
Policy innovations for including disabled people in the labour market: A study of innovative practices of Dutch sheltered work companies

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Abstract In its disability strategy, the European Union has expressed the central aim to improve the employment situation of people with disabilities. This article discusses Dutch policies, but specifically the Sheltered Work Act which contributes to this aim by regulating sheltered employment. The goal is to identify and explore innovative practices that have been applied by Dutch sheltered work companies for increasing the inclusion of disabled people in the regular labour market. The article reveals that the Netherlands has implemented a range of initiatives which together have resulted in an increase of non-sheltered jobs for disabled people. The article argues that the simple “sheltered/non-sheltered” dichotomy does not do justice to the gradual evolution of labour participation among individual disabled people and that the role of sheltered work places as a first step to the inclusion of disabled people should not be underestimated.

Keywords disabled worker, sheltered employment, labour force participation, the Netherlands, European Union

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Introduction

Globally, one out of every six people, or some 1 billion people, has a disability (WHO, 2011). According to the International Labour Office (ILO), between 785 million and 975 million of these people are estimated to be of working age, but most do not work (ILO, 2013). The European Union's 2020 strategy includes the ambitious aim to increase the labour participation rate of people with disabilities to be equivalent to 75 per cent of the participation rate for the total working-age population (aged 20–64). In its disability strategy the European Union (EU) has expressed the goal to “Improve the employment situation of People with Disabilities (PWD) through recognition of their right to work, including the opportunity to gain a living by work accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible” (Placencia Porreiro, 2012). Many EU and national policies are aimed at the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market. A wide variety of tools are applied to achieve this, including the introduction of principles of equal opportunity, equal treatment, and mainstreaming into vocational rehabilitation and employment services programmes (ILO, 2013). However, despite these initiatives the labour market participation of disabled people remains rather low in most European countries. The average participation rate is 45 per cent (EU SILC, 2010).

In many EU countries, including the Netherlands, sheltered work facilities have been created in which disabled people can work in protected environments. Work activities may include on-site assemblage activities, the maintenance and cleaning of public parks and streets and many other activities. In the Netherlands, sheltered work is offered by local or regional sheltered work companies. The sheltered work companies employ over 100,000 people, which makes them one of the biggest employers for disabled people in the Netherlands (van Santen, van Oploo and Engelen, 2013).

However, three developments have challenged the traditional perspective on sheltered work as an “open, inclusive and accessible work place” for disabled people. First, discussions have been initiated about the extent to which sheltered work places can be considered as “inclusive” (see for example, Fenger, van der Steen and van der Torre, 2013; Greve, 2009; OECD, 2003; van der Hallen and Bruyninckx, 1999). Disabled people making use of sheltered work places in the Netherlands formally show all the formal characteristics of regular employees, including a labour contract, a collective labour agreement, trade union membership and regular payment. In practice, however, the experience of sheltered work may also contribute to the exclusion of disabled people. First, this exclusion arises because contacts and interactions with non-disabled people are limited and second because the provision of a safe and protective environment may also form a barrier for disabled people to accept a job with a regular employer. In this regard, sheltered work may function as a protective cage for disabled people.

The second development that challenges the traditional perspective on sheltered work is related to the scarcity of labour in some sectors of the workforce that was predicted before the 2008 financial and economic crisis hit Europe. In 2008 in the Netherlands, the Commission-Bakker (Labour Participation Commission) produced a report called “Towards a Working Future”. The key message of this report was that increased rates of labour participation in conjunction with decreased levels of benefit dependency were crucial prerequisites for the sustainability of the Dutch economy and the welfare state. Increasing the level of regular labour market participation of disabled people in preference to sheltered work participation was considered as one of the options available to prevent workforce scarcity.

Finally, sheltered work is increasingly considered to be an expensive solution for the inclusion of disabled people. Sheltered work companies are heavily subsidized by local and central governments, and most sustain considerable losses on their activities (see, for example, Cedris, 2013d). This also calls for a repositioning of sheltered work and its main providers: sheltered work companies. Significant budget reductions in the funding of sheltered work provision are being planned by the Dutch government.

