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Stuck in Routines?

**The Interaction Between Social Assistance and Unemployment
Insurance**

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Abstract

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There are many unemployed in Sweden that do not qualify for unemployment insurance and instead are referred to social assistance. In 2011 the Swedish Department of Finance issued a report suggesting changes to the current system. The proposed changes would make it easier for the unemployed to qualify for unemployment insurance. This study aims to investigate why the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance has remained the same despite official critique. The study has a combined approach with document analysis and five semi-structured interviews. The findings are paired together with incremental institutional theory that emphasizes that change can develop in more incremental ways and through Michael Foucault's concepts concerning power relations. The study found that social assistance's original purpose has changed over time whereas the purpose of unemployment insurance has not. Regarding reforms to change the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance, various actors have different interests. The difficulties to change the interaction have various explanations. The interaction can be understood in terms of being path-dependent and that there has to be some type of external shock to spur change. The environmental surroundings, such as the neighboring policies, have an impact on the interaction. The political will for systematic change plays an important role. A systematic change would imply more costs for the state. Considering power relations, there are some that would want to change the interaction, however, it can be argued that they have too little power and resources in relation to those opposing formal systematic change.

Key words: Social Assistance, Unemployment Insurance, Labor Market Policies, Incremental Institutional Change, Foucault

Preface

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1. Introduction

When welfare state scholar Esping Andersen (1990) presented his categorization of types of welfare state regimes Sweden was characterized a social democratic welfare regime. This implies that various types of social insurances are generous compared to other types of welfare regimes and emphasis is put on universal policy principles (Esping Andersen, 1990:27). In relation to the generous social insurances a tendency has been for some politicians to debate how to best decrease the rates of welfare dependency (Salonen, 2013:6). Rather than dealing with questions regarding larger systematic changes to social insurance schemes the debate has instead emphasized factors such as recipients' lacking will to take up work and their committing of welfare fraud (Salonen, 2013:6). When Salonen (*ibid.*) emphasizes the structure of social insurance schemes he does so by elaborating on the interaction between the state's social insurance schemes and the municipal minimum income protection scheme. One illustrating case concerns welfare benefits for unemployed where there are variations in entitlement dependent on individuals' previous labor market participation (*ibid.*). Those who are not yet established on the labor market will not meet the eligibility criteria for the unemployment insurance. They are instead referred to the municipal and means tested social assistance which is society's last safety net for those without any other type of income (Laun et al., 2020:9). The financial distribution of responsibility between state and municipality was made visible during the financial crisis in the 90s. It meant cutbacks in Swedish public spending and resulted in less generous social protection programs (Bergmark & Palme, 2003:108). Paired with the rise in unemployment the number of people becoming dependent on the means tested social assistance increased (*ibid.*).

In order to increase the chances of the unemployed to enter the labor market the role of conditioning benefits combined with active labor market policies have been and remain central factors (Nybom, 2012:19). The role of activation is considered important in relation to unemployment benefits. However, how great of an effect activation has on people's ability to find work is debatable and scholars have shown that it often misses the mark (Lundin, 2018:11). Regardless of the results, Salonen

(2013:10) underlines the symbolic function of activation. On the one hand it should work in a controlling manner towards the unemployed. On the other hand it has a legitimizing function in relation to the public and the politicians (ibid.). This can be paired with sociologist Michael Foucault's understanding of labor that include: "the productive function, the symbolic function and the function of dressage, or discipline" (Foucault, 1980:161). Labor market participation can be considered highly valued and the disciplining function of labor can be further understood in relation to what Foucault (2017:251) emphasizes about society's control mechanisms. Through welfare institutional arrangements the society can be argued to control its beneficiary recipients.

Social assistance and unemployment insurance can be put in contrast to each other for two reasons: they can be argued to have some overlap in regards to the groups it is supporting but, the basic idea of the two differ from each other. The reasons for social assistance can vary but there are some overarching reasons as to why some groups need social assistance. For example, those who are not able to take up work due to social problems and those who are not eligible for benefits from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency are referred to social assistance (Salonen, 2013:8 & Swärd, 2016:92). However, statistics show that 40 percent of today's recipients of social assistance are job seekers without other social problems that hinder employment (SOU 2011:11:172).

The unemployment insurance has remained more similar to its original purpose. It can be described as an insurance to rely on for people that are established on the labor market and are between jobs (The Swedish Institute for Unemployment Insurance Inspectorate, 2021:5). Central to the idea of unemployment insurance is for the individual to be able to adapt and adjust to take up a new job and to make the time in unemployment as short as possible while fulfilling the requirements for unemployment insurance by, for example, actively seeking for jobs (ibid.). Qualification criteria include to have been a member in one of the 24 unemployment insurance funds for at least 12 months and to have worked for at least six months of the year preceding the unemployment (SOU 2011:11:165). The unemployment insurance is funded both through government tax and through a monthly membership fee in the unemployment funds. It is income related and the extent of the social

safety net when unemployed is set in relation to labor market participation and individual risk taking before becoming unemployed (Gschwind, 2021:3).

The fact that many unemployed are referred to social assistance and do not meet the requirements for unemployment insurance was emphasized in 2011 by the Swedish Department of Finance in the “Långtidsutredningen 2011” (SOU 2011:11). The “Långtidsutredningen 2011” (Hereafter referred to as: LU 2011) problematizes that too many unemployed are referred to social assistance. One of its fundamental points is that social assistance is not meant to function as an unemployment insurance (SOU 2011:11:172). The report suggests changes to the current interaction between unemployment insurance and social assistance and also emphasizes some of the potential challenges with changing the interaction (SOU 2011:11:174).

It has been more than ten years since the LU 2011 was issued. However, the interaction has not changed in the direction that the report suggests. What has changed, or rather not changed, on an institutional level can be elaborated on with the theoretical framework of Mahoney and Thelen (2012). In their work it is emphasized that institutional change not only happens through large systemic changes but also that institutional change can develop through incremental institutional change. The mode of institutional change most relevant to understanding the interaction between the two systems for benefits is “drift” which: “occurs when rules remain formally the same but their impact changes as a result of shifts in external conditions” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17). When there are changes in the environment around an institution actors have the choice to respond to these shifts. In the changed environment actors fail to update the institution in order to uphold the traditional impact. When it concerns drift this gap is often caused by neglect (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:19). In relation to the two systems it is necessary to investigate what role this inaction and neglect possibly play when it comes to making systematic changes to the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. A new report (SOU 2020:37)¹ issued by the Swedish Government Inquiries includes suggestions for a new reformed unemployment insurance. However, the interaction between unemployment insurance and social assistance was not emphasized (SALAR, 2021:2). This can perhaps be understood to point in a direction of neglect.

¹ SOU 2020:37 *Ett nytt regelverk för arbetslöshetsförsäkringen*

The interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance has been researched and elaborated on in reports but the interaction has remained the same.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

This research aims to investigate why the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance has persisted despite official critique by answering the following questions:

- How does the current interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance function and what are suggested reforms?
- How can incremental institutional theory and power relations explain why the interaction has not changed?

Approaching the research problem and the research questions the thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 presents relevant previous studies regarding social assistance, unemployment insurance and the interaction between the two systems. Chapter 3 concerns the theoretical concepts applied to the empirical results. First, institutional theory is discussed and second, the concepts of Foucault are discussed. Chapter 4 reflects on the methodology and the study's combined approach of interviews and document analysis. In chapter 5 the empirical material which consists of five interviews and document analysis is presented. For the document analysis the LU 2011 was chosen. Besides deriving data from it, the report is also part of the introduction and contributes to the understanding of the research problem. The presentation of the data from the report and the interviews follow the logic of three constructed themes that have been deducted from the LU 2011. The themes are also used for the structuring of the interviews. Chapter 6 discusses the data from the report and the interviews in relation to the theoretical concepts. Chapter 7 concludes the study's findings and reflects critically on the methodology and elaborates on the implications for future studies.

2. Previous Studies

The chapter aims to present a research overview of social assistance, unemployment insurance and the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. The variations over time of who receives social assistance mostly has to do with structural factors such as variations in the labor market and the existing social insurance schemes but also depend on individual factors (Nybom, 2012:27). Immigrants and young people who do not qualify for unemployment insurance are groups of recipients that continuously have been referred to social assistance (ibid.). In 2010 the National Board of Health and Welfare (2021a:1) started to collect data presenting the reasons for social assistance recipiency. Ever since 2010 unemployment has been the most common reason for needing social assistance. Statistics show that out of the total percentage of social assistance recipients 64 % were foreign-born and that about half of the total number of recipients of social assistance were unemployed in 2019 (The National Board of Health and Welfare, 2021b:2).

The number of social assistance recipients was affected by the financial crisis in the 1990s which led to increasing unemployment rates (Bergmark & Palme, 2003:108). In relation to the crisis it was prioritized by both central and local governments to cut back public-spending. The repercussions were cutbacks in all social protection programs which had a large impact on the welfare of individuals (Bergmark & Palme, 2003:108,110). Social assistance functions as society's last safety net. However, there are some critical voices raised about the fact that social assistance supports a fairly large group of people in the population whose primary issue is unemployment (Panican et al, 2013:44). In their (Panican et al 2013:44) research one of the interviewees mentions that it is hard to coordinate both the national and local governance regarding labor market policies. It is stated that there are "spillover effects" to social assistance when other social insurance schemes are changing (ibid.). This somewhat links to what Salonen (2013:8) claims about social assistance's new purpose. He argues that it has become a scheme that offers a complementary function to the welfare state's other social insurance schemes. Studies from the recent decades show that the influx of those in need of social assistance mostly have been

fit to work but lack sufficient access to the national social insurance schemes (Salonen, 2013:8).

It is costly for the municipalities to support people on social assistance. This is one of the reasons many municipalities arrange their own labor market activities in addition to the programs that exist on a national level (Hjort, 2016:2,4). Activation and labor market activities are also emphasized by Nybom (2012:19). Nybom (ibid.) states that the recent decades' developments in how to target unemployment and marginalization has aimed to toughen the requirements for activation and strengthen the role of "active labor market activities". Salonen (2013:9) claims that these municipal activation policies have shown modest results. However, since municipalities strive to make recipients of social assistance self-sufficient as quick as possible they have arranged a secondary arsenal of labor market policies additional to national labor market policies (ibid.).

