather than understanding the surprisingly long enrolment periods in the workshops in terms of what some economists would label as a 'welfare trap', whereby a form of learned helplessness had put the participants in passivity, the workshops gave witness of

active participants maintaining their working-class identity by reconceptualising their placements as 'work'. This enabled them to legitimise their desire to remain in the community, which they associated with notions of family, stability, and safety. I have argued that such reasoning resonated with a 'domestic world of worth' giving privilege to social relations, loyalty, and stability over investments in the self (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). This rationality imbued not only the lifeworlds of participants activated in the workshops, but the LMU's organisation as well, whereby institutionalised community obligations were weighed against fostering employable individuals ready to subject themselves to the market imperatives of today's working life. This illustrates how 'local worlds of activation' (Jacobsson et al. 2017) may be characterised by ethical plurality by which competing outlooks on the 'common good' may coexist simultaneously (e.g. Oldenhof et al. 2014). The implementation of neoliberal rationality hailing freedom and autonomy (Rose 1999), was thus complicated by a local 'sociologic' prioritising the complex web of interrelationships that may characterise local communities.

Whereas this chapter showed how Milltown's LMU tended to enable unemployed participants to maintain their self-worth, in the next chapter, I will depict instances where the dignity of Milltown's working-class unemployed was constrained.

8. At the limits of dignity

In her interviews with French and American workers, Lamont (2000: 111) showed how her informants found dignity in 'integrity, work ethic, responsibility and providing for the family'. Likewise, in the previous chapter, I have shown how unemployed Milltowners, despite being positioned in the lower strata of society both in terms of social class and place of residence, maintained their self-worth by doing what they considered good work throughout the community. Despite the fact that being a participant in a labour market policy measure rarely offers self-sufficiency in terms of economy, I have shown how the participants activated in Milltown's LMU sought to reconstruct a life similar to that which had prevailed in the community for generations. By drawing justifications from a domestic value sphere (Weber 1958), they modelled their identity on the moral character fostered in industrial society, valuing stability and trustworthiness over risk-taking and self-realisation (Sennett 1998). Ultimately, this enabled the participants to maintain their self-worth and dignity as working-class people.

However, when conducting fieldwork thorough the community, I also came across activities putting the dignity of the unemployed at stake. This was the case when I observed a course in so-called household economy organised by the municipality's social services, and a project seeking to scrutinise and validate the practical competencies held by participants in the LMU's workshops. The course in household economy was compulsory for social benefit claimants in the municipality, and thus included participants from Milltown's youth activation centre as well as the LMU's workshops. The validation project, however, was geared solely to participants activated in the workshops.

A course in household economy

Among the ideas and ideals that, according to Ambjörnsson (1988), were prominent among workers in traditional industrial communities in Sweden, we may identify a recurring emphasis on being a decent human being recognised by honesty, dignity, and self-control. The traditional Swedish worker put pride in being self-made, and not appearing as a burden to others. Tony Kenttä (2020: 615f) also pointed at how workers' orderliness in part used to be expressed by their household finances, and their engagement in a balancing act between one's earned income and one's needs and desires. However, in a system that prizes the immediate satisfaction of needs through constant consumption (Bauman 2007), such moral character is difficult to maintain. As a result of our time's hedonistic decree of enjoyment (cf. Žižek 2016: 10), an increasing number of people are instead indebted for overconsuming. At the same time, individuals having economic difficulties are seen as irresponsible and in need of more 'financial savviness' (Pettersson 2022: 34).

In line with Kenttä (2020) above, when researching Milltown's industrial history, I came across examples whereby the notion of an 'industrial mentality' was associated with economically responsible behaviour worthy of conscientious workers (Ambjörnsson 1988). In an interview conducted by a local newspaper, for example, a man who used to work as a clerk in Milltown's hardware store during the community's heyday described workers at the factory as being more concerned with acting responsibly than their superiors:

> People were shopping a lot on the books by then [Swedish *folk handlade på bok på den tiden*], and those who paid on time were ordinary workers at the factory. The engineers and foremen were the worst at paying. At that time, the industrial mentality was very evident.

In this quote, the notion of an 'industrial mentality' indicates dependability and honesty. It is in line with Lamont, who showed that a prominent feature of her worker interviewees was that they were 'more exclusively concerned' with morals than their managers (Lamont 2000: 246). Likewise, employing the concept of respectability, the British sociologist Beverley Skeggs (1997) have argued that appearing respect-

able is usually more the concern of the working class as they are the ones traditionally seen as immoral.

During one afternoon in 2019, I was able to observe how remnants of the moral character described in the quotation above encountered accusations of being careless and irresponsible. A course in household economy targeted at the municipality's social benefit claimants was to be held in the LMU's premises in a venue that otherwise functioned as a classroom devoted to adult education. I was asked if I wanted to attend, and that same afternoon I could observe a presentation promoting financial responsibility that tested the attendees' dignity.

Before the course started, some tables had been set in a U-shaped form, and by a couple of standing tables next to the room's whiteboard stood three women. First stood the financial adviser, a woman in her 50s who was responsible for the course, and what I learned were two aspiring social workers on work placement. Before the participants started to arrive and take their seats, I introduced myself as a doctoral student from Gothenburg interested in the local translation of labour market policy:

> 'Why Milltown?', asked the financial adviser. After I answered that I was interested in industrial communities in particular, she quickly answered 'Oh, then you have come to the right place!' I asked her what she meant by that. 'Well, there is no study habit here, at all. No one is educated here, it's just not on the map, you know!'
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Similar to other actors involved with governing Milltown's unemployed, the financial advisor understood the community's problems of unemployment in terms of a remnant from the community's industrial history. Originating from an urban city, she had only worked in Milltown for a year, and described the environment as a 'typical industrial community'. Similar to Anna, the supervisor we met in the previous chapter, the financial advisor shared a different place-specific *habitus* (Uddbäck 2021: 39) than the course's attendees. As we shall see, this had an effect on both the messages conveyed in her presentation and how they were received by the attendees.

The venue gradually started to fill up with people. Soon, eight individuals had sat down in the room, excluding the financial advisor, the

candidates and myself. The participants were all in their 20s and early 30s, and four of them were women. Before the course began, some of the women engaged in small talk while the men were silent:

> Initially, the atmosphere is uncomfortable. The financial adviser welcomes everyone while her candidates hand out printouts of power-point slides containing spaces for us to make comments. Everyone gets their own pencil. […] The first slide reads 'Income', and [name of financial adviser] looks around the room, asking 'What is an income?' It's quiet for a very long time, no one says anything. [Name of financial adviser] smiles as the tension between us and her intensifies. It becomes obvious that she's not going to give in until someone says something. The atmosphere is so unpleasant that I seriously think about whether I should say something, anything, but I manage to resist.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

The course was very different from what I observed in the youth activation centre and the LMU's workshops. Whereas the atmosphere prevailing in the latter tended to reproduce notions associated with working-class culture, such as a hard-but-hearty jargon and a particular sense of pride and dignity (cf. Lamont 2000), the course in household economy did not allow for the attendees to express their identity in such a way. Although well-intentioned, the financial advisor struck a somewhat authoritative tone in the room, seeking eye contact with each of the attendees as she waited for her questions to be answered. The messages conveyed in her PowerPoint presentation was also somewhat passivating in how they seemed to presume participants suffering from economic indifference, and that were incapable of making responsible financial decisions. In a slide that was named 'Home Insurance', the advisor addressed a male participant in the group, whose demeanour stood out from that of the others. Sitting in the back, he covered his head with the hood of his sweater as if signalling that he did not want to listen to what the advisor had to say. However, the financial advisor suddenly called him out:

> 'You there! Do you have any home insurance?' Time passes. [Name of advisor] leans forward, 'Ho-hoo … Isn't this important, to have a home insurance?' Finally, the guy answers quietly, 'I don't care – I don't care'. More time passes before she again straightens up, 'Alright, but you can actually get a subsidy for it!'
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

By refusing to play along in the role as someone in need of financial advice, the advisor's performance was here actively disturbed (cf. Goffman 1956). After the young man had challenged her authority (cf. Willis 1993 [1977]), for a while, she struggled to regain control over the situation.

By being somewhat of an outsider in Milltown, the course leader conveyed messages in the PowerPoint that did not always match the lived reality of the attendees. On several slides, she had not considered that the majority of the attendees did not live in apartments, but in fact resided in houses with gardens or even agricultural land. A slide on the cost of food stated:

> The cost of food is also a large expense. If there are many in the family, you can count on a large part of the income being spent on food. You can influence it yourself by acting smart!

'Acting smart' here meant looking for cheap pricing, and planning ahead when going grocery shopping. However, as housing is relatively inexpensive in Milltown, the financial advisor missed out on the idea of growing one's own crops and vegetables, which some of the participants took pride in doing. As a way of gaining appreciation for this kind of 'smartness' and ability to stay afloat in times of economic difficulty, one of the attendees raised her hand in order to redress this deficit:

> A young woman in a black hoodie adorned with the name of a rock festival raises her hand. 'Yes, or you can grow things yourself. I do. Potatoes, peppers, spices. Such things. Then you also get away cheaper.' Other women in the room nod in agreement.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

This attendee delivered her comment gently, with little intention to enter into polemics with the course leader's message. Nevertheless, by the way other attendees affirmed the woman's statement, it seemed to put the financial advisor off-balance. Her tone then once again changed, as if to restore her authority.

Although recognising that growing one's own food was a good way of living inexpensively, it was clear that the advisor had not expected

to encounter participants whose knowledge of running a household extended to partially supporting themselves from their own harvest. I argue that the above attendee's desire to address this matter stemmed from an urge to restore not only her dignity, but that of all the participants in a moment of paternalism. The fact that other participants nodded along with her remark testified to a joint effort among the group to emphasise that they were not irresponsible people, but that they *were* in fact able to 'act smart'.