Against the background of these developments, sheltered work companies (sw-companies) in the Netherlands are required to transform from being the providers of traditional on-site production facilities into organizations that stimulate and facilitate the inclusion of disabled people in the regular labour market. This transformation requires innovative products and processes. This article sets out to identify and explore innovative practices that have been applied by Dutch sw-companies to increase the inclusion of disabled people in the regular labour market.

The article is structured as follows: the following section offers an introduction to integration policies for disabled people and sheltered work. The article then discusses sheltered work policies specifically instituted within the Netherlands. This is followed by a detailed account of the characteristics of Dutch sw-companies and the presentation of the different initiatives of Dutch sw-companies to include disabled people in society. The article concludes by summarizing and critically reflecting upon innovative solutions designed to increase the integration of disabled people in the labour market in the Netherlands.

Integration policies for disabled people and sheltered work

Since the 1970s, the social inclusion of disabled people increasingly emerged as a societal and political issue (see for example, Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Oliver and Barnes, 2010). Employment for disabled people is viewed as an important element

to their social inclusion (see for example Giddens, 1991; Barnes and Mercer, 2005). This is closely linked to the idea that citizenship is pre-eminently associated with paid work (Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Grint, 1998).

Various policy programmes designed to facilitate the labour market integration of disabled people have been developed in recent years. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2003) reports four integration policy approaches: i) Legal framework for employment promotion; ii) Employer obligations; iii) Vocational rehabilitation and training; iv) Special employment programmes (subsidized employment, supported employment and sheltered employment). This is a relatively broad classification. Bamba et al. (2005) presented a more specific classification. They distinguish between five types of “welfare to work” strategies aimed at increasing the labour market participation of disabled people: i) Education, training and work placement; ii) Vocational advice and support services; iii) In-work benefits; iv) Incentives for employers (e.g. wage subsidies) and v) Improving physical accessibility.

Different actors are involved in the development and implementation of work integration policies for disabled people (see van der Torre, Fenger and van Twist, 2012). First, there are different levels of governmental involvement. Both at the national and local level, governments seek to develop policy programmes, instruments and measures that help to increase the inclusion of disabled people within the labour market. Second, there are implementing organizations that translate policies into practice. Such organizations include Jobcentre Plus in the United Kingdom, the *UWV* in the Netherlands, and *Samhall* in Sweden. These organizations are concerned with the actual realization of jobs for disabled people. Third, there are employers who are obligated to offer workplaces to disabled people. Their cooperation is essential for the successful integration of disabled people into the labour market. Disabled people are no less important as actors. Even though the central idea is that paid and regular work enhances the well-being of disabled people, not all disabled people are initially enthusiastic about participating in the regular labour market (see, for example, Bamba, Whitehead and Hamilton, 2005). A range of factors influence this lack of motivation, including the possibility of a decrease in income and psychological dimensions such as the fear of the unknown or the prospect of failure.

This article focuses on sheltered work providers. European examples of these types of organizations include Spain’s *Centros Especiales de Empleo* (CEE), Sweden’s *Samhall*; and France’s *Ateliers Protégés* and *Etablissements et Services d’Aide par le Travail* (ESAT). As noted in the introduction, sheltered work is increasingly viewed as inappropriate because it may contribute to the exclusion of disabled people (Fenger, van der Steen and van der Torre, 2013; Greve, 2009; OECD, 2003; van der Hallen and Bruyninckx, 1999). In various countries, a trend of replacing

“sheltered work” with “supported employment” can be observed wherein disabled people are employed by a regular employer with financial support. However, empirically, the provision of sheltered work is still regarded as being of great importance (Greve, 2009; OECD, 2003; Shima, Zólyomi and Zaidi, 2008).

This changing perspective on sheltered work may significantly impact upon the traditional role of sheltered work providers. It may be argued that less effort should be placed upon the acquisition of sheltered work for disabled people, with more effort being put into transition to the regular labour market. There are countries in which sw-companies have already adopted explicit goals to realize this transition, however transition rates into the general labour market are often relatively low (Greve, 2009).