The years followed by the financial crisis in the 1990s meant increased rates of unemployment which left the unemployment insurance strained. Sweden also experienced a rapid increase in the number of unemployed that did not qualify for any national social insurance schemes (Salonen, 1997:32). Since the 1990s there have been policy changes to mitigate the strain on the unemployment insurance. For example, the level of income support from unemployment insurance was lowered and a sequence of qualifying period was implemented (ibid.). When the level of income support was lowered some of the recipients were referred to social assistance for complementary social assistance since their unemployment insurance was not enough to cover costs (Salonen, 1997:34). Bergmark and Palme (2003:121) emphasize that the tougher conditions implemented after the 1990s had some impact. However, of greater importance when considering the components of unemployment insurance the foundational design with its eligibility criteria should be emphasized. The basic construction of unemployment insurance and that it presupposes previous labor market participation is what over the years have stopped newly arrived immigrants and young people from accessing unemployment insurance (ibid.). After the parliamentary election in 2006 the right-center government made additional changes to the unemployment insurance. For example, they implemented: "tougher eligibility rules, a shorter benefit period and compensation level,

increased membership fees and reduced state subsidies” (Lindelle, 2018:4). As a consequence, less was covered by unemployment insurance and it became less generous (ibid.).

The financial crisis in the 1990s and the state’s retrenchments led the municipalities to take on more responsibility regarding the unemployed (Salonen, 1997:9). The lessons learned from the 1990 recession in the Nordic countries show that high unemployment rates can persist for a long period of time resulting in high demand for social protection (Kuivalainen & Nelson, 2012:84). Social protection in terms of social assistance is of particular importance for those not eligible for unemployment insurance. It is suggested that the Nordic governments have “to provide a more effective system of redistribution” (ibid.) and in order to do so, strategies to ensure greater adequacy of minimum income schemes and social assistance should be developed. It is evident that there is correlation between the design of national social insurance schemes and the municipal social assistance (Salonen, 1997:9). There have been similar debates over time when the overarching social insurance schemes have failed to support people. As a result the municipalities have had to take more responsibility which has been a heavy burden financially (Salonen, 1997:5). Tapio Salonen (2013:16) emphasizes the need to change the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. Salonen (ibid.) suggests that an inquiry that overlooks social assistance and how it interacts with the national social insurance schemes should be issued by the Swedish Government Inquiries. It is emphasized that society should strive to change its policies to enable larger groups to qualify for the national social insurance schemes rather than referring them to the municipal social assistance (Salonen, 2013:17). A changed interaction will likely better allow social assistance to help those with social problems and also help those in urgent situations in need of temporary financial support (ibid.).

Salonen (2013:9) discusses the tendencies to rather make changes to the internal systematic logic than to change the external systematic logic. Instead of focusing on decreasing people’s need for social assistance the political debate on both national and municipal level has been to adjust smaller aspects of the social assistance that has to do with the internal systematic logic. Salonen (2013:11) claims that a more successful way to decrease the dependence of benefits would be to increase

the amount of unemployment insurance and to make it easier for people to qualify for unemployment insurance. Although, an implementation of such changes is argued to diverge from the internal systematic logic (ibid.).

Research has emphasized the need to reform the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. However, there does not seem to be as much research that elaborates on explanatory factors to why the interaction has remained the same over the years. This study therefore hopes to contribute to the understanding of this matter.

3. Theory

The theoretical framework hopes to contribute with an understanding to why the system has not changed despite official critique and consists of concepts explaining institutional change and power relations. In the end of this chapter an overview of how the theoretical frameworks have been used in previous research is presented. Institutional theory can regard many concepts and a relevant point of departure is the concept of path-dependency before elaborating on incremental institutional theory. The concept of “path dependency” belongs to welfare regime theory and emphasizes that previous political decisions matter for future policies. Pierson (2000:262) describes that the political life’s key features are that “public policies and (especially) formal institutions are change-resistant”. Politicians prefer to follow familiar policy paths since changing the course is a potential political risk that could also result in higher costs. The idea of path dependence constitutes an institutional heritage that will shape future policies and politicians (Pierson, 2000:252). Path-dependency can only partly explain institutional change, therefore, additional framework is needed to understand institutional change. Change can happen even though overarching policies have not formally changed (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:3). The concept of path-dependency elaborates on whether institutions are “subject to self-reinforcing lock-in” or not (ibid.). However, Mahoney and Thelen (2012:3) argue that it is rare for institutions not to evolve in the slightest, therefore, incremental institutional theory will be applied to explain the empirical results.

3.1 Incremental Institutional Theory

The theory emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that institutional change can happen in more incremental ways and still have a great impact on the institution (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:1). Mahoney and Thelen (2012:15-16) argue that there are four modal types for incremental institutional change. First, there is “displacement” where existing rules are replaced with new ones. Second, change can happen through “layering” which is when new rules are introduced alongside already existing ones. The third type is called “drift” and happens when existing rules’ impact changes because of shifts in the environment. Lastly, “conversion”, is when rules are enacted and interpreted in new ways but have not changed formally (ibid.).

The mode of institutional change most relevant to understand the interaction between social assistance and unemployment is “drift”. It “occurs when rules remain formally the same but their impact changes as a result of shifts in external conditions” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17). When there are changes in the environment around an institution, actors have the choice to intervene and respond to these shifts. They can also be more passive and then the inaction itself can result in change in the institution (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17). This inability of actors and way of neglecting an institution, a common trait for drift, enables institutional change. In the changed environment the actors have failed to update and adapt the institution in order to uphold the traditional impact (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:19). To summarize, “drift can occur when a gap opens up between rules and enforcement” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:21). When it concerns drift this gap is often caused by neglect. Figure 1 and the different links are relevant to describe different actors' interests and possibilities to intervene and drive change.

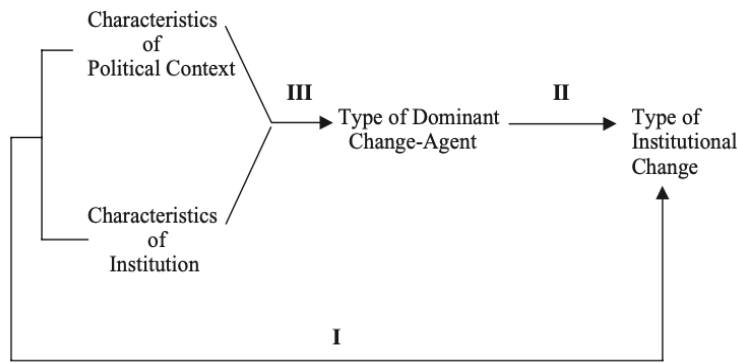


Figure 1: “Framework for Explaining Modes of Institutional Change”

(Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:15)

3.1.1 Political Context

Distinguishing what type of institutional change that will happen is dependent on the characteristics of the political context. Different contexts provide actors with varying veto possibilities. The type of institutional change also depends on the level of discretion in enforcement and interpretation in the targeted institution and its existing rules (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:19).

		Characteristics of the Targeted Institution	
		Low Level of Discretion in Interpretation/ Enforcement	High Level of Discretion in Interpretation/ Enforcement
Characteristics of the Political Context	Strong Veto Possibilities	Layering	Drift
	Weak Veto Possibilities	Displacement	Conversion

Figure 2: “Contextual and Institutional Sources of Institutional Change” (Ma-

honey & Thelen, 2012:19)

Actors are provided with strong veto possibilities in cases where they are able via institutional means to block change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:19). As figure 2 presents the existence of strong veto players in political environments make drift one promising strategy of change since it does not “require making any direct changes to the old institutions and do not rely on altering the rules themselves or actively

shifting their enactment” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:19). The strong veto powers are not enough to prevent drift since this often would require “supporters to take active steps to shore up support for an institution as the social, economic, or political context shifts” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:20). Within institutions where there is little margin for discretion in enforcement, would-be agents of change are less likely to accomplish change through drift (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:21).

3.1.2 Change Agents

When considering what drives different types of institutional change one factor to investigate further is the agents behind these changes and their motivation to change that leads to transformation. One can talk about “institutional losers” as change agents who advocate for change since they can only gain something in the situation considering them being “institutional losers”. Mahoney and Thelen (2012:22) state that the distinction between winners and losers tends to simplify the discussion and therefore elaborate on a framework that goes beyond this. Different modes of institutional change are linked to specific types of change agents and the idea with identifying change agents has explanatory purposes. Different change agents have varying and preferred strategies to achieve change and to distinguish change agents two questions can be posed. First, “does the actor seek to preserve the existing institutional rules?” and second, “does the actor abide by the institutional rules?” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:23).

Relevant to drift is the change agent “symbionts” that can be divided into two types, parasitic and mutualistic, however, it is especially parasites that are associated with drift. Actors with parasitic behavior strive to preserve the institution, however, parasites often tend to act contradictory to the institution’s purpose which undermines the institution in the long run. In settings where institutional maintenance is neglected and there is a mismatch between rule and practices on the ground parasites flourish. Additionally, parasites thrive in contexts where institutional conformity is expected to be high but where in reality the capacity to achieve this conformity is poor. Where institutional supporters manage to support and improve institutions’ ability in addressing gaps in compliance, parasites will not persist (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:24). In a mutualistic variety the association with institutional change through drift is weak since they rather contribute to making institutions more robust.

What distinguishes mutualists from parasites regarding their view on institutions is that “mutualists violate the letter of the rule to support and sustain its spirit – in contrast to parasites, who exploit the letter of rule while violating its spirit” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:24). To summarize “symbionts seek to preserve the formal institutional status quo, but their parasitic variety carries out actions that cause institutional drift” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:27).