After the presentation concluded with a discussion on the importance of establishing a monthly saving account, supervisors from the LMU started to enter the room. The fact that they brough coffee and pastries indicated that they wanted to take the edge off a somewhat unpleasant situation for everyone involved. The fact that about half of the participants left immediately without having neither coffee nor cake reflects the awkwardness of the situation.

The snapshots from the course in household economy testify to the fact that initiatives aimed to responsibilise welfare clients may not always concur with the lived reality of unemployed (cf. Boulus-Rødje 2019). While it is only reasonable that municipalities make efforts to educate social benefit claimants regarding how to manage the economic benefits granted to them, the implementation of a discourse responsibilising the presumably irresponsible here inflicted on the participants' integrity.

It is well-established that encounters between benefit claimants and welfare providers in general are characterised by both power-asymmetries and stigmatisation (e.g. Hasenfeld 1987; Baumberg 2016). It is thus understandable that welfare clients might be intimidated by discourses implying their irresponsibility and economic carelessness. However, in the context of a traditional working-class community, wherein residents already go to efforts in order to secure their dignity (Lamont 2000; Skeggs 1997), I suggest that there may be an even greater need to restore a sense of self-worth. Although the authoritative role occupied by the financial advisor may have resulted from the fact that she had two aspiring social workers with her, and thus felt a need to show control over the situation, her background in an urban environment may have also played a role in the attendees' need to counterbalance their subordination. In sum, I suggest that the present section illus-

trates the ways in which working-class subjects may seek to maintain respectability (Skeggs 1997) in situations presuming morally reprehensible behaviours.

A validation project

Threats to unemployed Milltowners' dignity, and perhaps some indications of resistance, could also be traced in a so-called validation project instilled in Milltown's LMU in 2019. As part of EU labour market policy, the notion of validation has been promoted as an opportunity for individuals without formal education to get their practical skills acquired through, for example, non-profit work or hobby activities, certified as a way of increasing their labour market prospects (European Commission & Cedefop 2015). According to the Swedish Public Employment Service, the result of validation processes may amount in either a certificate of competence, or a grade that states, for example, that the participant fulfils parts of a competence requirement and can partially qualify, but may need supplementary training. What scores the participants receive during a validation process depends on how much of their competence can be assessed and recognised in light of the criteria.

The person responsible for the validation project was Anna, the newly recruited supervisor at Milltown's LMU. In her mission to instil more focus on participants' employability, she had the main responsibility for overseeing that the participants' daily tasks were assessed with the help of a structured assessment formulae (see Figure 4 below).

The first time Anna told me about the project, she was very positive and saw it as a genuine opportunity to finally bring about change in the LMU. She argued that the validation project would finally entail a step in the right direction towards getting the participants out of the workshops into the regular labour market. She then showed me the material, which consisted of standardised forms in seven steps evaluating the level at which they had mastered the assignments. The participants were supposed to fill in the forms together with their respective supervisor:

> First, general social skills are listed under the category 'employeeship'. 'If participants reach step 3 under this category', [Anna] explains, 'it corresponds to

> a relatively low level of employeeship, meaning that participants should have basic understanding of their organisation, and what functions operates on various levels'.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

Similar to concepts such as employability and entrepreneurship, 'employeeship' is a somewhat ambiguous concept that is often vaguely defined in the literature. This has led Alvesson to group the notion with the 'violent explosion of doubtful expertise' stemming from contemporary management discourses (Alvesson 2021: 358). Besides the fact that the validation system suffered from problems related to its EU standardisation and translation of phrases and items into Swedish, this ambiguity resulted in Anna sometimes being forced to write 'do not understand' or 'unapplicable' in relation to some of the standardised items.

More importantly, by its very function of formally validating the practical skills and competencies nurtured among participants in the workshops, I suggest that the project implicitly deprived the participants of a space in which they had been able to 'affirm their worth and preserve their dignity [by] expressing their own identity and competence' (Lamont 2000: 4). With the validation project, each moment in the participants' daily activities was now supposed to be meticulously scrutinised. As Anna explained to me:

> If, for instance, kitchen staff are to be validated, one question may have to do with whether the participant actually reads the best-before date on the flour-package before pouring it into the bowl. […] Everything is described in great detail.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

By disintegrating and objectifying each assignment in great detail, the standardisation forms deprived the participants' work tasks from the particular complexity that practically oriented work assignments often consist of. In this way, I argue, the LMU suddenly transformed from a kind of buffer culture able to absorb external influences and maintain its own identity (Lysgaard 2001), to an arrangement that deprived the participants of the integrity associated with working-class culture (Lamont 2000).

THE BASICS OF CUTTING SHAPED HEDGES LEVEL 2	
LEARNING OUTCOMES *The knowledge, skill or competence is the ability to:*	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA *This has been achieved by the individual being able to:*
1. With some support carry out cutting of shaped hedges	1.1. Name the object to be cut 1.2. After instruction and with some support, carry out cutting of shaped hedges, taking into account the desired result, safety and ergonomics
2. Choose suitable tools and implements for cutting shaped hedges	2.1. Choose the right tool/equipment based on the hedge to be cut 2.2. With some support, handle tools/equipment correctly based on ergonomics and safety 2.3. After instruction, maintain tools/equipment in a correct manner
3. Handle cuttings/rice after cutting	3.1. Explain what is important to consider when handling clippings/rice 3.2. After instruction, ensure that clippings/rice are handled in an appropriate manner
After completing the module, the individual has basic knowledge of cutting shaped hedges. The individual can give examples of different hedge plants and how to carry out the shape cutting in an ergonomic and safe way. Furthermore, the individual can, with some independence, choose the right tool/equipment, carry out correct shape cutting based on the plant's conditions, handle clippings/rice in an appropriate way and maintain tools/equipment after use.	

Figure 4. Form from the validation project in Milltown's Labour Market Unit, my translation.

However, the idea of assessing participants' practical skills was something that the LMU's senior supervisors did not seem comfortable with. As Anna explained:

> They [the senior supervisors] are uninterested in the project. I think that they feel uncomfortable with the educating role that the validation project puts them in. […] They don't have the energy to do it, you know. And they don't have the administrative experience needed for it either.
>
> (Fieldnotes.)

What Anna implied was that the senior supervisors felt uneasy that they were now supposed to occupy roles as experts in the workshops. As I had observed while conducting fieldwork in the LMU, the supervisors did usually not make any clear distinctions between themselves and the participants. Instead, they allowed for the participants activated in the workshops to express their self-sufficiency by being in control of the operations without much supervision. With the validation project, however, the supervisors now had to mantle more authoritative roles, which clarified the boundary between them and the participants. As Anna hinted in the quotation above, the discontent that the supervisors felt about having to oversee and assess each work task that the participants performed in detail was expressed by indifference to the project.

Although the participants I spoke with who had been subjected to the project did not express any outspoken resistance, such questions were often met with the particular kind of shrug that signalled this was not a topic they were particularly interested in. The fact that the senior supervisors tended to neglect the importance of the validation project, I argue, indicated a sense of respect for the participants' integrity. However, Anna was notably disappointed with the other supervisor's neglect. At least, the project meant that something was being done in the workshops that could eventually bring the participants closer to the regular labour market.

At a later visit to the LMU, I learned that the validation project had come to a halt. When I asked Roger, the supervisor in charge of the LMU's outdoors' group, why things transpired the way they did with the validation project, he bounced the project back onto Anna, stating, 'Oh, I think it moves forward, but you'd better talk to Anna about those things'. The response was telling: Roger had no part in the validation project and did not desire to. Instead, Roger seemed to feel unease about the fact that he was now supposed to formally assess the tasks performed by the participants, whose competencies he showed great respect for.

Again, it was clear that Anna, with her background as a middle manager at the Public Employment Service in one of Sweden's largest cities, possessed a different mindset than the senior supervisors at the LMU, whose loyalty towards the participants, I suggest, impacted on

the project. As stated, this speaks about the senior supervisors' appreciation for the participants' integrity. By being Milltowners themselves, they shared with the participants not only a spatial context, but a cultural vantage point too. As a result, most of the supervisors recognised the participants' attempts to restore their self-worth in the workshops. Whether for the greater good or not, I argue that the validation project here misrecognised the participants' practical competencies and knowledge.

Valuing personal integrity, one's own and others', has been described as a prominent feature of working-class culture (Metzgar 2021). The validation project, I argue, not only violated the participants' sense of unsupervised autonomy but affected the senior supervisors' sense of integrity as well. By being part of the same culture as most of the participants, scrutinising their everyday work would be to misrecognise their competencies, and perhaps worse, to *act superior* (Lamont 2000: 235).

Hence, being able to intellectually reflect on cultural differences is one thing, as Anna did in the previous chapter when she recognised that her own class background clashed with that of the participants in the workshops. However, it is something else to emotionally experience the feeling of violating the precepts of one's own cultural norms. It is to counteract the 'collective line' of behaviour described by Willis as preserving the group's identity and social norms (1993 [1977]: 97). In other words, indulging in the validation project would mean violating the culture to which they themselves identified.

Concluding reflection

In this chapter, I have contrasted the fact that the translation of activation policies in Milltown tended to allow for a working-class culture to be restored in the community with occasional instances where the integrity and dignity of the unemployed was put at stake. In a culture that values orderliness and a self-made lifestyle (cf. Lamont 2000; Ambjörnsson 1988), I have shown how the course in household economy implied that the attendees were welfare beneficiaries in need of economic savviness (cf. Pettersson 2022). The course brought with it a discourse of responsibilisation (cf. Juhila et al. 2017) that seemed to overlook the lived reality of Milltowners, many of whom lived in

houses surrounded by large gardens and agricultural landscapes that facilitated a partially self-sufficient lifestyle. This is not to say that the course in household economy was unnecessary, but rather that parts of it deprived the participants of the sense of worthiness that may come with practical competencies. By explicitly emphasising that 'acting smart' could also mean growing one's own crops, for instance, the participants here sought to restore the respectability (Skeggs 1997) that the course deprived them from.