Dutch sheltered work policies: Developments of the Sheltered Work Act

Since 1969, sheltered work in the Netherlands has been regulated by the Sheltered Work Act (SWA).¹ This regulation aims to offer adapted jobs to those disabled people who do not succeed in independently securing a regular job. Sheltered work companies (sw-companies) are the main providers of adapted jobs for disabled people.

From 1995, the SWA has been increasingly subjected to criticism and adaptation (Fenger et al., 2011). In 1998 there was a revision of the SWA, followed by the two-phased modernization of the Act in 2005 and 2008. In 2015, the SWA is set to merge with the Social Assistance Act to form the Participation Act, which is to be aimed at all people who are excluded from or vulnerable within the labour market. These changes mark an increased focus on regular employment participation as the ultimate goal for disabled people. New instruments have been introduced to facilitate this goal, including the introduction of supported employment (1998); wage subsidies and the “no-risk policy” (*no-riskpolis*) (2005–2008). Supported employment differs from the other work types as the employee is employed by a regular employer instead of the sw-company. The sw-company still provides the essential guidance and support for the job itself. In the case of wage subsidies, the employee works for the statutory minimum wage (or the lowest scale of the collective labour agreement) and the employer receives a subsidy from the government. The no-risk policy guarantees that the government will pay the employee’s wage if he or she is incapacitated by ill health or injury. This reduces the (perceived) risk of hiring disabled people.

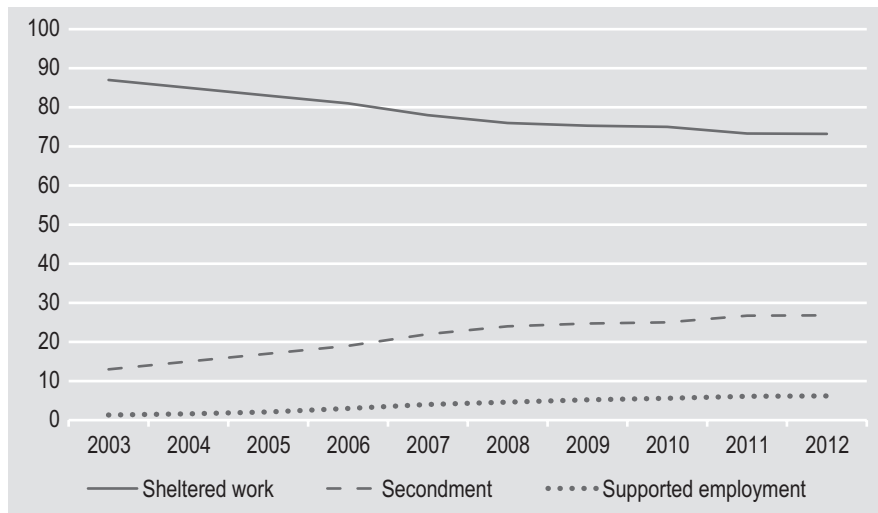
1. Some translations of the 1969 Act’s title, which has the Dutch acronym of WSW, refer to the Act of Sheltered Workplaces.

Besides these incremental policy changes, the SWA was further scrutinized by a newly-established Commission for the Fundamental Revision of the SWA in 2005 (Fenger et al., 2011; Fenger, van der Steen and van der Torre, 2013). The Dutch Cabinet assigned the Commission with the task of providing recommendations for instruments and measures designed to increase the labour market participation of people who are unable to find and sustain a job. In 2009, the Commission presented its advisory report “Work to Ability”. The report recommended the adoption of a uniform approach for all people that require support to participate in the labour market, independent from specific support needs or available measures to support these needs (Commissie Fundamentele Herbezinning, 2009). Participation in employment was prioritized over social benefits and employers and employees were regarded as central to this approach (rather than the regulation). The Commission proposed a reward system based upon the new instrument of “wage dispensation”. This new instrument would have allowed employers to restrict pay to levels directly related to the realized productivity of the employee, which can be less than the statutory minimal wage.

In its response to the report, the Cabinet claimed to share the principles presented in the report, but was hesitant in directly implementing the suggested solutions. The Cabinet decided to carry out several pilot studies during the period 2009–2012 to evaluate the impact of the suggested solutions. In these pilots, the involved parties (including employers, sw-companies and municipalities) were given the opportunity to implement innovative approaches and methods (Ernst & Young, 2013).