		Characteristics of the Targeted Institution	
		Low Level of Discretion in Interpretation/ Enforcement	High Level of Discretion in Interpretation/ Enforcement
Characteristics of the Political Context	Strong Veto Possibilities	Subversives (layering)	Parasitic Symbionts (drift)
	Weak Veto Possibilities	Insurrectionaries (Displacement)	Opportunists (Conversion)

Figure 3: “Contextual and Institutional Sources of Change Agents”

(Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:28)

As figure 3 shows the context and institution determine and affect what type of change agent that is likely to emerge in relation to different modal types of change. When it comes to drift the parasitic symbionts appear in contexts where the level of discretion is high and where the political context offers strong veto possibilities. The combination of strong veto players and the parasitic symbionts’ strive to not change the institution lead to securing the formal institutional status quo. There is however, a need for high discretion that allows parasitic symbionts to “alter the valence and meaning of institutionalized rules” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:28). It should be emphasized that change agents often work together with other institutional actors and not on their own as it may appear when theorized. In reality, they act together with opponents and defenders of the institution in question and the effect on change is dependent on what coalitions that unexpectedly emerge or are forged (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:29). What coalition is formed is dependent on the different actors’ relative power. The type of coalition assembled is very important since its’ constitution will either defend or change existing institutional rules. How coalitions are formed are affected by the specific context. However, to

understand it broadly we can ask if actors will form alliances with defenders or challengers of an institution and understand it from the perspective of which actors “benefit and do not benefit from the prevailing rules” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:29).

3.2 Power Relations

Incremental institutional theory is useful to understand the empirical findings. However, in order to understand the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance further it is fruitful to link this theoretical framework to concepts that emphasize power relations. This could be suitable to understand the ways in which the different actors act within conditions not of their own choosing and how it is influenced by power and discourse. These are necessary to consider in order to really understand the processes regarding power relations which Mahoney and Thelen themselves might not address too much. Mahoney and Thelen (2012:32) argue that their propositions and concepts should be elaborated and refined through application. Combining their theoretical framework with an elaboration of power relations can be considered one way of applying their concepts.

3.2.1 Discourse

Michael Foucault (1982) discusses how power is executed through the creation of truths and how discourses during different time periods have emerged and interacted. Discourse is defined as “the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation” (Foucault, 1982:107). Often can the manifest discourse be considered “no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say” (Foucault, 1982:25). The discourse itself is maintained through what it does not say and exists in a way that almost appears naturally. From the moment the discourse exists the question of power is posed and can be characterized as an object of a political struggle (Foucault, 1982:120). The notion of labor is one contemporary discourse and when discussing labor Foucault emphasizes that labor can be viewed as a form of “dressage”. Labor is described to have a triple function: “the productive function, the symbolic function and the function of dressage, or discipline” (Foucault, 1980:161). These three together constitute parts of the discourse on labor, however,

the symbolic and discipline function can be argued to be of greater importance (ibid.).

3.2.2 Discipline and Control

Labor market participation and its disciplining function can be understood further in relation to what Foucault (2017:251) emphasizes about control mechanisms. He states that all institutions in place to ensure individual control works in two ways. First, their function is to separate and distinguish who is what, for example if someone is dangerous or harmless and/or normal or abnormal. Second, the institutions' function is to differentiate people from one another and understand who someone is, where he or she should be and how he or she should be characterized. Furthermore, how to recognize him or her and how society constantly should control him or her through individual control (Foucault, 2017:251). Organizations and authorities thereby control the individuals by categorizing the individual. The constant division between normal and abnormal that individuals are subjected to is one way to describe how society exercises power over individuals. In order to attain "normal" there are several systems in place that measure, control and aim at fixing the abnormal and for this there are disciplinary arrangements (Foucault, 2017:252).

The power and control are arranged in the way that the individual should know that he or she is always controlled by the higher power. When the individual is aware of the constant control the power works automatically. The surveillance becomes permanent even though it is not continuous (Foucault, 2017:254-256). The power becomes so powerful that it does not have to be exercised. The individual should know his or her place and always be aware of the surveillance that is "needed" because there is some type of abnormality that needs correction (Foucault, 2017:254-256). There is an "inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (Foucault, 1980:155). The power relation created is independent from the one exercising the power since the individual himself internalizes the control that is in the relation. This exercise of power is efficient since it originates from the other part, the one being controlled (ibid.). This

ultimately implies that “power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no one owns” (Foucault, 1980:156).

3.3 Previous Studies

3.3.1 Incremental Institutional Theory

In order to maintain the support for the Swedish social democratic welfare state and its universal policies, Bergh (2008) applies incremental theory to explain welfare state support. Welfare states change incrementally as a way to ensure support for the welfare state (Bergh, 2008:235). It is said that: “the main reason for the persistence of high tax welfare states is that the strategy chosen by policy makers involves gradually adapting the welfare state to new circumstances” (Bergh, 2008:235). Since the support of the welfare state is dependent on the taxpayers the “policy makers have responded with measures that maintain welfare state support among voters who are otherwise likely to favor large cutbacks and lower taxes” (ibid.). Instead of making abrupt changes due to external forces, policy makers have changed welfare policies in incremental ways to ensure continued political support (Bergh, 2008:235). How an institution changes incrementally has been researched by Angelin, Johansson and Koch (2014:165) who have used Mahoney and Thelen’s theory in their research on minimum income protection (MIP) schemes in Sweden and Germany. It compares Sweden and Germany where the first one is often said to be a case of institutional inertia and the latter one a case of qualitative change. The study aims to deepen the understanding of this distinction and addresses the fact that change can happen in more complex ways. Through document analysis and semi structured interviews it is investigated how Swedish social assistance has changed over time despite no formal change to the system. Contrary to Sweden, in Germany the social assistance and unemployment insurance were merged (Angelin et al, 2014:165).

The theory of incremental change is applied to describe institutional changes beyond the dichotomies of change and inertia (ibid.). During the financial crisis in the

1990's Sweden's "overall trend was toward tighter eligibility criteria to unemployment benefits in terms of access, coverage and employment conditions prior to unemployment" (Angelin et al, 2014:171). The social assistance remained formally unchanged despite changes in other neighboring policy areas. One main point is that the social assistance system has come to support groups of people that were not originally supposed to be covered by it. This is not the result of any formal systematic change but rather due to the difficulties to qualify for unemployment insurance. To put it in other words, there has been a change in function despite formal continuity (ibid.). Mahoney and Thelen's theory and their concept of drift is applied to understand this development. It is argued that social assistance's "original function has "drifted" from social security of last resort for individuals in a temporary crisis situation and as maintenance for individuals with complex and multiple disadvantages into a permanent source of income in circumstances where unemployment and sickness insurances cover people increasingly insufficiently" (Angelin et al, 2014:173). The study finds that Germany experienced other modal types of change than Sweden and instead of drift, change happened through what Mahoney and Thelen mention as layering and displacement. One of the main conclusions is that Swedish and German MIP schemes entail elements of both inertia and change. In addition, despite different types of change they had similar policy outcomes in how the system had changed (Angelin et al, 2014:176).

3.3.2 Power Relations

Panican and Ulmestig (2017) present a historical overview of how western Europe has acted in relation to poor by using Foucault. Its' point of departure is in the 1500 hundreds and has a main focus on Sweden. They argue that the work to combat poverty throughout history has been based on solutions emphasizing control and punishment. They also mention that the categorization made between the deserving and undeserving poor have been continuous (Panican & Ulmestig, 2017:599). During the 14th century the Black Death and leprosy led to financial instability with an increase in poverty and shortage of labor workforce. Panican and Ulmestig (2017:601) refer to Foucault's ways of understanding how leprosy affected the way society would find new ways to condemn and exclude poor people. Through Foucault's concept of categorizing people it is explained that there has always been

some distinction between different types of poor. The deserving poor that show good character are more deserving of help than the poor that are considered lazy with bad morals (Panican & Ulmestig, 2017:600). The ways in which the control of the poor continued is explained through Foucault's concept of confinement. People perceived as deviant and abnormal were put in confining institutions and the idea was to discipline people through labor under surveillance. The function of the confinement was to correct any deviances and abnormalities (Panican & Ulmestig, 2017:604). Through Foucault and other scholars' concepts the authors emphasize that society consistently has controlled the poor and used labor as a way of disciplining. These concluding remarks can be argued to describe how contemporary society acts in relation to the poor and how these principles still constitute important parts of how the contemporary social assistance is constructed (Panican & Ulmestig, 2017:605, 608).

Panican and Ulmestig (2011:45) use another of Foucault's concepts in their research that centers around activation policies. The study consists of five social workers and 40 participants that are part of an activation project in a Swedish municipality. The data has been generated through semi-structured interviews and observations. The aim of their research is to investigate how power is executed in the relationship between the social worker and the client in projects concerning activation. The activation project is interesting to examine since it can be argued to embody the way the welfare state organizes its support and interventions for the unemployed. In order to understand the power that social workers exert over the unemployed in the project, Foucault's concept of pastoral power is applied (ibid.). Pastoral power should be understood as the core in terms of the relationship between the one who helps and the one who receives help. The ways in which the contemporary welfare state arranges help and support to the ones in need follows old traditions. For example, one such tradition originates from the pastorate that was established in 300 AD. Pastoral power should not be understood only as a type of politics or pedagogic. In order to describe the concept Panican and Ulmestig (2011:47) cite Foucault's original work where Foucault describes pastoral power as: "an art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men, an art of monitoring them and urging them on step by step, an art with

the function of taking charge of men collectively and individually throughout their life and at every moment of their existence” (Panican & Ulmestig, 2011:47). Pastoral power shares similarities with Foucault's theory of disciplinary power which strives to correct abnormalities and end deviant behavior. Panican and Ulmestig (2011:47) argue that pastoral power has three main principles that welfare state workers help to maintain. First, the role of the expert is to ensure salvation/ help to the individual but also to the community. Second, there are policies that regulate how the individual can receive help and the individual has to show deserving of help. Lastly, the very practice is based on the element of truth where the “pastor” guides the individual and teaches truth (ibid.).

Another scholar who has used Foucault’s concept of pastoral power in analyses on the welfare state is Järvinen (2017). Järvinen’s (2017:286) research aims to investigate the power relations between social worker and client. Social work aims to help and support but also involves aspects of control and power. Social workers can be considered representatives for the welfare state and the clients are recipients of help, support and control. Pastoral power is embedded in the welfare state’s helping and controlling institutions. Järvinen (2017:286) states that important tools for the pastoral power are the ways in which the authorities register and catalog its clients. To practice pastoral power can be understood in terms of categorization and differentiation through legislation and linking this differentiation to suitable sets of welfare policies (Järvinen, 2017:296).