Moreover, the validation project that was instilled at Milltown's Labour Market Unit seemed to challenge the participants' unsupervised autonomy that otherwise prevailed in the premises. By extension, this threatened the participants' integrity. The formalisation of practical competencies in standardised ways here meant that the supervisors would meticulously oversee the participants' daily routines and assess the ways in which they lived up to the preformulated competencies listed on the validation sheet. However, by being part of the same working-class culture as the participants, the supervisors practiced a similar 'monitoring for pretensions' as the individuals they were supposed to govern (Skeggs 1997: 11). In working-class culture, this means keeping a lookout for people who are acting in a way that is not considered authentic or sincere. The supervisors here felt uncomfortable carrying out the validation project, as doing so forced them to departure from the social norms prevailing in the LMU. As a result, the validation project was de-prioritised in favour of other tasks.

In sum, this chapter has reflected the way in which social and labour market policy may clash with local rationalities; in this case, a manual working-class culture gatekeeping the collective from infringement on peoples' integrity and self-worth. Such infringements entailed a rural-urban distinction, by which both the financial advisor and Anna, who was responsible for the validation project, had their backgrounds in urban, big city environments. As a result, they brought with them an urban-centric approach to Milltown, whereby their image of welfare clients as presumably irresponsible and passive was informed by a neoliberal rationality.

9. Conclusions

> Maybe you remember [name of racing driver], who once exclaimed that 'When it feels like you have everything under control, then you are driving too slowly'. This may probably be the case for a municipality as well – if you want to keep up, you have to switch gears. […] Even though the time of the industrial community is over, we should be proud of our history. We carry it in our backpack and it strengthens us in various ways.
>
> (Milltown's business manager, column in local news pamphlet, my translation.)

Paraphrasing Willis' *Learning to labour* (1993 [1977]), the title of this thesis pertained to attempts made in the former industrial community of Milltown to mitigate local problems of unemployment by putting an end to the reproduction of a manual working-class culture. In a time characterised by automation, globalisation of production and flexible specialisation, Milltown appeared as a spoke in the wheel of flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998). However, rather than locating the community's problems of unemployment to industrial re-structuring, I have shown how politicians and actors involved in governing Milltown's unemployed ascribed the situation to an alleged 'industrial mentality'. Appearing as a residue from the community's industrial history, the 'industrial mentality' referred to a mindset that presumably aspired to occupy blue-collar jobs in the locality, despite industrial rationalisation. By way of ethnographic methods conducted over a four-year period throughout Milltown, this thesis raised the overarching research question of what has become of so-called activation policies that sought to foster individuals' ability and willingness to approach today's increasingly service-oriented labour market. By paying particular attention to the municipality's two activation schemes – a youth activation centre and Milltown's Labour Market Unit – the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. In practice, what becomes of activation policies as they 'trickle down' to a locality shaped by its industrial history?

2. What tensions may be observed in the work of transforming the alleged 'industrial mentality' to fit with the ideals of the active society?

To be able to answer these questions in the most in-depth way as possible, the study called for as broad an approach as possible, aiming not only to observe the aforementioned activation schemes, but also to get a sense of the local culture by engaging with the community's local history and contemporary way of life. Culture, in this sense, has been defined as institutionalised 'regimes of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006; Dequech 2008) that provide meaning to ideas and everyday conventions. The more market-oriented policy ideals entailed in the active society, illustrated by policy concepts such as employability and entrepreneurialism, were contrasted to and compared with the moral value judgements integral to Milltown's local rationality. Below, I conclude the most important findings rendered visible by this examination, before ending the thesis by calling attention to some implications of the study.

Encountering a 'domestic world of activation'

Activation policy is a cornerstone of an active society (Elm Larsen 2005: 82). By emphasising the labour market participation of all welfare clients, such as the unemployed, sick, elderly, and functionally varied (Heidenreich & Rice 2016: 3), the aim of an active society is to mitigate public sector expenditures by enabling all individuals to participate productively in society. The logic is one of enablement, whereby activation policies have appeared as new 'modes of government that work upon the capacities of citizens to act on their own behalf' (Cruikshank 1999: 38f). In turn, this has required new 'experts of subjectivity' (Rose 1999), such as job-coaches, motivational coaches and life-coaches, who are responsible for motivating unemployed to 'work on the self' in order to detect previously undetected strengths, or areas of improvement (cf. Sunnerfjell 2022). In this way, the active society marks a new orienta-

tion of welfare policy emphasising a supply-side policy focus that aims to get people at risk of social exclusion closer to finding a place in the labour market (Bonoli 2010; Garsten & Jacobsson 2004).

This thesis was planned and conducted in light of the fact that more supply-side policy interventions have called for a conversion of social and labour market policy in order to facilitate more individualised support (Heidenreich & Rice 2016). As a result of this conversion, individuals deemed at risk of social exclusion are increasingly subject to municipal activation initiatives, rather than state employment agencies. Rather than assuming homologous welfare regimes, this has led scholars to speak of 'local worlds of activation' (Jacobsson et al. 2017), whereby local governance structures, such as cooperation between municipalities and the level of involvement of private services and the EU, may affect the organisation of activation policy locally.

Researching a situated practice of activating unemployed, the findings from the present study have pointed to what I label a 'domestic world of activation'. In the process of translating activation policy at the municipal level, a local rationality valuing ideas of stability, predictability and loyalty was here incorporated in and made part of Milltown's activation of unemployed. In Milltown's Labour Market Unit, this was reflected by the way unemployed people found dignity in serving private people and municipal institutions throughout the locality, which in turn enabled the participants to reconceptualise and legitimise their placements as 'work'. Likewise, rather than instilling an atmosphere whereby unemployed were motivated to improve and/or adapt social and communicative skills central to the notion of employability (cf. Garsten & Jacobsson 2004), both of Milltown's activation schemes were instead imbued by a shopfloor-like atmosphere that safeguarded against any pretensions of gold-plating oneself in order to appear in better light (cf. Lamont 2000; Bourdieu 1984). This included a hard-but-hearty jargon whereby witty remarks and humour served to maintain a 'collective line' of behaviours Willis (1993 [1977]: 97) among both participants and their superiors. It was a domestic atmosphere in the sense that it allowed for both participants and representatives of the activation schemes to express themselves in ways that felt natural to them. However, while contributing to make the operations bearable – and, as we saw in Chapter 7, even meaningful – the prevailing

atmosphere in Milltown's activation schemes at the same time hindered the participants from adopting and nurturing the empowering self-help ethos promoted in the active society (Cederström 2018; see also Sunnerfjell 2022). The activation measures here seemed to create a buffer zone whereby unemployed Milltowners, in lack of alternatives, were able to maintain their identity as working-class people and continue to cultivate the practical knowledge that many of them had acquired in a previous working life. In turn, this provided them a chance to maintain the dignity and self-worth that is under threat from flexible capitalism (Sennett 1998).

I argue that this 'domestic world of activation' may be traced to the 'industrial spirit of community' fostered in traditional Swedish working-class communities (Lundqvist 2001; Forsberg et al. 2001). By symbolising the collectivist identity developing in these milieus, fostering a set of common norms and values acquired through similar experiences of material and social conditions (Bursell 1997: 11), Milltown's way of organising activation policy could be reflected as a story of continuity rather than discontinuity. However, this is not to say that all practices employed to activate unemployed in Milltown worked contrary to the ideals promoted in the active society. In the municipality's youth activation centre, the rather literal translation of activation into physical exercise, such as weekly gym and swimming activities, seems reasonable considering the way in which health has evolved into an expression of employability (cf. Holmqvist & Maravelias 2006; Cederström & Spicer 2015). At the same time, such activities allowed for male participants to reproduce their identity as working-class people who show grit and stamina. In this case, the coaches at Milltown's youth activation centre met the requirements brought about by the active society in their own way, influenced by the community's situated rationality.

Tensions in the active society

As a result of encountering the 'domestic world of activation' depicted above, I was able to discern a range of tensions in Milltown's attempts to manage the active society locally. Rather than being exclusively tied to Milltown as an industrial community transitioning to post-industrial society, the tensions depicted in the following have wider impli-

cations. Milltown may here be seen as a magnifying image that sheds light on the discontents imbuing the active society, and that have relevance to other actors who seek to adapt unemployed to the demands of becoming active and employable citizens. As they span through different levels of analysis, in the following, I have sought to structure them accordingly.

The active versus the domestic subject

The first tension is directly dependent on the 'domestic regime of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) that permeated Milltown's activation schemes. By valuing community, stability and loyalty, Milltown's situated rationality helped to cultivate a domestic self that by nature of valuing such notions was in stark contrast to the normative assumptions surrounding discourses on employability, entrepreneurialism, and lifelong learning. The domestic self thereby constitutes a counterweight of the active self, which by 'comfortably surfing social change' (Goodhart 2017: xii) and maximises market prospects by engaging in 'work on the self' (Foucault 1997) appears as *the* subject of neoliberal governmentality (cf. Mikelatou & Arvanitis 2018; Holmqvist et al. 2013; Crespo & Serrano Pascual 2004, 2007). However, although the domestic self finds worthiness in maintaining social relations and a sense of community, the domestic subject is not to be confused with indifference and passivity. On the contrary, by referring to a domestic value sphere (Weber 1958) when facing questions of aspirations and desires in life, the domestic self actively resists subjection to norms imposed by discourses of marketisation and self-realisation shrouded in promises for freedom (Rose 1999).

The mobile versus the fixed subject

The domestic subject is also a fixed subject. The desire to maintain social relations and live a life characterised by social security rather than risk-taking makes for a life that is relatively free from mobility. However, in the active society, fixity comes at a price. To nurture a strong sense of place attachment is to resist the decrees for mobility imposed by flexible capitalism (cf. Farrugia 2016; Garsten 2008; Uddbäck 2021). The fixed subject here appears as a subject whose character suffers from moral scruples. As I argued in Chapter 2, rural peripheries like

Milltown appear as immoral geographies in the active society. Consequently, people who nurture a 'cosmopolitan ethos' (Rozpedowski 2010; Durante 2014) knows that such environments are better abandoned to their fate.