Following evaluation of the pilot programmes, significant changes to the Sheltered Work Act, the Work to Ability Act (2010) and its successor, the Participation Act (2012), were planned. At the core of the new regulatory framework was the merging of the SWA with other regulations to facilitate the integration of vulnerable people into the labour market. At the same time, significant reductions in public expenditure and a greater focus on non-sheltered work for disabled people were proposed. In the Participation Act there were also plans for the introduction of a quota for employers. These plans have yet to be formalized. The planned start of this new amalgamated Act was January 2015. The involved parties had anticipated the implementation of the Act despite not being fully aware of the full content of the new law. However, in 2013 these plans were cancelled.

Looking at the results of the SWA, we can be positive about the developments. An important decline in the percentage of sheltered work when compared with supported employment and secondment can be observed (see Figure 1). In the period 2003–2012, the percentage of sheltered work of the sw-companies’ total jobs declined by almost 14 percentage points. At the same time participation in supported employment greatly increased.

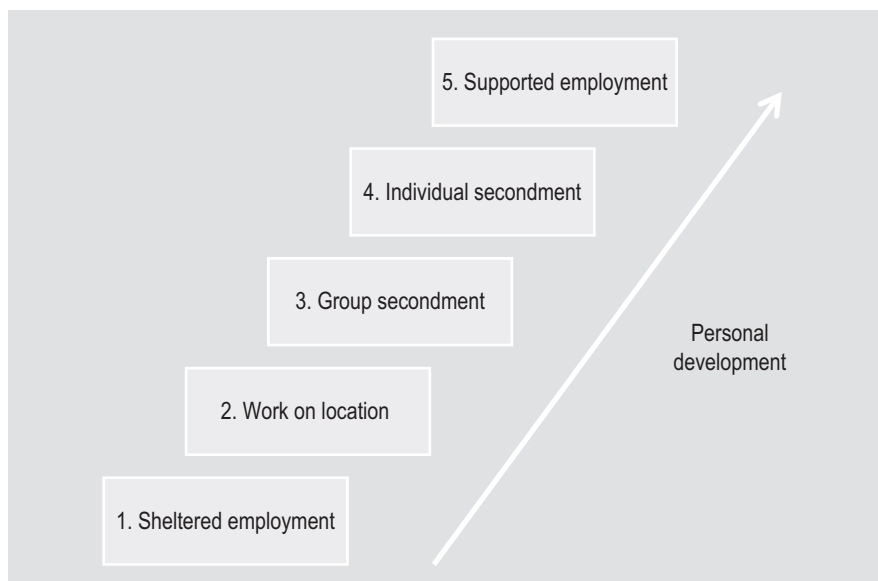
Figure 1. Percentages of work types used by sw-companies in the period 2003–2012

Sources: Based on Bolhuis, Flapper and Mandos (2005); Bolhuis and Flapper (2006, 2007); Plooij and Mandos (2004); van Santen, van Oploo and Engelen (2008); van Santen, van Oploo and Engelen (2009–2013).

Dutch sheltered work companies

There are 94 sw-companies in the Netherlands (van den Berg and Risseeuw, 2009). Their main task is to provide jobs to people who require adapted work circumstances because of an assessed psychological condition or an assessed mental or physical disability (VNG, 2006). This task arises as an aspect of the implementation of the Sheltered Work Act (SWA).

In total, the sw-companies supply jobs to more than 100,000 disabled people (Santen, van Oploo and Engelen, 2013). These jobs can be *internal* or *external*. Internal jobs are jobs in the sheltered environment of the sw-company itself. External jobs are with regular employers. In general, Dutch sheltered work companies offer five job types to their clients: i) sheltered work at the sheltered work company, ii) working on location, iii) individual secondment, iv) group secondment and v) supported employment. All of these job types are steps on the SWA “work ladder” (see Figure 2). This work ladder has been developed by Cedris (the interest group for sw-companies) as a schematic tool to show the job development of their clients. The lowest step is sheltered employment. The second step is “WOL” (work on location). Work on location involves disabled people working in supervised groups outside the sw-company in occupational areas such as gardening or cleaning. The next steps involve group secondment and individual secondment. In the case of group secondment, a group of disabled people work at a regular company. Supervision at the work floor-level is provided by the