The exact theoretical concept of pastoral power may not be directly applied to the study’s empirical findings. However, the mentioning of this concept shows that Foucault’s framework on power relations is suitable to understand welfare state arrangements concerning the unemployed and poor. Through concepts emphasizing power relations society can be considered having institutions in place to arrange the needs of the unemployed through controlling and disciplining power.

4. Methodology

This chapter will emphasize the general research design, elaborate on ontological and epistemological stance and the combined method of both document analysis and interviews. It will also discuss the sampling and the coding of the report and the interviews. Furthermore, ethical considerations and limitations to the study are presented.

4.1 Research Design

The study has a combined methodological approach through triangulation (Mason, 2018:41). Initially, it should be stated that the interviews conducted are not minor to the document analysis and it is of importance to emphasize that the input of the result from the document analysis is directly used to structure the interviews. With the LU 2011 report as a starting point the interviews' purpose is to gain more in-depth knowledge complimentary to the report. The five interviews hope to corroborate, tone down, refute or add new perspectives to the ones identified in the report. The triangulation in this study draws on corroborative logic (Mason, 2018:41). What is hoped to be achieved is to observe the phenomenon from different perspectives and that data from different material can corroborate each other. One challenge with triangulation is for example that it is rare that two different methods corroborate perfectly (Mason, 2018:41). The study's interview guide was structured out of the themes identified in the report, however, since interviews are a more vivid format where the interviewee is able to speak freely new topics can emerge and it can be challenging to see how the two methods corroborate in a straightforward manner (ibid.). The research has deductive reasoning (Mason, 2018:228) with a working hypothesis which is formed by elaborating on the explanatory factors given in the report to why the interaction has remained the same. This has then worked as a point of departure for the interviews. In order to gain better understanding and go beyond the explanatory factors given in the report interviews are needed, however, the working hypothesis based on findings in the report can still exist.

4.2 Ontology and Epistemology

There are many types of documents one can choose from when doing document analysis for example letters, diaries, news articles etc. (Bryman, 2018:656). The document chosen for this study is the LU 2011 which is a report issued by the Department of Finance and the Swedish Government Inquiries (SOU 2011:11). When studying documents, it is important to consider and question what status the document has (Bryman, 2018:674). This is necessary since it matters for how the documents should be interpreted and links to the overarching question of how knowledge should be understood. Ontology describes what reality is like and epistemology emphasizes what the relationship between the researcher and that reality is (Mason, 2018:4-7).

It is common that document analysis places itself in the social constructivist theory of science emphasizing the study of a socially created reality and understanding documents as something produced in a certain context (Esaiasson et al, 2017:211). However, the fact that this study uses institutional theory as one theoretical framework contradict that this research entirely would position itself within social constructivism. Institutional theory speaks to a realist approach why this study positions itself within realism. According to Maxwell (2012: vii) critical realism is a combination of a realist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. The realist ontology emphasizes the existence of a real world independent from our constructions and beliefs. A constructivist epistemology underlines the challenge of “achieving a purely “objective” account that is independent of all particular perspectives” (Maxwell, 2012: vii) meaning that people inevitably construct their knowledge of the world from their perspective. However, of importance is that reality still exists without our beliefs and our own constructions about reality (ibid.).

The institutions and the system for benefits exist independently of the interviewees’ beliefs and constructions. The institutions can be seen as a social structure that both enables and limits people’s chances to make a difference and act. The interviewees’ knowledge of this world, the institutions and the two systems, is inevitably their own construction created from a specific point of view shaped by the organization they are part of. It is not possible to achieve “a purely objective account that is

independent of all particular perspectives”, however, reality can exist independently (Maxwell, 2012: vii). Interviewees are unlikely able to contribute to a purely objective perspective on why the system has not changed since their knowledge on reality is created from a certain point of view.

4.3 Sampling Population

The study is based on purposive sampling where the idea was to find interviewees working within different organizations to gain different perspectives (Bryman, 2018:496). In order to not make the sample frame too narrow the research samples different professionals who may know something about the topic and have somewhat of an understanding of the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance (Mason, 2018:62). It was important that the interviewees had different key characteristics since it would provide a broader understanding of the interaction and ultimately the research questions (Bryman, 2018:496). By finding people working within different organizations and occupations the researcher thought it would be easier to move on to someone else within one category if someone in one specific category did not want to participate (Mason, 2018:62). Apart from the LU 2011 the study consists of five interviews and by covering different professions and organizations the researcher argues the sample of interviewees in addition to the report to be enough to further understand the interaction and answer the research questions (Mason, 2018:110, 70).

Table 1: The Sample

Number	Organization	Position
N1	Institute for Evaluation of Labor Market and Education Policy	PhD in Political Science Associated Professor
N2	The Liberal Party	Member of Parliament
N3	The Social Services	Social worker
N4	The Swedish Unemployment Insurance Inspectorate	Two Investigators
N5	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)	Investigator

N= Number

4.4 Sampling Strategy

In accordance with the purposive sampling three out of five interviewees were thought of through the reading of reports that themselves had issued. These three different reports indicated that these organizations had an understanding of the interaction and were therefore contacted. To begin with, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions had issued an official letter to the government that concerned the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. The report issued by the Swedish Unemployment Insurance Inspectorate regarded municipal labor market policies and this authority was therefore of interest. The fact that their role is to overlook the unemployment insurance also made them interesting to include since their main competence and interests regard the unemployment insurance. The Institute for Evaluation of Labor Market and Education Policy issued a report concerning the distribution of responsibility between the state and the municipality regarding the active labor market policies and was therefore contacted. The Liberal party was contacted on the basis that they were one of the governing

parties when the report was issued in 2011. The Social services' perspective was important in order to understand the role of social assistance further which is why the social worker with 17 years of experience of social assistance was contacted.

Initially, emails with an invitation to participate in the study went out to seven potential interviewees. In order to get in contact with these seven interviewees emails were sent with an invitation to participate in the study. The e-mail address to N1 was found on the website of the Institute for Evaluation of Labor Market and Education Policy. The way of contact to N2 was similar to N1. The email address to the N2 was found on the Swedish Parliament's website. N3 is a former colleague to the researcher and the way of contact was via private messaging. Initially the researcher tried to contact her old manager who manages one branch of social assistance in a large municipality in Skåne. However, the manager replied that there was no time for participating in the study. At this stage, N3 was contacted with the purpose of getting in contact with someone who has worked with social assistance for a long time. Reflecting on it, interviewing the social worker was perhaps more insightful than interviewing the manager since the social worker probably could provide a better understanding of the situation on the "work floor" as the social worker is in direct contact with those applying for social assistance.

To get in contact with N4 the researcher emailed The Swedish Unemployment Insurance Inspectorate's official email address. In this email there was a request to get in contact with one of the investigators that had written a report issued from this authority that concerned the subject of this essay. After a couple of days there was a reply from one of the authority's investigators where the investigator agreed to participate in a shorter interview together with another colleague, also an investigator. In advance they wanted the questions for the interview which were sent to them beforehand based on their request. In order to get in contact with N5 an email was sent to the official email of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. In the email the researcher asked to get in contact with an investigator involved in a report on a subject concerning this study. When they replied they wanted the questions in advance so these were sent to the investigator beforehand. After

the interview interviewee N5 stated clearly that the views expressed in the interview were his or her own and should not be considered the organization's opinions.

Besides the manager within social assistance who declined participation there were two additional potential interviewees that did not respond to the email. There was no reply from the one additional professor that was contacted, nor a reply from the official mail of the Swedish Federation of Unemployment Insurance Funds. The latter one is mainly focusing on serving its members which perhaps can be one explanation to why they did not prioritize participation in this study. The researcher considered contacting these two potential interviewees with another email. However, did not do so since it was believed that the other researcher in the sample had contributed to the understanding of the issue and that The Swedish Unemployment Insurance Inspectorates contributed with knowledge on unemployment insurance that could perhaps be similar to the perspective that the Swedish Federation of Unemployment Insurance Funds would provide.

Choosing the LU 2011 meant that there were other documents illuminating the case that were not chosen. The official letter from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions emphasizes much of what is brought up in the LU 2011. It provides an overview of the interaction and suggests improvements. However, since it does not hold the same official status as a report from the Swedish Government Inquiries this document merely worked as a source of information emphasizing the interaction. The report from the Swedish Unemployment Insurance Inspectorate did not fully correspond with the aim of this study why this document was not considered for document analysis. The report from the Institute for Evaluation of Labor Market and Education Policy did not mainly focus on the system for benefits but focused to a greater extent on labor market policies, a neighboring area to the study but not the primary focus of the study. The report SOU 2020:37 from the Swedish Government Inquiries suggests a new framework for unemployment insurance but does not emphasize the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance and therefore it was not chosen.

4.5 Generating Data

The data from the interviews were collected through semi-structured interviews which is a type of interviewing where the interviewer on beforehand has come up with specific themes that the interview is supposed to deal with (Bryman, 2018:563). The idea is to allow for the interviewee to construct his or her answer freely even though the interview aims to follow a set of themes and questions. Despite the set themes the questions do not have to follow the same order in each interview. The order in which the themes and questions appear is dependent on the interviewee's answers and the structure of the interview should allow for the interviewer to link to what interviewees say and sometimes their reflections goes beyond set themes (ibid.). The interview guide created for the interviews worked well and for some of the interviews the interview guide could be followed quite thoroughly. In other interviews the interviewee spoke more freely and openly and touched upon other themes and questions when answering another one. The fact that the interview guide allowed this links to the idea that the semi-structured interview process should be flexible (ibid.).

All of the interviews were conducted online which allowed for the researcher to more easily interview people that live and work in other parts of Sweden. The interviewer and the interviewee could through the camera see each other during the interview. The interviews were audio recorded which is helpful for the work with the analysis since note taking of what the interviewees say risks losing the exact meaning of what the interviewees tried to emphasize (Bryman, 2018:566). The interviews were conducted in Swedish which is the interviewees' and the researcher's mother tongue. Consequently, the transcriptions are in Swedish and the quotes used in the thesis have been translated into English by the researcher. The researcher has done her best to avoid the meaning of quotes to be lost in translation by going through the translation several times and comparing it to the quote in Swedish.