Nevertheless, a majority of the Milltowners I engaged with during fieldwork resisted the mobility imperative implied in policy concept such as entrepreneurship and lifelong learning (e.g. LLP n.d.). Considering that young people in particular may be sensitive to norms of urbanisation (cf. Svensson 2006), it is noteworthy that many young Milltowners, instead of being attracted to urban environments, wielded notions of security and a sense of community when defending their community against accusations imposed from the outside, such as being a boring and stagnated place of residence. By identifying strongly with Milltown as a working-class community, I argue that such accusations posed a threat to their own integrity and self-worth. For example, although some agreed to outsiders' depiction of Milltown as 'a shithole', such depictions were followed by the statement that it was *their* shithole.

The coaches in Milltown's youth activation centre labelled the desire among young people to remain in the locality as 'homeboundness', which they, besides the elevation of manual labour (Willis 1993 [1977]), ascribed as yet another aspect of the alleged 'industrial mentality'. In a society that has reconceptualised mobility 'as involving empowerment, self-actualization, and as a learning opportunity' (Garsten 2008: 4), the coaches here recognised fixity as a problem to be remedied. However, the fact that a sense of 'homeboundness' could also be viewed as something potentially positive, was recognised by Milltown's local business manager. By working to improve the conditions for companies in a municipality struggling with depopulation, too much emphasis on mobility would run the risk of missing out on important start-ups in the community. Rather than speaking of a persistent 'industrial mentality' lingering in the community, I showed how the local business manager instead connected the desire among young people to remain in Milltown to an 'industrial spirit of community'. As described in Chapter 5, this concept has been used by historians and cultural geographers in Sweden to describe the values and collective identity fostered in communities were once family-like

conditions prevailed between residents and community-building companies. However, at a time when capital invest locally without necessarily making any commitments (Bauman 1998; Sennett 1998), the 'push' factor whereby young people may seek their fortune elsewhere increases.

The included versus the excluded subject

A third tension rendered visible in the present thesis is connected to the notion of active inclusion, which involves strategies of bringing people at risk of social exclusion into worthy forms of existence (European Commission 2008; EAPN 2014). In the literature, this entails bringing the governing of unemployed closer to the local level in order to evoke a sense of belonging, and thus responsibility among unemployed (Berkel & Valkenburg 2007; Heidenreich & Rice 2016). As stated in a blog post administered by the European Commission:

> Being an active citizen means to have a sense of belonging to a community, a sense of solidarity for the community and a sense of responsibility for one's own life and consequently for the life of the community.
>
> (Vukomanovic 2017.)

The above quote illustrates a mode of government emphasising the importance of 'personal allegiances' at the local level, which Rose has labelled 'government through community' (1996: 328). In the present thesis, I have shown how individuals at risk of social exclusion may in fact already nurture a strong sense of belonging, illustrated in the preceding chapters by the loyalty shown towards Milltown as a community. This raises questions of how notions of inclusion and exclusion ought to be understood, and whether they are productively used in national and supranational policy recommendations. If, by inclusion, we mean a strong sense of belonging and collective identity, one may even argue that Milltown was already an active society. I suggest that a more productive use of inclusion and exclusion would be to dislocate these concepts from an individual level and re-connect them to structural conflicts rooted in notions of centre and periphery, where the relocation of production to low-wage countries has created rings on the water in the form of new patters of structural inequality (cf. Wallerstein 2004). In tandem with increasingly growth-oriented

policies, industrial communities have witnessed depopulation and the deterioration of infrastructure and access to public services (Andersson et al. 2021). In addition, housing and living costs in urban environments where the service professions are found have increased. This has led to widespread geographical inequality, whereby people who remain in rural environments like Milltown may not have the financial means it takes to build new lives elsewhere. It is therefore perhaps more reasonable to speak of *environments*, rather than individuals, as being at risk of exclusion from wider society.

The malleable subject of governmentality versus the stable subject of social class

A final tension concerns the theoretical contribution of this thesis. Whereas the literature on activation presumes plastic subjects (cf. Gilbert 2005; Crespo & Serrano Pascual 2004), the attempts made in Milltown to foster active selves shows the complexity of transforming human subjectivity. This related to the coaches and supervisors employed in Milltown's activation schemes as well, who despite recognising the need to adapt Milltown's unemployed to a changed labour market had difficulties of turning themselves into 'experts of subjectivity' (Rose 1999) mastering discourses such as employability and entrepreneurship. Being a working-class environment, Milltown seemed largely immune to governmental attempts to instil such discourses. As stated above, the arrangements set in place to foster active selves here *incorporated* rather than transformed Milltown's manual working-class culture. In this way, rather than providing new vistas to which unemployed could align their future aspirations, the practices and atmosphere in Milltown's activation schemes allowed for a manual working-class culture to be reproduced (Lamont 2000).

In line with my abductive – or pragmatic – approach to research, the difficulties of getting unemployed in Milltown to *un*-learn to labour, as it were, called for me to contrast the malleable subject of governmentality with literature pointing to the integrity, and thus, stability of working-class subjectivity (cf. Willis 1993 [1977]; Bourdieu 2010, 1984). However, this is not to say that individuals are impotent to discourses suggesting new ways of relating to oneself, hence discarding the plasticity of human subjectivity. Rather, depending on situational circum-

stances such as what culture dominates any particular environment, I suggest that some discourses have more bearing on peoples' everyday life than others. In Chapter 7, I showed how a contemporary neurobiological discourse (cf. Rose 2003; Rose & Abi-Rached 2013; Conrad 2007) was more easily incorporated in the activation of unemployed than discourses on lifelong learning, employability, and life-skills. Compared to such policy concepts, the coaches in Milltown's youth activation centre seemed well attuned to the medical parlance surrounding diagnoses such as ADHD and symptoms that previously fell under the label Asperger's syndrome. Although I also depicted attempts to resist neurobiological subjection, the neurobiological discourse was also familiar to many of the participants, who seemed to have nothing against reinterpreting periods of passivity in terms of neuropsychiatric diagnoses. Hence, although a salient working-class identity seemed to cause tensions in attempts at implementing neoliberal rationality in Milltown, the thesis suggests that some people may be more susceptible to understand themselves through some discourses than others. Whereas the postmodern turn of the 1980s and 1990s helped downplay the idea of stable identities in favour of a more fluid view of subjectivity (cf. Baudrillard 1994; Laclau & Mouffe 1985), this thesis points to the way in which peoples' sense of self may form a hindrance to governmental attempts at subjection. In line with Valerie Walkerdine's remark (2005), I argue that people who identify with working-class culture may be particularly reluctant to neoliberal decrees of remaking oneself.

Implications

For policy makers involved with activation policy, this thesis suggest that more attention needs to be devoted the local implementation of activation. I have shown how local rationalities may help transform the meaning and content of policy concepts such as activation, employability, and life-skills (cf. Sahlin & Wedlin 2008). In this regard, it may be relevant to repeat an old truth in classical organisational theory, namely that organisations are culturally sensitive (Selznick 1966). The way in which activation policy are implemented locally will be dependent on what norms and expectations govern local communities. Competing outlooks on the 'common good' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) may

here affect the outcome of initiatives seeking to mitigate social exclusion locally.

In the wake of the postmodern turn whereby sociologists have tended to emphasise the 'placelessness of place' (Gieryn 2000), this thesis suggests a theoretical revitalisation of the way in which 'place attachment' and 'place identity' (cf. Uddbäck 2021: 31) influence people's moral value judgements (Asplund 1991). In notable ways, the tensions outlined above resemble the *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft* dichotomy made famous by Ferdinand Tönnies in 1887, who delineated two rationalities definable in light of each other; one which pertained to organic, peasant societies whereby social interactions were conditioned by personal, moral obligations (*Wesenwille*), and one which adhered to the kind of mechanic, contractual relations nurtured as part of urban, industrial society (*Kürwille*) (Tönnies 1957 [1887]).[29] Whereas the active society is impregnated by market logic, it is important to consider that such rationality may not always concur with the everyday life of local communities. In line with Michelle Brady (2014, 2011), I suggest that more research on welfare state reforms should employ ethnographic methods in order to explore what becomes, in practice, of policies translated at the local level.

Moreover, as I showed in Chapter 6, actors involved in activation projects that are dependent on funding from the EU should take seriously the risk of actually contributing to create the target group it seeks to support. The strong neurobiological discourse that has now become part of how we understand ourselves and others (Rose & Abi-Rached 2013; Conrad 2007) here seemed to override Milltown's working-class culture by offering unemployed new identities as functionally varied. This, I suggest, points to a process of (bio)medicalisation of unemployed (cf. Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018; see also Holmqvist 2009) that requires further attention.

29. It needs to be pointed out here that although the sociological canon has traditionally connected the process of industrialisation to processes of individualisation, in Sweden, the relationship is somewhat more complex. As described in Chapter 3, a strong collectivist rationality often grew in traditional Swedish industrial environments. Perhaps Durkheim's notion of individualism as 'the sole surviving form of mechanical solidarity in modern society' (Marske 1987: 1), as opposed to what he labelled 'egoistic individualism', is the closest we can get to the idea of the Swedish 'industrial spirit of community'.

Some final words

In the introductory part of this thesis, I argued that large scale policy changes, such as the turn from the welfare society to the active society, are seldom scrutinised by way of ethnographic methods (Brady 2014, 2011; Hansen Löfstrand & Jacobsson 2022). The present thesis has sought to redress this deficit by contributing with insights into the everyday life of making operational the policy concepts travelling with the active society, such as lifelong learning, employability, life-skills, and entrepreneurship. I did this by using the case of a pronounced industrial community tampering with residues from its industrial history. Milltown's working-class culture was here reflected by the persistent expectation among young adults in the community to be able to bypass higher education in favour of finding blue-collar jobs, preferably within the community. In this way, Milltown was used as a 'statutory situation' (Eribon 2004: 96) shedding light on the ambiguities and tensions involved with implementing the active society locally.