Figure 2. The “work ladder” for disabled people

sw-company. Disabled people who are seconded individually with a regular employer work more independently. These disabled workers are not accompanied by a permanent supervisor, but do have continuous access to a consultant from the sw-company. In the next step, “supported employment”, disabled people commence employment with a regular employer, with employers receiving “wage cost subsidies”. This is the final step before people enter a regular job.

This article focuses on Dutch sw-companies’ innovative practices to increase the inclusion of disabled people. Based on the classification of Bambra, Whitehead and Hamilton (2005) we developed a framework to discuss the different practices (see Table 1). A content analysis of different data sources is conducted. Data sources used are: i) the websites of all Dutch sw-companies, ii) other studies focusing on the initiatives of Dutch sw-companies to integrate disabled people in the labour market, and iii) interviews with the management of eight Dutch sw-companies. The results are discussed in the next section.

Sw-companies’ initiatives to include disabled people in society

Earlier we evidenced the increase of non-sheltered work for disabled people in the period 2003-2012, wherein the innovative practices of Dutch sw-companies contributed to this development. This section presents an overview of initiatives taken

Table 1. Five types of “sheltered work to non-sheltered work” practices

Practice	Explanation
1. Education, training and work placements	The provision of vocational skills, work experience and exposure to employers, recognized qualifications or other types of training or education
2. Vocational advice and support services	The improvement of job-search skills, match individuals to jobs, generating access to training and education schemes, informing about in-work benefits, and other forms of vocational advice and support
3. In-work benefits	Overcoming disabled people’s personal fears
4. Incentives for employers	Encouraging employers to recruit disabled people e.g. by offering wage subsidies
5. Improving physical accessibility	Reducing the physical workplace barriers

Source: Based on Bamba, Whitehead and Hamilton (2005).

by Dutch sw-companies to increasingly integrate disabled people into the labour market. This by no means comprehensive overview looks at the methods, projects and instruments, but not at the measures taken to implement these initiatives.² For most initiatives the names of organizations implementing the measures are given. The discussion is structured following the five job types of “sheltered work to non-sheltered work” outlined above.

Education, training and work placements

Due to the growing political demand for a more inclusive labour supply involving disabled people, Dutch sw-companies are increasingly being transformed from “production factories” into a “human development companies”. At the core of this transformation is the principle that the development and outplacement of disabled people becomes the central goal of the organization. Therefore, various practices to increase the labour skills of disabled people have been developed. In general, it can be said that sw-companies offer a wide variety of education, training and work placements, ranging from vocational training, computer courses, skill training for workers, and language courses (for an example, see Box 1).

Vocational advice and support services

Besides increasing the labour-market skills of disabled people, sw-companies also help this group to find a job outside the sw-company. Various initiatives are

2. Many of these initiatives demand a great cultural change within the sw-company at the level of the management, the supervisors and the disabled people.

Box 1. Carrousel (!Go)

The goal of this project is that: “the participant will learn and gain practical experience in various professional fields. The participant develops and objectifies his/her employee skills. The person will formulate his/her perspective on work” (!Go, 2013). The project consists of: i) an intake; ii) a two-week training programme covering the topics of self-motivation, personal care and presentation, employers and work, the employee and skills, and exercise and healthy diet; iii) the “carrousel”, which consists of apprenticeships on selected vacancies, and iv) an individual follow-up route.

implemented to support disabled people in their search for a regular job and these often take place in special test and training centres (e.g. the Diamant Groep Education and Training Centre). Sw-companies have also developed initiatives (e.g. the Baanstede Mobility Centre and the Diamant Groep Education and Training Centre) to enable disabled people to enter a job in the regular labour market that is well matched to their skills and personal attributes (see also Diamant Groep, 2013; Baanstede, 2013).