4.6 Coding

The LU 2011 is a Swedish Government Official Report and was written under the Department of Finance. It is common to use political texts for document analysis and doing an analysis on this material generates knowledge on the overarching policy changes (Widén, 2019:198). In order to identify the relevant passage, the overall report consisting of 280 pages was skimmed through one time and then narrowed down to one specific section that constitutes the point of departure of this study. The report in full concerns different labor market policies and everything is not relevant. In the end, the pages relevant to the study are pages 171 to 176 which constitutes the section: 8.5 “Samspelet mellan arbetslöshetsförsäkringen och systemet för försörjningsstöd (In Eng: The Interaction Between Unemployment Insurance and Social Assistance). After reading this section several times, these pages were systematically coded out of themes (Esaïsson et al, 2017:213). In relation to the research questions there were three themes that emerged and it is through this overview that the researcher can start to make sense of text passages in relation to the specific research (ibid.). Three themes were constructed. Theme 1 emphasizes the problematization of the interaction between unemployment insurance and social assistance and elaborates on whether it can be considered problematic or not? Theme 2 emphasizes the reforms suggested to replace current policies that concern the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. Theme 3 identifies what type of change-resistance to reform the current system that can be found.

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and then the transcripts were printed. Transcribing and going through all pages of transcribed material to code for the analysis was time consuming (Bryman, 2018:579). The five interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes long and the total transcribed material consists of 60 pages. To code the transcripts the same three themes were used as in the coding of the document. The researcher was a bit concerned that the interviews would yield too broad of a picture of the issue making it hard to code out of the three set themes. Before the coding the transcripts were read through in whole in order to get a better understanding of how the three themes could be applied. After doing the interviews and after reading the transcripts it appeared that it would work to use the three

themes created so then one by one the interviews were coded with different marker pens in accordance with the three themes. It was not always an easy task to understand which quotes belonged to which theme. It became clear that the different themes overlap. This was especially the case for theme 2 and theme 3 and where there was uncertainty these quotes were coded to belong to both theme 2 and theme 3. In a way it is important not to be too strict with the themes since this potentially could lead to missing the point that the themes are linked and in order to understand the issue it is important to understand further how different aspects interact with each other.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The participants in the study have to be informed about the study's purpose and the methods and it is important that they feel that they have been informed in a way that provides them with an understanding of what they are agreeing to when they participate in the study (Eldén, 2020:86-87). In the beginning of the interviews the interviewees were informed about the study which corresponded with the information that was in the email that was sent welcoming them to participate in the study. The researcher strived to be as transparent as possible and explained the process of the research and how the data collected would be used. To ensure that participants understand what they are giving their consent to is of importance and therefore they were also asked at the end of the interview if they had any questions regarding the study and the usage of their data (ibid.).

After gaining an understanding of the study's purpose the participant has to consent to participating and it is important that the interviewees know that their participation is voluntary (Israel, 2015:79). The interviewees were in the beginning of the interview informed about the conditions for the study. They were asked if they agreed to be recorded in order for the researcher to transcribe the material and when they gave their consent the recorder was put on. They were informed that they at any time could cancel their participation in the study. The participants were not asked to sign any formal consenting form. However, the participants were asked about their consent when the recording was on which can work as a substitute to a signed consent (Eldén, 2020:90). The conditions for under the interviewees participate is

completely set by the participant. For example, one of the interviewees said at the end of the interview that he or she wanted to consent to the quotes that the researcher would like to use in the presentation of the results. The researcher emailed the transcription of the interview and asked for consent about the specific quotes that the researcher wished to use and was given consent to use the quotes. One possible way to interpret this is that the interviewee wanted to make sure that he or she understood what was authorized by approving what he or she had said in the interview (Israel, 2015:80). It can also be argued that consent should not only be limited to the beginning of the research process when the interviews are conducted but should be a continuous process where “process consent” is practiced (Israel, 2015:82). In retrospect the researcher could perhaps have conducted process consent to a greater degree and contacted the other participants as well even though they did not specifically ask for it like the above-mentioned interviewee. However, since they did not seem to wonder about this and to the researcher's knowledge seemed aware of the implications of their participation through the information about the study and their given consent in the beginning this was not prioritized.

The interaction between unemployment insurance and social assistance may not appear as a very sensitive topic. Regardless of that fact, the aspects of confidentiality have been taken into consideration. The interviewees have not been guaranteed complete anonymity, however, they are ensured that their personal details are stored in a way that only the researcher has access to (Élden, 2020:130). The names of the interviewees are not disclosed in the study. However, the organizations that the interviewees work within are presented and this is to show that the interviewees offer different perspectives to the issue perhaps based on what organization they work within. How the confidentiality should be considered is something to reflect upon, especially since one of the interviewees is a member of parliament. In a way, since the topic is highly political, it is evident that the member of parliament is interviewed in his or her role as a politician and represents the party's political views on the interaction. Despite being a politician, the politician's name does not appear in the study since none of the other interviewees' names appear either. Lastly, the interviewees were at the beginning of the interview informed that their contributions to the study would only be used for the purpose of the research and that the material would be deleted after the passing of the thesis (Elden, 2020:31).

4.8 Limitations

The scope of the study implies limitations to what can be investigated why neighboring areas of policy problems are not emphasized. The evaluation of policies where one can investigate what possible output changed reforms would have on the interaction would have been interesting to investigate since it links to the aim of this study. Even though these are linked it is important to keep in mind that the study does not aim to investigate the possible output of changing the interaction but rather why the interaction has not changed despite official critique.

The size of the sample can be reflected on and in conducting interviews one can reflect critically on how many interviewees are enough to give a broad picture of the issue? With regards to the limitations in time to conduct the study, the five interviews in combination with the study of the report hope to give enough contrasting perspectives to understand the interaction. With additional time for the study, more interviewees could have been contacted, for example someone that works within one of the unemployment insurance funds and/ or recipients of unemployment benefits.

The mixed approach with interviews and document analysis has derived data that probably provides a more nuanced understanding than what would have been provided if only one of the methods was used. It is important to reflect on the data's function as evidence in addressing the research questions and how the arguments being made are convincing or not (Mason, 2018:34). The triangulated approach can be argued to have increased validity since it draws on corroborative logic which connects to the importance of showing that the identified concepts can be measured in the way the researcher argues that they can be measured. However, not all findings corroborated and it can be questioned whether or not what one interviewee has said can be argued to provide evidence to answer the research questions? For example, the fact that only one interviewee has pointed out something specific about the interaction does not necessarily mean that it is not an accurate way to understand the interaction. It should be emphasized though, that it may have implications for the generalizability which can be understood in varying ways (Mason, 2018:35).

The idea with the study has not been to make empirical claims that allow generalizing to a whole population but rather to generalize based on theoretical concepts (ibid.).

5. Empirical Results

In this chapter the empirical data will be presented in relation to the theoretical framework of incremental change and the theoretical concepts emphasizing power relations. There are introductory parts to all three themes where connections to the report that regards the specific theme are made. Theme 1 problematizes the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance and elaborates on whether it can be considered problematic or not? Theme 2 emphasizes the reforms suggested to replace current policies that concern the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. Theme 3 identifies what type of change-resistance to reform the current system that can be found. Then, the idea is to elaborate further on what has been emphasized by the interviewees under each theme and whether or not it has been reflected in the same way or a different way by the interviewees.

5.1 Problematic Interaction?

The point of departure in the LU 2011 is that too many of the unemployed are referred to the municipal social assistance rather than being able to qualify for unemployment insurance. The report suggests a couple of reforms and how these could be implemented and in order to understand the need for reform there has to be elaborate parts on the current interaction between the two systems and whether or not it can be viewed problematic and for whom it may be problematic? Initially the authors of the report state that:

“Our assessment is that the biggest deficiency by far in the present system for benefits for those looking for work is that too many are referred to the means tested social assistance or lack benefits completely.” (SOU 2011:11:171)

This passage in the report, considered the foundational point of departure to this study, was also a part of the explanatory introduction to the interviews. In relation to this, the interviewees were asked to reflect on whether or not in their perspective the interaction can be viewed problematic or not. The researcher said that:

“I believe that there are more people that receive social assistance than there should be, simply put. (...) And that there is something strange in the fact that municipalities can make demands, some demands, on the ones looking for work in relation to the outermost social safety net. (...) Preferably we only want the most marginalized groups to end up there, so to say” (N1:4)

This corroborates what is argued in the report, that there are more recipients of social assistance than it perhaps should be. It is also problematized that some of the recipients of social assistance are not traditionally viewed to be part of a marginalized group that social assistance is meant to help and support. The meaning of what a “marginalized group” is can of course spur discussion, however, the quote somewhat indicates that social assistance supports people that were not originally considered to be helped from it. This especially applies to the ones that are unemployed without any other social problems that hinder employment. As one of the interviewees put it:

“It is not a short-term effort in relation to temporary financial support problems but has become a long-term financial support solution for large groups of people (...)” (N5:5).

The report states that too many are referred to social assistance and both N1 and N5 reflect in similar ways. This links to elaborating on who it is that has troubles qualifying for unemployment insurance and are referred to social assistance? To qualify for unemployment insurance, you have to meet the condition of previous labor market participation and have to have been a member in one of the funds for at least 12 months (SOU 2011:11:165). The report points out that this condition disadvantages some groups:

“A consequence of the work condition is that many unemployed today are placed outside of the social insurance system. Especially disadvantaged are those who enter the workforce for the first time, like the youth and the newly arrived immigrants from other countries.” (SOU 2011:11:171)

What is emphasized as problematic by N1 is Social Services’ possibility to make demands and condition society’s last safety net through sanctions that recipients meet when they have not participated in activities that aim to increase their chances of labor market participation. When they are denied social assistance, they are without income and have no other source of income to turn to which is also emphasized in the report:

“The possibilities for the municipalities to withdraw the whole or parts of the social assistance means that some people in practice run the risk to stand outside the outermost social safety net and without a reasonable standard of living.” (SOU 2011:11:172)

Based on the report stating that too many are referred to the social assistance and identifying certain groups that are disadvantaged the interviewees were asked to reflect on who is referred to the social assistance and one interviewee said:

“Spontaneously I think that it is people who cannot be the recipients of any other kind of benefits, they don’t get benefits from the Social Insurance Agency and they don’t get benefits from the unemployment insurance (...) It can be newly arrived persons or people who for other reasons have not established themselves in the labor market.” (N4:3)

The recipients constitute a broad group of people that are without any other income, often newly arrived immigrants. Another interviewee underlined that additional reason for applying for social assistance is when other benefits and/or wages are too low to cover basic costs.