Implementing policy to practice is ambiguous work, so it is important to once again appreciate the enormous task local actors face in terms of translating social and labour market policy to the local level. What does entrepreneurialism actually mean? When are individuals considered employable enough? And what to make of inclusion in environments where individuals already nurture a strong sense of community? In the wake of industrial re-structuring and economic recessions, I have shown how Milltown's municipal activation manager, coaches in the youth activation centre, and the management of the municipality's Labour Market Unit all did their best to interpret such policy concepts at the local level. However, rather than reflecting successful subject-formation, the relatively few unemployed that I came in contact with during fieldwork who aspired to occupations departing from previous generations did so either as a result of unintentional workings of identification with their coaches or as a result of resistance to neuropsychiatric assessment.

Importantly, the tensions involved in Milltown's attempts to manage the active society locally tell us something about the normative assumptions travelling with it. In contrast to decrees for marketisation, mobility and self-realisation (Rose 1999), which are aspects personified

by the active and entrepreneurial self who is driven by possibility rather than necessity (cf. Henrekson & Stenkula 2007: 30), are peoples' common aspiration for security and predictability in life (Giddens 1991). Security and predictability should not only be understood in relation to a predictable working-life and financial stability, but just as much to the deep feeling of authenticity and resonance that comes with a sense of belonging (Rosa 2019; Sennett 1998).

Finally, there are many aspects of Milltown's translation of activation policy locally that have gained less attention than deserved in this research. Most notably, the present study lacks a gender perspective. As stated in Chapter 6, the coaches in Milltown's youth activation centre testified to the difficulty of getting more young women to attend the activation centre. This is reflected in Chapter 6, by which the observations presented from the youth activation centre are largely based on group activities that exclusively involve young men. Moreover, the study lacks the sufficient number of in-depth interviews needed in order to explore, from a subjective perspective, the meaning that the unemployed in Milltown ascribed the everyday life inside the municipality's activation schemes. Given the findings presented herein, future research should, for example, explore the ways in which class identity interacts with activation policy on a subjective level.

In sum, what the present study has contributed to the literature on activation are much-needed ethnographic observations that illustrate how activation policy adapts to situated rationality (cf. Künzel 2012). The findings have suggested that no society is characterised by either discontinuity or reproduction, but rather, that these are processes interacting simultaneously. Hopefully, this thesis should encourage more research into the complexities of implementing policy to practice, whereby particular attention is given the ways in which situated rationality is incorporated when municipalities seek to translate social and labour market policy at the local level.

Svensk sammanfattning

Kapitel 1. Inledning

Titeln på den här avhandlingen – *Un-learning to labour?* – parafraserar Paul Willis (1993 [1977]) klassiska studie där han frågade sig hur arbetarklassungdomar fostras till arbetarklassyrken. Snarare än att bli stöpta till arbetare vid de lokala industrierna, fann Willis att ungdomarna fostrade sig själva till att göra motstånd gentemot inte bara utbildningssystemet, utan även de elever som valde att underkasta sig dess auktoritet. Genom att ungdomarna odlade en motkultur som kretsade runt ett uppvärderande av manuellt arbete framför utbildning, menade Willis att de för egen maskin reproducerade sin position i samhället.

I min avhandling undersöker jag hur en utpräglad svensk bruksortskommun – som jag valt att kalla Milltown – arbetar med att försöka bryta den typ av kulturell reproduktion som Willis beskrev i *Learning to labour*. I likhet med andra svenska bruksorter förstås arbetslösheten lokalt i termer av en kvarvarande så kallad bruksmentalitet, vilken tar sig uttryck i låg studiemotivation och bristande initiativförmåga bland arbetslösa. Trots att kommunen bevittnat hur ekonomiska kriser tillsammans med automatisering och globalisering av produktionen lett till att jobben försvunnit från den lokala arbetsmarknaden, förstår man därmed arbetslösheten i termer av individers bristande aspirationer, snarare än utifrån strukturella förutsättningar. Detta är i linje med internationell forskning, som visar hur arbetslöshetsproblem alltmer kommit att tillskrivas en individuell-psykologisk nivå (Crespo & Serrano Pascual 2004; Berkel & Valkenburg 2007).

”Bruksmentaliteten” ter sig oförenlig med kommunens självbild som en del av det ”aktiva samhället” – vilket i avhandlingen betecknar såväl en offentlig diskurs om hälsa och framåtanda som en social- och

arbetsmarknadspolitisk policyorientering för att främja inkludering, personlig utveckling och entreprenörskap (jfr European Commission 2010; Elm Larsen 2005). Som ett led i arbetet med att anpassa kommunens arbetslösa till en postindustriell arbetsmarknad och därigenom minska de lokala offentliga utgifterna för socialbidrag, har man i Milltown sedan en tid tillbaka organiserat ett så kallat aktiveringscenter i kommunen för att komma till bukt med arbetslöshetsproblemen. Centret, som till en början var EU-finansierat, är tänkt att fungera som en så kallad *väg in* dit ungdomar mellan 16 och 29 år erbjuds individuell hjälp med att öka sin anställningsbarhet. Likt de flesta av Sveriges kommuner har Milltown därtill en arbetsmarknadsenhet, vilken sedan 1990-talet syftat till att aktivera arbetslösa i alla åldrar. Båda dessa åtgärder är uttryck för en ”aktiveringspolitik”, vilken åsyftar strategier avsedda att minska offentliga utgifter för ekonomiska bidrag genom att ställa högre krav på bidragstagare att bli mer anställningsbara och därigenom öka sina sysselsättningsmöjligheter (Bengtsson & Jacobsson 2018). I ljuset av att aktiveringspolitik alltmer kommit att bedrivas på lokal nivå (Berkel & Valkenburg 2007; Heidenreich & Rice 2016), undersöker jag i avhandlingen på vilka sätt ovan nämnda aktiveringsinsatser tar intryck av den (bokstavligt talat) aktiva arbetarklasskultur som präglat Milltown i generationer. De frågor som väglett studien är:

1. Vad blir det i praktiken av aktiveringspolitiken när den ”sipprar ner” och översätts lokalt i en bruksort?

2. Vilka motsättningar kan observeras i arbetet med att anpassa en ”bruksmentalitet” till de ideal som genomsyrar idén om det aktiva samhället?

Genom att undersöka dessa frågor etnografiskt är min avhandling ett bidrag till den litteratur som belyser ”situerade” aktiveringspraktiker (Künzel 2012; Jacobsson et al. 2017). Den är också ett bidrag till den litteratur som genom att premiera etnografiska metoder kommit att problematisera synen på välfärdsreformer som nyliberala projekt vilka antas forma nyliberala subjekt enligt en linjär *top-down*-modell (Brady 2014, 2011; Hansen Löfstrand & Jacobsson 2022). Inte minst är avhandlingen ett bidrag som ger viktig empirisk kunskap om hur

vardagen kan se ut när aktiveringspolitik skall omsättas lokalt ute i kommuner, vilket fortfarande är ett relativt underutforskat område (Thorén 2009: 150; Hornemann Møller & Johansson 2009: 7; Lundahl 2010: 24). Trots att kommunala aktiveringsstrategier i Sverige nyligen kartlagts (SKL 2018; SKR 2021), bygger dessa kartläggningar allt som oftast på självrapportering med de problem som det innebär.

Kapitel 2. Det aktiva samhället: en bakgrund

I avhandlingens andra kapitel beskriver jag med hjälp av aktuell forskning den samhällsutveckling som utgör bakgrunden till min studie. Kapitlet inleds med en historisk översikt över den så kallade aktiva samhällsorienteringen (Elm Larsen 2005). Först diskuterar jag de strukturella förändringar som ägt rum på västvärldens arbetsmarknader, och som inneburit att delar av arbetskraften förväntas ställa om till en mer flexibel kapitalism (Sennett 1998). Därefter diskuteras det mobilitetsimperativ (Farrugia 2016; Garsten 2008; Uddbäck 2021) som kännetecknar den aktiva samhällsorienteringen, där i synnerhet unga människor förväntas röra sig mot mer urbana och ”utvecklande” miljöer (Svensson 2006). I ljuset av den här utvecklingen framstår före detta bruks- och industrisamhällen alltmer som ”omoraliska geografier”, varvid de som vill stanna kvar kan uppleva sig nödgade att rättfärdiga en sådan önskan. Efter det förtydligar jag hur social- och arbetsmarknadspolitik i det aktiva samhället kommit att centreras kring begrepp som anställningsbarhet och entreprenörskap, vilka är policydiskurser som illustrerar en alltmer utbudsinriktad politik (Garsten & Jacobsson 2004).

Sedan presenterar jag en översikt över svensk aktiveringspolitik. Den har sina rötter i den så kallade arbetslinjen som kännetecknas av att utbildning och arbete alltid prioriteras framför ”passiva” åtgärder i form av ekonomiskt understöd. Här diskuterar jag också kommunernas roll i aktiveringen av arbetslösa. Trots att det är Arbetsförmedlingen som har det huvudsakliga ansvaret för arbetsmarknadspolitiken i Sverige tar kommunerna stort ansvar för implementeringen av politiken lokalt. Jag beskriver hur kommunal aktivering kännetecknas av ett komplext nät bestående av kommunalt aktivitetsansvar, vilket regleras i skollagen kapitel 29 § 9 för unga som inte fullgjort gymnasieutbildningen, samt aktiveringen av individer som uppbär ekonomiskt

bistånd. Därtill aktiverar kommuner ofta även arbetslösa för statens räkning. Faktumet att kommunal aktivering ofta finansieras av EU kan också medföra en viss styrning i form av till exempel vilka målgrupper som skall prioriteras. Slutligen redogör jag för de kommunala aktiveringsprogrammens organisation, innehåll och effekter.