In-work benefits

In-work benefits are aimed at overcoming both the financial and psychological fears of disabled people. Measures such as wage subsidies are implemented to mitigate fears relating to the prospect of financial insecurity by ensuring that an adequate income is secured for disabled people. The alleviation of psychological fears is regarded as being of equal if not greater importance. Many disabled people may initially experience feelings of anxiety and stress when confronted with the plan of work they are required to commit to outside the sw-company. The sw-company is a place which they know well and a focal point of their social network. Leaving this well-known, secure environment can precipitate a fear of the unknown eventually leading to resistance against the plan to find a job outside the sw-company. Sw-companies can play an important role in alleviating these fears and any resistance to the plans. One way in which this can be done involves taking these fears into account when designing job routes for disabled people. Small steps can help to overcome fears. Illustrating this, the project “Paswerk in the district” (*Paswerk in de Wijk*) aims to alleviate the fears and resistance of disabled people by letting them take careful, small steps towards labour participation (Cedris, 2013a). Another method used is communication. Sw-companies publish leaflets (e.g. WEDEO, Ergon), magazines or web pages in which they offer information and

present positive stories of disabled people who already work outside the sw-company (see, for example, DSW, 2013), which are aimed at stimulating and motivating disabled people to take similar steps.

Incentives for employers

Employers' willingness to offer jobs to disabled people is crucial for an inclusive labour market. Sw-companies have initiated and developed various projects and methods designed to increase the number of available jobs for disabled people with regular employers. We divide these into two categories: i) practices to get sw-companies known by employers and ii) practices to convince employers to offer jobs to disabled people.

Practices to get sw-companies known by employers

A first step in generating more jobs with regular employers is to get known by them. Sw-companies need to raise awareness amongst regular employers before they can start to "sell" their services. This section discusses several initiatives of sw-companies to become known by employers.

Get involved in employers networks. Employers' networks offer opportunities to gain contact with employers and for sw-companies to get known by them, particularly when company presentations are organized on a regular basis.

These networks are characterized by different types of members and tasks. Examples include employers networks of specific local industrial areas (e.g. BGS), and a network between the sw-company, small and medium sized enterprises, and Start Foundation³ (e.g. !Go). These examples include both employer networks that are already in existence as well as employers' networks that are initiated and developed by sw-companies (e.g. Atlant Groep, IBN). One example is "Inspiring IBN" that offers employers "a regional network with a social heart" (IBN, 2013).

External communication. External communication tools are also utilized to increase the visibility of an organization.

Examples of external communication tools:

- Articles in employers' magazines about the sw-company (e.g. Presikhaaf, DSW).
- Publication of the sw-company's own magazine (e.g. BIGA groep, Combiwerk, Lander).

3. Start Foundation is an independent social investor that seeks to create opportunities and jobs for vulnerable people.

- The use of flyers or leaflets to present the services of the sw-company (e.g. Ergon, Op/maat).
- A comprehensive marketing campaign directed at employers (e.g. Fivelingo started the campaign “Hands for work” (*Handen voor werk*), which consists of a website, newsletter, and flyers).
- The organization of business lunch meetings (Felua-Groep, 2013), open days (e.g. Paswerk, Patijnenburg), or welcome business groups (e.g. Op/maat).
- Attending networking meetings for entrepreneurs (e.g. Lander) including the organization of promotional stands (e.g. De Betho).
- The organization of information meetings for employers. Examples include the meeting “Connect!”, which informs employers about current political issues (e.g. Ergon and Lander) or meetings about corporate social responsibility (e.g. Haeghe Group).

Convince employers to offer jobs to disabled people

Besides becoming known by employers, it is also important to convince employers to do business with the sw-company. The employers should be “tempted” to hire disabled people as their employees. This section discusses methods adopted to enable sw-companies to realize this goal.

Work-demand driven. The “employer approach” is used by most sw-companies to increase the number of jobs with employers for disabled people. The core of this approach is that sw-companies gain real insight into the wishes and demands of employers and that they try to meet these wishes and demands (Cedris, 2013b) to enable a good match between the employer, the disabled person and the work place. For example, “Our Employers Desk will advise and support you with questions about personnel or outsourcing work. The Employers Desk is practical, flexible, without bureaucracy or jargon. We make clear agreements, only one phone call and the Employers Desk takes everything out of your hands” (Sallcon Werktalet, 2013).