“In general it is more about complementary social assistance, meaning that they don’t have their whole income support from the municipality. But, they have a low level of income support either from the benefits received from the unemployment insurance or from the benefits received from the Social Insurance Agency because they are taking part in one of the programs of the Public Employment Agency and then they need complementary extra support from the municipalities.” (N2:3)

Social assistance evidently supports people for varying reasons that sometimes does not have to do with social problems or illnesses that hinder unemployment. Another component that contributes to understanding the interaction is the systems’ structure of incentives which is emphasized and compared in the report.

“The contrast between the well-balanced unemployment insurance, with its distinct conditions and sequence of qualifying periods, its de-escalation and mandatory program, and the social assistance [that is] subjected to a means test is striking.” (SOU 2011:11:171)

The report underlines the difference in structures of incentives as striking which is also reflected on by one of the interviewees when asked whether or not the interaction between the two systems can be viewed problematic:

“Well, it is a problem likely for a number of reasons. Partly it is about the incentives to take a job and to actively search for a job. When you transfer into a system that is subjected to a means test which is supposed to... and you start to work you lose, you lose your social assistance money as soon as you start to work. (...) That can simply create some problematic structures of incentives.” (N1:5)

The interviewee emphasizes that there are probably many reasons that can explain why the interaction can be considered problematic and that one of the reasons is the structures of incentives. The structures of incentives in relation to social assistance is further emphasized in the report and described as problematic because:

“The social assistance is today calculated per month. This means that it is not financially profitable for someone who is receiving social assistance to take an occasional job because the social assistance will then decline with the same amount as the increased income from work.” (SOU 2011:11:174)

The discussion on how to best incentivize work, how to design balanced policies and ultimately to make sure that citizens work corresponds with the discourse and how the contemporary discourse influences the understanding of who is deserving of help when unemployed? It poses a question of deservingness in relation to previous contributions and if unemployed who have made previous contributions are more deserving of help than those who have not contributed? In relation to Foucault (2017:252) and the way of categorizing people, previous contributions based on labor market participation speak to the fact that you have been “normal” which is in line with the discourse. Labor market participation can be viewed as the normal state in the discourse and being unemployed the “abnormal” state (ibid.). It is of importance to discuss the incentive structure both because it really sheds light to the power of the discourse but also to better understand why there is a difference in incentive structures between social assistance and unemployment insurance? The poor structure of incentives is emphasized in the report by stating that:

“A system in which it is not beneficial to take a temporary occasional job, or to marginally increase the number of working hours, is not a good social benefit system for people in search of work.” (SOU 2011:11:172).

According to the suggested reforms in the report there are better ways to structure the social assistance to improve the incentivizing of work for people on social assistance. This poses the question of why unemployed supported by social assistance have been referred to a system with less incentivizing mechanisms than people with unemployment insurance? Since the end goal is the same, for people to find employment, it is interesting that the systems have very different structures of incentives. One explanation in relation to different structures of incentives could potentially be the fact that social assistance is not originally designed to function as un-

employment insurance. However, this has been the exact outcome when unemployed people have not qualified for unemployment insurance and therefore been referred to social assistance. This is emphasized by N3 saying that:

“Let the Social services be the Social services. I think that it is a problem that we are some kind of pretend unemployment benefit fund. Do you understand? In other words, that it is unnecessary to drag people into the Social services. So that the ones that have actual social problems are also dragged along and are regarded as unemployed because they are account-coded as such (...) and possibly the other way around. Like, it’s unnecessarily stigmatizing for those without problems as well.” (N3:7)

This interviewee is frustrated with the fact that the Social services have to function as a type of unemployment insurance although they are not intended to be one. In addition, N3 points to the fact that unemployed without social problems tend to be more stigmatized because of the type of benefit they are on and that people despite their social problems are viewed as people that perhaps could take up work. One can question how Social services and social assistance has been allowed to transform into a type of unemployment insurance although it is not supposed to function as one. This gradual transformation can be understood through incremental institutional change theory and specifically in terms of drift, where change happens despite no formal changes to the institutional system (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17). To understand what has enabled change through drift one interviewee reflected on the role that the municipalities have played and more specifically the municipalities’ financial incentives to get people off social assistance.

“There are number of different parts that govern that the local authorities take this responsibility today. Partly it is the social assistance that is, and it is not like the municipalities are appointed to take that responsibility rather it is a consequence of the fact that people fall outside of the other systems and then it is an instinct of self-preservation for the municipalities since they do not want high costs for social assistance hence they work hard to get people to start working. (N2:7)

The municipalities through the Social services want to ensure that the people they are providing for through social assistance are doing their best and are given the best prerequisites to participate in the labor market. Change via drift has been enabled when institutional maintenance is neglected and there is a mismatch between rule and practices and it is in these contexts that parasites flourish (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:24). The changed original purpose points in the direction of drift, that there have been no formal changes in overarching policies but there has been changes (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17).

5.2 Suggested Reforms and Actors' Interests

It has been over ten years since the report was issued and since then there have been other suggested reforms regarding the unemployment insurance. Within the report there are suggestions to reforms where the authors of the report list the reforms out of which one would be preferred the most. This study centers mostly around the most preferred one. However, this chapter elaborating on suggested reforms will also highlight another suggestion from the report to further emphasize the fact that the interaction has remained formally the same despite the fact that there is more than one reform suggestion in the report. When some of the interviewees reflected on the most preferred reform suggested in the report, they also mentioned a more recent policy suggestion made after the report which is also emphasized. The report suggests the following reform to be best suited in order to change the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance:

“Instead applicants who do not fulfill the work condition ought to get the possibility to enter into a guarantee program after three months of unemployment and thereby be entitled to financial support according to the same principles that apply to youth today. The financial support should equal today's basic amount in the unemployment insurance.”
(SOU 2011:11:162)

This foundational passage of the report was included in the introductory part to the interview and worked as a point of departure when talking about the three themes. Interviewees reflected on the suggested reform of making it easier to qualify for unemployment insurance and its potential implications where N3 emphasized that:

“I think that there are many who work with social assistance that would have wanted to sort out some persons who would have managed if one had only raised financial aid amount a little bit up to certain level (...) with a slightly higher level of support they would not need to apply to the Social services.” (N3:5)

It is mentioned that social workers at the Social services would find it beneficial if the financial aid amount from the Swedish Insurance Agency Fund was slightly higher since this would mean that less clients would need complimentary social assistance. Furthermore, the distribution of responsibility between the municipality and the state was elaborated on by interviewees:

“I think that it basically is, like the labor-market policies, should be a responsibility for the national government rather than the local government. And with that it follows, I also think, that the system for benefits should be national and be paid for with money from the national government rather than with money from the local government.” (N1:7)

The interviewee emphasizes the fact that labor market policies is more of a national responsibility rather than a municipal responsibility. In relation to the state's responsibility one interviewee reflects on the role of the Swedish Public Employment Service and what they would think of the reform of making it easier to qualify for unemployment insurance:

“If anyone should think anything it should ultimately be the Swedish Public Employment Service that may not want any more clients to deal with (...) One could say that it would have become more of a national governmental concern, national governmental funds, so to say a national governmental concern for those who so to say, who in reality don't have any issues, or how to put it, so that the municipalities can possibly focus on those who have the biggest troubles.” (N3:6)

The suggested reform that would make it easier to qualify for unemployment insurance would clarify that it is ultimately the state's responsibility to arrange labor market activities. This would allow the municipality to a greater extent focus on the ones who mostly need the support and to a smaller degree helping the unemployed with labor market activities. The report argues that by making it easier to qualify for unemployment insurance social assistance is allowed to function more accurately as the last safety net for people who cannot provide for themselves.

“The social assistance can, in this case, stay as the outermost social safety net for people who cannot provide for themselves.” (SOU 2011:11:175)

This is possibly more in line with social assistance's original purpose, to help those who cannot provide for themselves and by that maintaining the organization's main task. One can question what enables a shift allowing for social assistance's purpose to change. Mahoney and Thelen (2012:24) describe that parasites tend to act contradictory to the institution's purpose which undermines the institution in the long run and that the parasites also thrive in environments where the conformity is expected to be high but where the capacity to achieve this is low. Social workers processing social assistance follow the Social Service Act² and additional local guidelines when processing applications. However, since the Social Service Act

stipulates that each case should be assessed from circumstances relevant to each individual the conformity in decision making is not always easy to achieve.