Kapitel 3. Teoretiska perspektiv

I mitt teoretiska kapitel presenterar jag de tre huvudsakliga perspektiv som inspirerat mig både i fält och under avhandlingens analytiska fas.

Den första teoretiska inspirationen kommer från det så kallade *governmentality*-perspektivet, vilket syftar till att synliggöra de subtila styrningstekniker som inordnar individer under normativa ideal (jfr Rose & Miller 1992). I avhandlingen kopplar jag perspektivet till diskurser om livslångt lärande, anställningsbarhet, mobilitet och entreprenörskap, vilka alla utgör viktiga aspekter av det aktiva samhället. Uppsökandet och aktiveringen av arbetslösa förstår jag i ljuset av en så kallad biopolitisk logik, vilken syftar till att genom coachning erbjuda individer möjligheter till ett ”bättre” liv (Puumeister 2014: 301). Detta kan illustreras av det kommunala aktivitetsansvaret som genom att bryta unga människors förmodade passivitet möjliggör individers förmodade självförverkligande. Logiken kan därmed kopplas till vad Nikolas Rose har kallat ”styrning genom frihet” (1999: 273, *government through freedom*).

Därefter presenterar och diskuterar jag litteratur som teoretiserar arbetarklassens dygder i form av motspänstighet gentemot medelklassnormer och auktoriteter (Willis 1993 [1977]), integritet och värdighet (Lamont 2000) samt arbetsetik och en känsla för det allmänna (Ambjörnsson 1988, 1992). Här lyfts också begreppet ”bruksanda” fram, ett begrepp som historiker och kulturgeografer använt sig av för att beskriva traditionell svensk arbetarklasskultur (Lundqvist 2001; Forsberg et al. 2001). Trots att ”bruksanda” och ”bruksmentalitet” är synonyma begrepp, diskuterar jag hur det förra har fler positiva konnotationer till gemensamma normer och samhörighet än det senare som istället associeras till stagnation och passivitet.

Till sist diskuterar jag Luc Boltanski och Laurent Thévenots (2006) ekonomisk-sociologiska begreppsapparat om de sex idealtypiska värde-

sfärer som människor använder sig av dels för att orientera sig i världen, dels för att rättfärdiga idéer eller sätt att handla. Genom att var för sig erbjuda specifika legitimitetsanspråk, använder jag dessa idealtyper i avhandlingen för att synliggöra de motsättningar som präglar den lokala översättningen av aktiveringspolitiken. En central motsättning som genomsyrar hela avhandlingen utgörs av att en lokal gemenskapslogik (*domestic world of worth*), vilken främjar idéer om tradition, stabilitet och lojalitet, konkurrerar med en marknadslogik (*market world of worth*), i vilken konkurrens och varufiering är bärande idéer. Motsättningen mellan en lokal gemenskapslogik å ena sidan och en marknadslogik å den andra, skall här förstås som en förenklad abstraktion av två större värdemodaliteter vilka båda också inrymmer till exempel idéer om det allmännas bästa (*civic world of worth*).

Kapitel 4. Etnografi som förhållningssätt

I detta kapitel diskuterar jag min etnografiska metod och de observationer jag genomfört såväl i som utanför Milltowns båda aktiveringsåtgärder, kommunens aktiveringscenter och arbetsmarknadsenhet. Det inkluderar observationer och tillhörande etnografiska konversationer genomförda på kommunens bibliotek, kaféer, systembolag, industrimuseum och på gatan. Dessutom består mitt material av konventionella intervjuer samt allehanda text-, video- och ljudmaterial, såsom projektbeskrivningar, lokala policydokument, nyhetsartiklar, regionmuseets rapporter, privata fotoalbum, videointervjuer och radiodokumentärer. I kapitlet lyfter jag fram fördelar och nackdelar med etnografin som förhållningssätt. Exempelvis tar jag upp etnografins möjlighet att jämföra och analysera policy i förhållande till praktik, såväl som det faktum att etnografi innehåller en rad både etiska och analytiska problem, såsom observationer av utsatta i stängda miljöer och vetenskapsteoretiska spörsmål i form av tillförlitlighetsproblem. Jag diskuterar också hur min egen erfarenhet av en traditionell bruksort bidragit till en viss förförståelse av historia och kultur, samt förståelse av de utmaningar kommunen står inför i form av hög arbetslöshet och låg studietradition.

Kapitlet innehåller också viktiga etiska resonemang. Trots att godkännande från den regionala etikprövningsnämnden erhölls före det att

fältarbetet startade, samt att alla intervjuer vari känsliga personuppgifter förekom föregicks av underskrivet informerat samtycke, diskuterar jag hur etnografiska undersökningar till sin natur är kännetecknade av en rad etiska dilemman vilka sträcker sig bortom formella teknikaliteter (Wästerfors 2019). I min avhandling berör detta kanske inte främst de arbetslösas vardag i ovan nämnda aktiveringsåtgärder, utan framförallt coachernas och arbetsledarnas vardag. I avhandlingen förekommer empiriska avsnitt vari vissa aktiveringspraktiker kan framstå som underliga, eller aningen plumpa. Här understryker jag att coachernas och arbetsledarnas arbete med att aktivera de arbetslösa ungdomarna skall tolkas med största respekt och ödmjukhet eftersom deras uppgift till sin natur är genomsyrad av både tvetydighet och resursbrist.

Kapitel 5. Milltown: scener från en bruksort i förvandling

Med detta kapitel inleds den empiriska delen av avhandlingen som presenterar mina empiriska data i ljuset av de teoretiska perspektiv och begrepp jag använder mig av. Kapitlet inleds med en beskrivning av Milltowns historia som runt år 1800 var starkt präglad av Sveriges fideikommissväsende. Detta var en förordning som säkerställde att mer eller mindre omfattande jordbruksfastigheter fördes över från generation till generation enligt ett enarvingesystem utan att delas upp och därmed minskas i omfattning. Jordägarna arrenderade i sin tur bördigare mark till torpare vilka betalade hyra i form av obetalt dagsverke. Torparna utgjorde tillsammans med de egendomslösa statarna, som jordägarna anställde på årsbasis i hela familjekonstellationer, ett slags jordbruksproletariat på herrgårdarna. Fideikommissväsendet gav därmed upphov till starkt patriarkala samhällen i den mening att arbetarna, i utbyte mot jordplättar och husrum, kom att visa ”fromhet gentemot patriarkens auktoritet” (Weber 1968: 1050, min översättning). När sedan Milltowns första industrier slog upp dörrarna under sent 1800-tal bytte snart arbetarna i området jordplättar mot fabriksgolv. På så vis argumenterar jag för att Milltowns industrialisering kännetecknas av kontinuitet, snarare än av ett brott mot institutionaliserade sociala mönster.

Med industrins etablering i området beskrivs därefter hur Milltown moderniserades med elektricitet, moderna vägar, avloppssystem och

hälsovård. Samtidigt växte en stark arbetarrörelse fram med ett sammanlänkat föreningsliv. Successivt kom Milltown på så vis att tjäna som en utpräglad bruksort av senare typ, varvid en stark ”bruksanda” kom att prägla vardagen för dess invånare. I kapitlet skildrar jag sedan hur Milltown alltsedan 1990-talet förlorat momentum. I takt med att jobben blev färre påverkades även det förr så levande kulturlivet. I jämförelse med närliggande orter, som skulle komma att genomgå rurala gentrifieringsprocesser, visar jag hur Milltowns stämpel och kultur som utpräglad bruksort gjort att miljön kommit att utgöra en slags ”icke-plats” i form av ett ”osynligt landskap som befinner sig i det symboliska mellanrummet mellan urban kosmopolitism och rural romantik” (Andersson & Jansson 2012: 40).

Efter denna redogörelse för Milltowns uppgång och fall som framgångsrik bruksort, lyfter jag fram lokala förståelser av kommunens arbetslöshetsproblem i form av regionala nyhetsbelysningar och röster från lokalbefolkningen. Här återkommer begreppet ”bruksmentalitet” som problemförståelse, vilket i sammanhanget förknippas med låg studiemotivation bland unga och en förväntan om att finna manuella yrken i närområdet. Genom att stå inför både ekonomiska och kulturella utmaningar sprungna ur kommunens industriella historia, avslutar jag kapitlet med argumentet att Milltown är en väl lämpad miljö för att utforska de motsättningar som kan uppstå när aktiveringspolitik skall implementeras lokalt.

Kapitel 6. Att förändra en manuell arbetarklasskultur: scener från Milltowns aktiveringscenter

I detta kapitel tar jag med mig läsaren in i Milltowns aktiveringscenter, vilket utgjorde en central pusselbit i kommunens strategi att öka studiemotivationen och anställningsbarheten bland sina unga vuxna. Centret drevs med stöd av Europeiska socialfonden (ESF) och kom därigenom att integrera det kommunala aktivitetsansvaret för unga sysslolösa mellan 16 och 20 år med aktiveringen av arbetslösa upp till 29 år. EU-stödet möjliggjorde att tre fritidsledare kunde anta roller som coacher som tillsammans med samordnaren för det kommunala aktivitetsansvaret arbetade med att stödja och motivera deltagarna att återuppta studier eller, i andra hand, söka praktikplats eller arbete.

I kapitlet följer jag två EU-finansierade projekt som bedrevs i aktiveringscentret, där det senare avlöste det förra. Båda projekten varvade individuell hjälp med studier, cv-skrivande och ifyllande av diverse blanketter, med gruppaktiviteter som fysisk träning och matlagning. De senare aktiviteterna analyserar jag som ett sätt att översätta, eller som försök att tillämpa, aktivering som policybegrepp. Därmed inte sagt att sådana aktiviteter framstod som orimliga. Tvärtom har forskning visat att hälsa i sig självt allt oftare kommit att utgöra en inträdesbiljett till arbetsmarknaden (Holmqvist & Maravelias 2006: 19; Cederström & Spicer 2015). I ljuset av att begrepp som anställningsbarhet ofta framstår som ”flytande” och därmed svårtolkade (Garsten & Jacobsson 2004; Cremin 2010) kan dessa aktiviteter förefalla logiska.