Facilitate employers to hire disabled people. The pilot studies discussed earlier showed that employers want to be facilitated when they hire disabled people. They want risks and “hassle” to be minimized and financial attractiveness is a precondition. Sw-companies take various initiatives to facilitate employers in hiring disabled people and to encourage them to provide jobs for them, examples include:

- *Financial incentives*

Sw-companies can access legal instruments such as wage subsidies which can be used to make it more financially attractive for employers to hire disabled people.

Illustrating this, reducing the costs of prospective employers may often be used to facilitate the hire of disabled people. For instance, “PAUW provides customized services without a profit goal. Thus we can offer you a competitive price, while offering people a chance at a distance from the labor market. The knife cuts both ways” (PAUW Bedrijven, 2013).

- *Unburdening the employer (both in administration and supervision) and taking away risks*

“Our core purpose is to relieve you completely. Not only with the efforts of our employees in your organization, but also with the support behind the scenes. From administration to grant applications and personal guidance, we take it out of your hands” (WNK Bedrijven, 2013).

- *Low threshold for contact with the sw-business*

Employers can also be facilitated by easy access to the services of the sw-companies. Sw-companies therefore make it possible to register jobs online (e.g. Amfors Groep, De Risse, Felua Groep) and also look at CVs and employees personal profiles online (e.g. BIGA, Dukdalf, Felua-Groep, Presikhaaf).

- *Helping hand by social return requirement*

Clients are increasingly required to spend part of their budget on social return. Employers can achieve social return by hiring disabled people. Sw-companies provide employers with guidance in relation to fulfilling this social return requirement (e.g. IBN, Weener Groep, DSW).

Take away hesitations. Despite all previous discussed facilities employers can still have doubts concerning hiring disabled people. Sw-companies have developed various initiatives to take away these hesitations, examples include:

- *Pilot projects*

Several sw-companies give employers the opportunity to experience working with disabled people (e.g. Noorderkwartier, Topcraft, UW). In practice it is often observed that when the cooperation between the sw-company and the employer goes well the employer extends the amount of workplaces available for disabled people (see, for example, Noorderkwartier, 2013).

- *References and success stories*

Sw-companies often showcase on their website employers who already hire disabled people from their organization. This often includes positive experiences told by the employers (e.g. Felua-Groep, Fivelingo, SWB, WAA).

- *Summing up the advantages of hiring disabled people*

In order to encourage employers to hire disabled people, sw-companies often give a clear list of the advantages on their website (see Box 2).

- *Show an overview of the workforce: “Give disabled people a face”*

Another initiative to help mitigate hesitations among employers is the use of promotional tools that “give disabled people a face”. Some sw-companies provide an

Box 2. Summing up the advantages of hiring disabled people

- Motivated and loyal staff
- Trial with no obligation
- Financial compensation for loss of production
- No additional administrative burden
- No labour costs resulting from absenteeism
- Job coaching: coaching of employees and employers
- Public image of your company

Source: De Bolder (2013).

overview of the disabled people who are available as employees on their website accompanied with a CV, a photograph, information about personal interests and sometimes even a short film clip in which jobseekers present themselves (e.g. Sallcon Werk talent, Felua-Groep).

Other benefits. There are also other benefits that sw-companies offer to those employers who (will) hire disabled people. Examples are:

- *Positive publicity*

Several sw-companies offer an annual award or certificate to employers who demonstrate exceptional levels of social responsibility. Examples include: “the CRS certificate” (e.g. Concern voor Werk), the award “Tom’me” (e.g. Empatec), the “I have the job for you trophy” (e.g. Sallcon Werk talent) and “the Meergroep Award” (e.g. De Meergroep).

- *Advice about production processes*

In addition to the facilities available to employers discussed earlier, some sw-companies also offer advice with regard to the development of the production process which can lead to efficiency improvement, higher production levels and lower personnel costs for employers (e.g. De Betho, Presikhaaf Bedrijven).