There is emphasis in the interviews on the importance of maintaining the original purpose of the unemployment insurance. When considering the reform to make it easier to qualify for unemployment insurance, interviewees reflected on the importance of not making it too easy to qualify since that could risk changing the purpose of unemployment insurance:

“Generally speaking, so to say, the right person in the right system. Then again, one should remember that the unemployment insurance is

² SFS 2001:453 Socialtjänstlag

a readjustment insurance for when you are between jobs. So, it should not become a new social assistance insurance since that is not the idea of the whole thing. But then maybe one should work with, I don't know if what's in the LU 2011 is completely correct or if one should work with some kind of basic amount like the one in relation to the Swedish Public Employment Service when you belong to the Swedish Public Employment Service and then one may qualify oneself for unemployment insurance when one has started to work since one have then contributed to the readjustment insurance as it is thought to function.” (N2:8)

It appears important to uphold unemployment insurance's role as a type of readjustment insurance and ensure it does not become a system similar to social assistance. The suggested reform in the LU 2011 is critically reflected upon by the interviewee and it is suggested that there may be better ways for policy makers to decrease the amount of unemployed referred to social assistance. The interviewee's suggestion involves labor market participation in order to qualify for unemployment insurance and by this, unemployed have contributed to the unemployment insurance as it is thought to function. The discourse and Foucault's (1980:161) triple function of labor where one function is the symbolic function of labor can be argued relevant in relation to what N2 says. N2 emphasizes that unemployment insurance builds on contributions and therefore there is value in previous labor market participation. Another interviewee agrees with the fact that not all unemployed ready to take up work will be able to receive unemployment insurance:

“One of the main purposes of the suggestion for a new insurance is that more people will get qualified for it. (...) So, of course it will have a resulting effect regarding social assistance, but there will still be persons who to some degree are fit for work but nevertheless will not be eligible for unemployment insurance. You have to be aware that that is also the way that it will be.” (N4:5)

The interviewee refers to the report SOU 2020:37 that suggests a reformed unemployment insurance. It will make it easier for some to qualify, however, the suggestions in the LU 2011 can be argued to have had easier entry requirements to access unemployment insurance. This is agreed on by interviewee N2 when asked whether the reform in the report from the LU 2011 is to take it further than the suggestion in the SOU 2020:37: “Yes, to my estimation that is to go a little further.” (N2:6). The LU 2011 suggested more than one reform and if policy makers would not agree with their suggestion for the most preferred reform, the LU 2011 suggested changes to the system for social assistance:

“One alternative to the enlargement of the right to a basic amount is to keep the work condition but instead transform the social assistance into a daily allowance. (...) If the social assistance instead is transformed into a daily allowance the marginal effects will be smaller; an aid recipient who is working one or two day per week will lose social assistance for those days but will benefit from taking that temporary job.” (SOU 2011:11:174)

This alternative reform was not introduced in the interviews by the researcher and was not mentioned spontaneously by any of the interviewees. However, these suggestions would according to the report adjust the problematic incentive structures within social assistance.

5.3 Factors Affecting Change

The LU 2011 has come with suggestions to how the interaction between the two systems could change and within the scope of this study two of them have been emphasized. This section aims to elaborate on explanatory factors to why the interaction has remained the same and reflect on resistance in changing of policies. In the LU 2011 two explanatory factors is the distribution of responsibility between municipality and the state and the aspects of fiscal costs. The interviewees contributed with additional understanding when they emphasized aspects that were not directly addressed in the report such as what politicians choose to prioritize and more. To begin with the report states that:

“The system still becomes more expensive since some persons, who previously were not entitled to social assistance because they had alternative means of provision, are now entitled to compensation.” (SOU 2011:11:173)

Based on social assistance’s means testing and the function of being society’s last safety net there are tougher requirements regarding how much income and assets you are allowed to have. Unemployment insurance which is not means tested allow vehicles and/or other assets why an easier access to unemployment insurance can, as argued in the LU 2011, result in higher costs since more people will be eligible for unemployment insurance. What is also reflected in LU 2011 is the potential risk of making it too easy to qualify for unemployment insurance.

“Another problem relating to an increased right to the basic amount is that groups which in reality are not available to the labor market will get access to the benefits. It indicates that benefits to groups without work experience should be conditioned by participation in mandatory programs and a longer qualifying period.” (SOU 2011:11:174)

The suggested reform in the report is to make more people eligible for unemployment insurance, however, the foundational assumption that welfare benefits should be conditioned with labor market activities prevails. The discourse and what is considered “normal” is noticeable, the idea is to make yourself employable and participate in the labor market (Foucault, 2017:252). In contemporary discourse the unemployed can in some way be described as having “failed” to make themselves employable. In addition, while unemployed they are no longer making contributions via labor and tax. They can therefore be considered as someone with less power in relation to someone who is working and via contributions to society has more power resources. As emphasized by one of the interviewees:

“And that a society needs a group of people to whip (...) I am only cynical now, that there somehow is some kind of idea, which also is true, that unemployed people are somehow chased down. (...) That you simply want to keep the unemployed going. They shouldn’t have it too easy. There should be more control. (...) Maybe there is a cynical idea

in me that is about that you simply should chase the poor, so to speak.”

(N3:9)

The control being practiced over the poor is questioned such as the ways in which society uses activation policies to signal that people receiving social assistance should not have it too easy. Without commenting on whether or not this is the discourse society should maintain it is interesting to theoretically ask how the discourse affects society's perception of the unemployed who are dependent on unemployment insurance and/or social assistance. Foucault (2017:252-256) argues that authorities control its' clients by categorizing the client and that the recipients are constantly aware of this control and exercise of power and when the recipients have interiorized the power relation the power works automatically (Foucault, 1980:155). The ways in which society has organized help for the unemployed and how unemployed are precepted are both embedded in the discourse. The existing institutional arrangements to support unemployed have been in place for a longer period of time. This may be something that contributes to the understanding of why it is hard to attain formal institutional change regarding the interaction. The role of path dependence that Pierson (2000:252) discusses can be considered to elaborate on the likelihood to conduct systematic changes to institutions that have been in place for a long time. Interviewee N1 reflects on what is needed to fundamentally change a system in place:

“You have a system. (...) Then there needs to be some kind of external shock somehow, that will make you move away from (...) I don't know what it would be in this case. But I don't think that the LU 2011 is enough of an external shock in order for something, a fundamental system, to be changed. It is easier to poke in small changes, like introducing the job stimulation for example, to sort of touch upon these issues somewhat rather than change the system. And then there are, well, yes... Yeah, absolutely that... I mean, it is very easy to be stuck in old routines. That's what I think.” (N1:10)

Interviewee N1s underlines that there needs to be some kind of external shock and that the LU 2011 is not enough shock to spur fundamental change. Smaller changes

are easier to conduct than larger ones and it is easy to be stuck in old routines. According to interviewee N1 it is hard to distinguish what external shocks that can help move away from the way social insurance schemes are arranged. The discussion on external shocks can possibly be paired together with what N4 emphasizes about fiscal costs: “you don’t want the costs to run high and then there are the structural changes with waves of refugees and such as well that you may not have anticipated in the system” (N4:15). The people coming to Sweden for example as refugees or immigrants can be one type of external shock that affects policy making. The aspect of changed demographics could perhaps be considered one type of an external shock. Changed demographics could on the one hand spur systematic changes that make it easier to access unemployment insurance. On the other hand it could result in more restrictive policies since some advocate to not make unemployment insurance too accessible. If the interaction were to change like the LU 2011 suggests the aspect of distribution of responsibility needs to be considered as emphasized in the report:

“However, it is not obvious who should carry out such a means test. Employment officers typically do not have the knowledge and experience that is demanded to process a means test and have extensive assignments already today. Social workers have the knowledge needed. But if you let the responsibility regarding the means test remain with the municipality then this reform will not liberate the possible resources at the Social Services.” (SOU 2011:11:174)

A complicating factor regarding the suggested reform in the LU 2011 is that it is not obvious who should carry out the processing of unemployment insurance. This leads to the discussion on distribution of responsibility between the municipality and the state regarding the labor market policies. The report states that one of the pros with the reform to make it easier to access unemployment insurance is that:

“One advantage with such a reform is that it will be more apparent that it is the Swedish Public Employment Service that has the main responsibility regarding benefits and measures in relation to the unemployed.

And that the Swedish Public Employment Service is given the possibility to use sanctions within this group. Furthermore, resources in the local governments' social services will be liberated in order to be focused on the groups that have social problems.” (SOU 2011:11:173)

The interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance and the likelihood of formal systematic change is affected by the environmental surroundings and the neighboring policies (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17,19,31 & Angelin et al, 2014:167). The reformation of the Swedish Public Employment Service is one factor that affects the willingness to investigate and systematically change the interaction. As one interviewee put it:

“Labor market questions are of course a big issue for the national government. (...) one could really say that labor market questions are always important issues that are given priority irrespective of the direction of the political management. But I would think that it also is somewhat about, well, an issue that has always been big, it is about this question concerning how to get people employed. I believe that has higher priority than what the system for benefits look like. I think it could be something like that. Just like it has been the last few years. It has been a lot about how the Swedish Public Employment Service is conducting its mission. This thing about controls, that the ones in search of work actually are looking for work. That can have an effect on this. Why does it take so long to make changes in a system for benefits? It could also be that there are a lot of different questions to be aware about in this.”

(N4:7)

The interviewee highlights that labor market participation is considered highly prioritized by all governments which indicates that the idea of labor market participation is strong. In the center of attention has perhaps more often been the performance of the Swedish Public Employment Service instead of what the system for benefits have looked like or should look like. The question of how well the Swedish Public Employment Service performs and the role of government was mentioned by an additional interviewee:

“On the one hand it is the national government, they have to take the initiative to make a bigger change, that’s the way it is. And that is, I assume, connected to the general political situation where we haven’t had any... We have had relatively weak minority governments for a long period of time and then you don’t make bigger changes. But then again, I believe that the Swedish Public Employment Service is a greater player in this than what one thinks.” (N2:10)

The external conditions (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17) when considering institutional change concerns the political setting and the composition of government but can also concern neighboring policy areas such as the Swedish Public Employment Service. Interviewee N2 underlines the implications the political situation has had on the interaction between the two systems, for example the meaning of weak minority governments. Another interviewee mentions that no actor or party can be considered clearly against a change in the interaction but at the same time no party has advocated enough for a change why it has not changed in the direction of the suggested reform in the LU 2011:

“We have had different political parties in government at different points in time and none has made any changes in these, in either direction of this dimension. No political party is pushing the issue and no political party is... You can probably find someone who thinks that it is a bad suggestion, but there are no strong opponents against it. But there is no entrepreneur who is pushing it either, so to say.” (N1:10)

It becomes evident that there has to be someone who advocates for change and that in this case there have not been any strong actors advocating to change the interaction. There are other political matters prior to changing the interaction between the two systems. Concerning labor market policies, the reformation of the Swedish Public Employment Service is more politically prioritized. In relation to the reformation and the national labor market policies it could be argued that the municipalities and their work with social assistance is somewhat neglected from the national

political level. This neglect enables drift which is likely to take place when the political context offers great veto possibilities as emphasized by Mahoney and Thelen (2012:28). The political context impacts the likelihood to fundamentally change social insurance schemes since there has to be some political actor with great veto possibilities that advocates for it (ibid.). In the end, the likelihood of formal institutional change has to do with whether or not there is a political will to fundamentally change a system or not which is emphasized by an interviewee:

“That is, to my mind, a political question. Political scientists and other people can sit and say that this is what one should do but it is, as it were, a political question how one wants to have the system for benefits sorted. There is, so to speak, a lot of politics in how our insurance systems should be constructed, who should be included and in which way and so on.” (N5:8)

There can be endless reports investigating potential reforms, however, as pointed out by interviewee N5, if there is no political will the likelihood of formally changing policies is perhaps rather small. Besides the role of the political context the aspect of fiscal costs is emphasized by another interviewee:

“If one should be really cynical then it is cheaper for the national government that the municipalities disburse social assistance. And that it is cheaper because they disburse smaller amounts. I think that can be one explanation.” (N3:8)

The interviewee states that it would be more expensive for the state if the interaction would change and that it is cheaper system when the municipalities are responsible. It is reasoned to be cheaper for the state since the municipalities are stricter in their assessments than the federal authorities are with their assessments. This was also emphasized in the LU 2011 stating that the suggested reform could potentially be more expensive than the current system.