Trots att de konkreta praktikerna inte skiljde sig nämnvärt åt mellan det första och andra aktiveringsprojektet visar jag hur coachernas ton gentemot deltagarna förändrades i det andra projektet. I och med att socialfonden utlyser projektmedel efter olika prioritetsområden kom själva målgruppen att förändras i detta projekt. Nu var det inte längre sysslolösa unga vuxna som skulle prioriteras, utan sysslolösa unga vuxna med neuropsykiatrisk diagnos. För att lyckas fylla den kvot av deltagare som behövdes för att få tillgång till socialfondens projektmedel, omformulerade den lokala projektledaren, tillsammans med samordnaren av det kommunala aktivitetsansvaret och coacherna, projektbeskrivningen lokalt så att denna även riktades mot individer som ”kunde tänkas ha” neuropsykiatriska diagnoser. Med hjälp av vad jag kallar ”subjektivitetspåminnelser” (*subjectivity reminders*) i form av tavlor och andra budskap som framhävde positiva aspekter med diagnoser såsom adhd och autism, visar jag hur coacherna sökte motivera deltagare att omvärdera perioder av sysslolöshet, och sig själva, i ljuset av en biomedicinsk diskurs (jfr Sunnerfjell & Jacobsson 2018; Rose & Abi-Rached 2013). Jag argumenterar för att detta speglar en biomedikalisering av arbetslösa, där svårigheter och tvetydigheter i livet omtolkas i ljuset av en stark neuropsykiatrisk diskurs som både coacherna och deltagarna var väl bekanta med. Samtidigt fann jag också exempel på motstånd mot sådan neuropsykiatrisk underkastelse.

Sammanfattningsvis visar jag i kapitel 6 hur spår av Milltowns manuella arbetarklasskultur influerade snarare än transformerades i aktiveringen av unga sysslolösa i kommunen. Detta i form av en grabbig

men samtidigt familjär jargong som upprätthölls mellan deltagare och coacher (jfr Lamont 2000), samt fysiska aktiviteter som tillät manliga deltagare att ge uttryck för en traditionell maskulinitetskultur (Willis 1993 [1977]). Med det andra projektet kom dock atmosfären och tonen att förändras och anta en mer paternalistisk form. Detta menar jag återspeglar faktumet att samordnaren för det kommunala aktivitetsansvaret såväl som coacherna var mer bekanta, och bekväma, med en neurobiologisk diskurs, än vad de var med policybegrepp såsom livslångt lärande, anställningsbarhet och livskunskap.

Kapitel 7. Att appropriera en manuell arbetarklasskultur: scener från Milltowns arbetsmarknadsenhet

Ett annat viktigt sammanhang där upprepade observationer genomfördes för att utforska Milltowns aktivering av arbetslösa var i kommunens arbetsmarknadsenhet.

Trots att arbetsmarknadspolitiken i Sverige är ett statligt ansvar organiserar i stort sett alla svenska kommuner idag så kallade arbetsmarknadsenheter i syfte att aktivera arbetslösa (Panican & Ulmestig 2017). Till följd av skärpta kvalificeringskrav till statliga ersättningssystem och begränsade ersättningsperioder har allt fler individer blivit utlämnade till samhällets yttersta skyddsnät, vilket utgörs av de kommunala socialtjänsterna. Genom sina arbetsmarknadsenheter kan kommunerna begära någon form av motprestation i utbyte mot ekonomiskt bistånd. Därigenom tar svenska kommuner stort ansvar för arbetsmarknadspolitiken lokalt (Jacobsson et al. 2017).

Jämfört med statliga arbetsmarknadspolitiska åtgärder är kommunala arbetsmarknadsenheter föremål för mindre kontroll, vilket öppnar upp för att verksamheter kan organiseras olika beroende på regionala och kommunala förutsättningar (Künzel 2012). I kapitel 7 beskriver jag hur Milltowns arbetsmarknadsenhet sedan 1990-talet aktiverat arbetslösa uppbärare av ekonomiskt bistånd i sex mestadels praktiskt orienterade verkstäder, vilka alla på ett eller annat sätt bidrog med service till kommunen och dess invånare. Exempelvis organiserade arbetsmarknadsenheten en utegrupp som skötte om

privatpersoners trädgårdar, en sygrupp vilka sålde billiga kläder och textilier till mindre bemedlade samt ett snickeri vari deltagare bland annat renoverade diverse kommunala faciliteter såsom bänkar och dörrar. På så vis organiserade Milltowns arbetsmarknadsenhet aktiveringen av arbetslösa enligt vad Jenny Nybom (2014) benämner som ”jobbaktivering”, snarare än ”resursaktivering”. Det vill säga, snarare än att organisera utbildande och kompetenshöjande aktiviteter, aktiverades arbetslösa enligt principen att avskräcka dem från att passivt uppbära bidrag genom att utföra olika typer av semijobb. Jag kunde dock visa att deltagarna i verkstäderna, tvärtemot vad man kan förvänta sig av en sådan aktiveringslogik, istället omvärderade aktiveringen som ”jobb” eller ”arbete”. I själva verket gav flera av deltagarna uttryck för hur möjligheten att ”hjälpa till” i kommunen gav dem både stolthet och en känsla av tillhörighet. Detta intygades av arbetsmarknadsenhetens chef och arbetsledare, vilka vittnade om hög trivsel och arbetsmoral bland deltagarna.

Samtidigt som trivseln bland deltagarna skapade frustration hos ledningen genom att motverka enhetens mål att föra de arbetslösa närmre den reguljära arbetsmarknaden, bidrog deltagarnas praktiska färdigheter också till att verksamheten kunde upprätthålla institutionaliserade service- och tjänsteuppdrag i kommunen. Jag visar hur detta skapade en ambivalens hos ledningen, som slets mellan att å ena sidan fostra anställningsbara subjekt redo att söka sig bort från verksamheten, och att å andra sidan vidmakthålla sin pålitlighet som tjänsteleverantör till kommunala verksamheter och mindre bemedlade privata hushåll. Denna ambivalens förstår jag i ljuset av Boltanski och Thévenots begreppsapparat (2006) varigenom en manuell arbetarklasskultur, eller ”bruksanda” om man så vill, premierade stabilitet och pålitlighet (*domestic world of worth*) framför en samtida, marknadsimpregnerad aktiveringspolitik (*market world of worth*). Jag argumenterar därmed för att Milltowns lokala rationalitet *approprierades* snarare än transformerades i den lokala aktiveringen av arbetslösa.

Kapitel 8. Värdighet och integritet sätts på spel

Med avstamp i litteratur som visat hur integritet och respektabilitet utgör centrala aspekter av traditionell arbetarklasskultur (Lamont 2000; Skeggs 1997; Metzgar 2021) belyser kapitel 8 situationer som utmanade den värdighet och integritet som aktiveringsåtgärderna tillät de arbetslösa i Milltown att upprätthålla. Den första situationen var en kurs i hushållsekonomi som kommunens budget- och skuldrådgivare höll i, riktad till mottagare av ekonomiskt bistånd. Därmed deltog individer från både Milltowns aktiveringscenter och arbetsmarknadsenhet i kursen. Jag visar hur kursen innebar att deltagarna exponerades för en diskurs som, i kontrast till den skötsamme arbetaren (Ambjörnsson 1992) som karaktär i industrisamhället (jfr Sennett 1998), förutsatte deltagarnas ekonomiska vårdslöshet. Jag visar också hur en del av deltagarna gjorde motstånd mot en sådan porträttering genom att framhäva sina egna ekonomiska ansvarstaganden i form av kunskaper i odling och självhushåll. Detta analyserar jag som ett sätt att återupprätta den typ av värdighet som tillkommer individer vars praktiska kunskaper erkänns som värdefulla.

En andra situation som gjorde intrång i de arbetslösas integritet var ett valideringsprojekt som skulle implementeras i arbetsmarknadsenhetens verkstäder. Genom att formalisera deltagarnas praktiska kunskaper via en uppsättning formulär stötte projektet på motstånd från framförallt arbetsledarna, vilka kände sig obekväma med att plötsligt avvika från den kollegiala roll som tidigare kännetecknat deras vardag i aktiveringen av arbetslösa. Snarare än att detaljstyra deltagarna i deras vardagliga sysslor, var arbetsledarna vana vid att bejaka deltagarnas självständighet i verkstäderna. Genom valideringsprojektet tvingades arbetsledarna bryta med den kamratskap som rådde mellan dem och deltagarna, och som tycktes modellerad efter andra arbetsintensiva och manuellt dominerade arbetsplatser. Man avvek med andra ord från den ”kollektiva linje” av beteenden som främjas i traditionella arbetarklassmiljöer (Willis 1993 [1977]: 97).

Kapitel 9. Sammanfattade resultat och implikationer

I mitt slutkapitel sammanfattar jag avhandlingen genom att svara på de frågeställningar som väglett fältarbete och analys. Kapitlet inleds med en sammanfattning och konceptualisering av Milltowns aktivering av arbetslösa i termer av en lokal gemenskapslogik (*domestic world of activation*), varvid Milltowns platsbundna rationalitet inkorporerades i den lokala översättningen av aktiveringspolitiken. Snarare än att arbeta för att lösgöra deltagarna från den arbetarklasskultur som präglade kommunen, och som lokalt problematiserades i termer av en kvarvarande ”bruksmentalitet”, argumenterar jag för att åtgärderna istället genomsyrades av samma rationalitet. Med undantag från den neurobiologiska diskurs som introducerades i det andra socialfondsprojekt jag observerade vid Milltowns aktiveringscenter, tenderade den praktiska verkligheten i kommunens aktiveringsåtgärder därmed att kännetecknas av kontinuitet snarare än diskontinuitet. Detta stödjer forskning som i ljuset av social- och arbetsmarknadspolitisk decentralisering kommit att peka mot alltmer situerade aktiveringspraktiker (Künzel 2012; Jacobsson et al. 2017). Genom etnografiska observationer bidrar min avhandling till aktiveringslitteraturen med konkreta exempel på hur aktiveringspolitik bäddas in i lokala strukturer och logiker allteftersom den ”sipprar ner” från statliga och överstatliga policyrekommendationer.