- *Access to governmental assignments*

Due to a close relationship with local government(s), sw-companies often have easier access to governmental projects, including the cleaning of governmental buildings and greening projects within urban environments. Sw-companies can facilitate access to these types of governmental projects and employers can then engage disabled people from the sw-company to carry out the work involved in the project (e.g. Lander).

Positive framing: “Sell” disabled people as employees. Another method utilized to influence the willingness of employers to hire disabled people is to give such employees a positive “label”. Sw-companies may describe the “talents or work talents” of disabled people on their webpages (e.g. Presikhaaf Bedrijven, Sallcon Werk talent).

Improving physical accessibility. The SWA requires that disabled people receive subsidies for workplace adaptations (Gemeenteloket SZW, 2013). This provides a budget for necessary workplace adaptations.

Besides specific subsidies for workplace adaptations, sw-companies also actively encourage the creation of suitable jobs for disabled people at companies by “job carving” or “structural function creation” (e.g. ATEA, Sallcon Werk talent, Atlant Groep, Weener Groep). Job carving consists first of an analysis of the different tasks within a specific job (Cedris, 2013c). On the basis of the analysis, the easiest tasks are separated out and merged into a newly-created job deemed suitable for disabled people. Structural function creation goes further than job carving by encouraging the creation of a new organizational structure with redefined function levels (Weener Groep, 2013).

Discussion and conclusions

This article has illustrated a range of innovative solutions implemented within the Netherlands to increase the non-sheltered participation of disabled people in the labour market. These initiatives have had varying degrees of success, however a steady reduction of the number of people working in traditional sheltered facilities – in favour of all other types of more inclusive, less protected work environments – has been clearly observed in recent years. From this analysis, we can derive three general reflections that may be of importance for the further development of innovative policies aimed at the inclusion of disabled people.

First, this article has shown the importance of distinguishing and facilitating employment for disabled people that goes beyond the “sheltered/non-sheltered dichotomy”. The simple distinction between regular, non-sheltered work and sheltered work does not do justice to the gradual evolution of the labour market participation of individual disabled people. The innovative forms of employment that have been discussed in this article show how sheltered work companies can play an important role in the personal development of disabled people on the so-called “participation ladder”.

Second, in addition to the initiatives aimed at the inclusion of disabled people in the regular labour market, this article has also illustrated the demand for sheltered work environments as a mode of preparing disabled people for the labour market. Whilst the sheltered and protective environment may limit

disabled people's motivation to work in the regular labour market, many sw-companies now use this sheltered environment as a base from which disabled people can prepare for other, more inclusive functions within the labour market. Therefore, we argue for a reevaluation of the sheltered workplace as a meaningful first step in the "work ladder", rather than dismissing it as a tool for exclusion and segregation.

Third, we may observe a gradual but remarkable shift in the perception of the legitimacy of social benefits for all kinds of recipients, including disabled people. Schneider and Ingram (1993) have argued how important processes of social construction are for determining the deservingness of benefits. Halvorsen and Hvinden (2014) also confirm the distinction between the legitimacy of benefits for regular unemployed and disabled unemployed people in this themed issue. In this article, we have discussed the policy trend towards the integration of all policy measures into one new Participation Act. We could label this the "normalization" of disability: disability may be considered as "just one of many" reasons for not being able to participate in the labour market, in the same manner as poor education, low skills or a lack of motivation. Disability no longer requires a separate policy regime. Interestingly, this may also have implications for the perception of the legitimacy of disability benefits. A mental or physical disability is no longer sufficient to be considered "deserving": the "new welfare state" requires that all people should do everything in their means to be included in the labour market. Deservingness needs to be actively "deserved" by specific actions, and even misfortune may no longer be sufficient reason to be considered deserving, even for disabled people. In this regard, disability becomes a subject of the new paradigm of the social investment state (see Ellison and Fenger, 2013).

In this article we have identified and assessed a large number of innovative initiatives for disabled people's inclusion, we have also observed that there is no simple solution to this issue. Therefore, in the authors' view, continuous experimentation and close monitoring is the way forward to achieving a fully-inclusive labour market for disabled people.

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