Att organisationer tenderar att vara kulturellt inbäddade är i sig inget nytt (se t.ex. Selznick 1966). Vad min avhandling visar är hur detta gäller även människobehandlande välfärdsorganisationer, vilket i slutändan kan få konsekvenser för deras klienter. Övergripande policyrekommendationer kan inrymma normativa antaganden om det allmännas bästa vilka inte alltid överensstämmer med lokala föreställningar om vad som bäst gynnar medborgarna (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). Följaktligen kan bärande idéer inom aktiveringspolitiken, såsom vikten av att ingjuta arbetslösa med personligt ansvar för sig själva och andra (Elm Larsen 2005; Barnett 2003), komma att betyda någonting annat efter att en anpassning till lokala omständigheter och föreställningar ägt rum (jfr Sahlin & Wedlin 2008; Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). I avhandlingen illustrerades detta av arbetslösa som återupprättade mening och värdighet i vardagen genom att vara kommu-

nen behjälpliga med praktiska kunskaper och kompetenser, snarare än att fostras till anställningsbara och därmed förmodat aktiva individer i linje med den aktiva samhällsorienteringens policyrekommendationer (t.ex. European Commission 2019).

Därefter mejslar jag fram fyra motsättningar vilka genomsyrat mitt material och som på olika sätt bidrar till tidigare forskning om aktivering, samt till sociologisk teori om klass, moral och subjektivering.

Den första motsättningen utgjordes av en krock mellan det aktiva subjektet (*the active subject*) och det lokalt gemenskapsorienterade subjektet (*the domestic subject*). Det gemenskapsorienterade subjektet kännetecknas av en strävan efter att upprätthålla stabilitet i livet genom att odla sociala relationer och en känsla av gemenskap. Att känna tillhörighet till en specifik plats, samt att uppleva sig behövd bidrar till att en stark lojalitetsprincip präglar vardagen. På så vis utgör det gemenskapsorienterade subjektet en motpol till det aktiva subjektet, som genom mobilitetsaspirationer och en önskan om att på olika sätt ”förverkliga sig själv” agerar mer i linje med den nyliberala styrningsrationalitet (*neoliberal governmentality*) som genomsyrar det aktiva samhället.

Motsättningen mellan det aktiva och det gemenskapsorienterade subjektet leder över till nästa motsättning, vilken utgörs av det mobila respektive det fixerade subjektet (*the mobile versus the fixed subject*). I en tid av global kapitalism och starka mobilitetsimperativ (Farrugia 2016; Uddbäck 2021) framstår det fixerade subjektet som moraliskt klandervärt. Den som är platsbunden och finner mening i en lokal tillvaro motsätter sig här det kosmopolitiska etos (Rozpedowski 2010; Durante 2014) som implicit ingår i policykoncept som entreprenörskap och idéer om livslångt lärande, vilka alltmer kommit att innefatta individers mobilitet (t.ex. Foucault 2008: 230; LLP n.d.; se också Garsten 2008: 4).

En tredje motsättning återfinns mellan det inkluderade och det exkluderade subjektet (*the included versus the excluded subject*). Det är begrepp som i det aktiva samhället kommit att förskjuta idéer om jämlikhet och ojämlikhet från en strukturell nivå ner till individnivå (jfr Boltanski & Chiapello 2005: 361). I det aktiva samhället är idén om social inkludering stark, och förstås i termer av att människors existens bör kännetecknas av värdighet och ett ansvar gentemot sin omgivning (European Commission 2008; EAPN 2014; Elm Larsen 2005).

Jag visar hur individer, trots att de befinner sig utanför arbetsmarknaden, kan känna stark tillhörighet och gemenskap lokalt. Därmed kan även arbetslösa uppfattas vara socialt inkluderade, vilket reser frågor om vilka normativa föreställningar som ryms i aktiveringsdiskursen. Man kan man exempelvis fråga sig huruvida aktiveringspolicyer verkar förutsätta att inkludering endast kan ske via de alltmer abstrakta arbetsformer som präglar den flexibla kapitalismen (Sennett 1998), och därigenom negligera andra, mer konkreta förståelser av begreppet, såsom rumslig inkludering till följd av stark platsidentitet.

En sista motsättning rör avhandlingens teoretiska bidrag. Här fokuserar jag distinktionen mellan det foucauldianska, formbara subjektet å ena sidan (*the malleable subject of governmentality*), och det stabila, klassorienterade subjektet å den andra (*the stable subject of social class*). Medan litteraturen om aktivering tenderar att betona det plastiska subjektet (jfr Gilbert 2005; Crespo & Serrano Pascual 2004), vittnar min avhandling om komplexiteten i att omforma människors förståelse av sig själva och sin omvärld. Genom att vara en utpräglad arbetarklassmiljö tycktes Milltown ha svårt att omsätta idén om det aktiva samhället lokalt, i betydelsen att fostrandet av aktiva och utåtriktade subjekt komplicerades av lokala lojalitetsprinciper samt av en motvilja bland aktörerna involverade i aktiveringen av arbetslösa att våldföra sig på andras integritet (jfr Bourdieu 1984: 382; Lamont 2000).

Faktumet att en biomedicinsk diskurs tycktes ha lättare att få fäste i Milltown, tyder dock på att vissa diskurser har mer bäring i människors liv än andra. Som exempelvis Peter Conrad (2007) och Nikolas Rose (2003) har visat, finns det idag en stark tendens bland människor generellt att omkoda svårigheter och tvetydigheter i livet, såsom exempelvis perioder av arbetslöshet eller sjukfrånvaro, i ljuset av neurobiologisk kunskap. Att en neurobiologisk diskurs tycktes lättare att implementera i aktiveringen av arbetslösa än begrepp som anställningsbarhet och entreprenörskap, framstår därmed inte som så underligt. Till syvende och sist tyder mina resultat på att individers öppenhet för att bli omformade, och kapacitet att omforma sig själva (jfr Dean 1995), skiljer sig åt beroende på i vilken kontext olika försök till så kallad subjektivering äger rum.

I kölvattnet av 1980 och 90-talens postmoderna vändning, varvid aspekter såsom ”platsens platslöshet” (Gieryn 2000) och en mer fly-

tande syn på identitet (jfr Baudrillard 1994; Laclau & Mouffe 1985) kom att betonas framför plats- och klassidentitet, pekar min avhandling på att det senare alltjämt utgör viktiga utgångspunkter i samhällsvetenskaplig forskning. I linje med Michelle Brady (2014, 2011) menar jag att en etnografisk approach som tillåter jämförelser mellan policy och praktik, och som betonar översättning som en situerad process, är särskilt behjälplig för den som avser utforska implementeringen av välfärdsreformer lokalt.

Att implementera policy till praktik är svårt, varför vi i samband med sådana här studier bör vara ödmjuka och visa förståelse för de som söker skapa en bättre tillvaro för till exempel arbetslösa. Detta inte minst i en tid kännetecknad av en ”våldsam explosion av tvivelaktig expertis” härrörande ur samtida managementdiskurser (Alvesson 2021: 358, min översättning). Vad betyder det exempelvis att vara anställningsbar och entreprenöriell? När kan vi anses anställningsbara nog? Och inte minst, hur står sig påbud om mobilitet, flexibilitet och livslångt lärande i relation till allas vår gemensamma strävan efter trygghet och förutsägbarhet i livet (Giddens 1991; Sennett 1998)? Med de här frågorna avslutar jag min avhandling. Genom att ha genomfört min studie i en utpräglad bruksort, där aktiveringspolitiska initiativ syftade till att råda bot på en allestädes närvarande ”bruksmentalitet” (jfr Willis 1993 [1977]), har jag visat hur försöken att fostra aktiva och mobila subjekt krockade med en platsbunden rationalitet som främjade lojalitet och integritet framför marknadsimperativ och uppmuntrandet av arbetslösas självförverkligande. I Milltown tycktes de arbetslösas tillvaro redan genomsyras av en känsla av autenticitet och resonans med omgivningen (Rosa 2019; Sennett 1998), vilket är i linje med målen för aktiv inkludering. Avslutningsvis är min förhoppning att denna avhandling uppmuntrar till fler genomlysningar av de normativa föreställningar som ryms i hela den begreppsarsenal som idag tillämpas i det aktiva samhället som både diskurs och policyorientering.

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Today's flexible Western labour markets place new demands on the workforce. Whereas industrial society fostered individuals who found dignity in performing long-term, manual labour, few people can now expect to go through working life without engaging in continuous updating of knowledges and skills. However, there are environments on both sides of the Atlantic where the workforce is still adapted to an economy of production. Industrial restructuring has led to islands of unemployment, whereby the labour force has been unable to reorganise into other sectors.

In light of automation and a globalised economy, Jon Sunnerfjell presents a study that explores how a once-flourishing industrial community seeks to manage the challenges of post-industrial society and flexible capitalism. What is at hand is the adaptation to what scholars have labelled the 'active society', reconceptualising structural inequality in terms of individual exclusion. This is a society that seeks to mitigate public expenditures on social welfare by fostering active and employable individuals able and willing to navigate life responsibly.

Drawing on ethnographic data, Sunnerfjell analyses what becomes of policy concepts such as lifelong learning, employability and entrepreneurship when they are put to work in an environment imbued with industrial history and working-class culture. Ultimately, he shows the tensions that pervade the active society and what forms of resistance it produces.

Arkiv