6. Discussion

This chapter will elaborate further on the empirical findings in relation to the theoretical framework: incremental institutional change and concepts emphasizing power relations.

6.1 Drift

The social worker interviewee (N3) is frustrated with the fact that the Social services has to function as a type of unemployment insurance although they are not intended to be one. One can question how Social services and social assistance has been allowed to transform into a type of unemployment insurance although it is not supposed to be one. This gradual institutional change can be understood in terms of drift, where change happens despite no formal changes to the institutional system (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17). Some components can be identified to have enabled change through drift.

6.1.1 The Municipalities

To begin with, one interviewee reflected on the role that the municipalities have played and more specifically their financial incentives to get people off social assistance. The municipalities through the Social services want to ensure that the people they are supporting are given the best prerequisites to participate in the labor market. Change via drift has been enabled when institutional maintenance is neglected and there is a mismatch between rule and practices and it is in these contexts that parasites flourish (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:24). This way, the municipality can be described to cover up the state's failing attempt to arrange sufficient labor market policies for all unemployed and it causes institutional drift. An explanation to the gap of neglect and how it causes institutional drift could potentially be that the municipalities are committed to making recipients of social assistance financially self-sufficient. The municipalities have the greater financial incentive to arrange labor market activities when the Swedish Public Employment Service does not offer sufficient activities for the unemployed. The interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance may not occur as a great policy issue since

the municipalities are taking responsibility for the unemployed that are somewhat neglected by the state. In the long run there is a potential risk that the Social services' acting as a pretend unemployment benefit fund will undermine the purpose of the Social services and the social assistance. The instinct of self-preservation for the municipalities that do not want high costs for social assistance could possibly lead to the Social services becoming more and more of a pretend unemployment benefit fund.

6.1.2 Original Purpose

All interviewees mentioned that the original purpose of social assistance, to help those not fit to work or help unemployed without income during a short period of time, has changed and that the contemporary purpose of social assistance is different. The shift being that many recipients of social assistance “only” struggle with unemployment and not with various types of social problems such as mental illness or substance abuse. The changed original purpose points in the direction of drift where no formal changes in overarching policies have been implemented but nonetheless resulted in changes (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17). Some of the interviewees emphasize the importance of keeping the unemployment insurance's role as a readjustment insurance intact. It should continuously be a readjustment insurance and should not become a system similar to social assistance since this is not the original idea with unemployment insurance. The suggested reform from the LU 2011 is partly questioned by one of the interviewees and it is suggested that there perhaps are better ways to decrease the number of people referred to social assistance. The suggestion by the interviewee involves labor market participation in order to qualify for unemployment insurance and by this the unemployed would have contributed to the insurance. The discourse on labor and Foucault's (1980:161) concept of the triple function of labor where one of the components is the symbolic function can be argued to be of relevance. The politician emphasizes that there is value in previous labor market participation since the citizen then also would have contributed to the insurance before taking part of it. The notion of work and the idea that you have to deserve the unemployment insurance via previous contributions link to the symbolic function of labor as it is emphasized by Foucault (ibid.).

6.1.3 Discretion

Interviewees mention that it is important to maintain the original purpose of unemployment insurance. However, when it comes to social assistance the original purpose has somewhat changed and the institution has changed through drift (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:17). It should be considered why unemployment insurance is not as likely as social assistance to become an object of drift. One explanation to this can be that unemployment insurance has a much more rigid qualification system through its income related mechanisms and the membership qualification. Social assistance is means tested and the last safety net so if Social services would not adjust to the environmental changes and in some cases help people that cannot get that help from anywhere else it would mean that people would have no last safety net to turn to. The characteristic for drift is when institutional rules remain formally the same but shifts in external conditions impact change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:15-17). Although, it is not social assistance's original purpose to be a type of unemployment insurance social services adjust to their clients in a way that unemployment insurance does not have to do. In a way, unemployment insurance's framework does not allow for drift in the same way as Social services' framework do. The legislative framework for social assistance grants the social workers a higher level of discretion than what the case workers at the unemployment insurance funds have. The role that discretion plays is mentioned by Mahoney and Thelen (2012:21). They emphasize that within institutions where there is little margin for discretion in enforcement, would-be agents of change are less likely to accomplish change through drift. The type of institutional change depends on the level of discretion in enforcement and interpretation in the targeted institution and its existing rules (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:19). It can be questioned why the political landscape values the importance to keep the original purpose of the unemployment insurance higher than to value the importance to keep the original purpose of social assistance. How come this is the case and how come Social services ultimately are more likely to be an object of institutional change via drift than the unemployment insurance? The level of discretion can partly explain why Social services are more likely to be an object of change via drift than the unemployment insurance. The debate on deservingness can partly explain the strive to keep the original purpose of unemployment insurance rather than keeping it for the social assistance.

What is it then that enables a shift in the original purpose of social assistance and who can be considered an enabler? Parasites tend to act contradictory to the institution's purpose which undermines the institution in the long run. The parasites also thrive in environments where the conformity is expected to be high but where the capacity to achieve this is low (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:24). Social workers processing social assistance follow the Social Service Act and additional local guidelines when processing applications. However, since each case should be assessed from the circumstances in each individual's case the conformity in decision making is not always easy to achieve. This is not only the case for social workers working in different municipalities but also the case for social workers in the same municipalities. The way the original purpose of social assistance is transformed can therefore partly be understood in relation to the social worker's discretion.

6.2 Discourse and Control

The individual's responsibility to support him or herself and the focus on employability can be described as the contemporary discourse. The unemployed can in some way be described as having "failed" to make themselves employable and are no longer making contributions via labor and tax. They can possibly therefore be considered as someone with less power in relation to someone who is working and who via contributions to society has more power. The contemporary discourse can be argued to influence the understanding of who is deserving of help when unemployed. It poses a question of deservingness in relation to previous contributions and if unemployed who have made previous contributions are more deserving of help than those who have not contributed. In relation to Foucault (2017:252) and the categorization of people, previous contributions based on labor market participation speak to the fact that you have been "normal". Labor market participation can be viewed as the "normal" state in the discourse and being unemployed the "abnormal" state. Through the labor market participation and the contributions to the unemployment insurance funds individuals are considered more deserving of welfare benefits since he or she has previously worked and been considered a part of the "normal" group. Many of the social assistance recipients have not been making previous contributions via labor market participation and may categorically be

viewed as “abnormal” to a greater extent than the unemployed who have unemployment insurance. In addition, as social assistance is means tested the recipients can be argued to be controlled to a greater extent than the recipients of unemployment insurance. Arguably, this can be considered the case partly because recipients of social assistance each month have to provide Social services with their bank balance and are not allowed to have any savings. Both unemployment insurance and social assistance are conditioned with job searching. However, unemployment insurance do not have the same monthly controls regarding the bank balance and savings. The structure of the two systems allow divergent views on deservingness based on what type of benefit the individual is entitled to. One can question why the structure of incentives is not as well designed for social assistance as the unemployment insurance since the discourse emphasizes labor market participation. One probable explanation as to why the structures of incentives is better regarding unemployment insurance is that social assistance was not designed to support unemployed to the extent that it is currently doing, why there was no “need” to design the system with the same incentivizing effect that the unemployment insurance has.

Drawing on Foucault (2017:252) society can through its categorization of people be considered to view some unemployed as more deserving than others based on their previous contributions via labor market participation. In theory it allows elaboration on who is deserving of help and who is not. Furthermore, one could ask, should those who are considered less deserving be controlled to a greater extent than those who are considered more deserving and have qualified for unemployment insurance? Arguably, previous contributions and its connection to deservingness are important in terms of understanding the discourse that underlines the meaning of work.

There have been suggestions in relation to how to potentially change the interaction, yet it has remained formally the same. Despite suggested reforms the debate concerning beneficiary recipients have often to a great extent tended to focus on the conditioning of social assistance than the consideration of actual suggestions that could fundamentally change the interaction. In order to do so there has to be political will to change the interaction and up until now the tendency has been the im-

plementation of tougher requirements of participation in Active Labor Market Policies (Nybom, 2012:19). These types of activation activities can be more or less useful. However, they also have control functions in order to make sure the individual is doing his or her best to enter the labor market (Nybom, 2012:19 & Salonen, 2013:9). The tendency to place a great amount of the responsibility of unemployment on the individual rather than to a greater degree deal with the structural challenges regarding labor market and social insurance schemes is a challenge. This follows the logic of the discourse where people that are working are considered more “normal” than the unemployed who are considered “abnormal” and therefore less deserving of benefits.

6.2.1 Coalitions, Political Context and Power Relations

Different coalitions can be formed within the institutions and how coalitions are formed are affected by the specific context. In order to understand it broadly we can ask if actors will form alliances with defenders or challengers of an institution and understand it from the perspective of which actors “benefit and do not benefit from the prevailing rules” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:29). From what has emerged in the interviews it appears as if the municipalities are the ones benefiting less from the current interaction whereas the state and the unemployment insurance have been able to sustain the original purpose of unemployment insurance and letting the existing rules prevail. Different actors’ varying power resources and the actors’ veto possibilities impact change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:19). The Social services, in line with their role as the last safety net, have little power over if they are going to help or not. This is in accordance with what Salonen (1997:7) emphasizes, that the municipalities have continuously been required to cover the faults in the national social insurance schemes.

One could question whether or not the state and the municipalities can be argued to be in a coalition together or if the municipalities in relation to the state should be viewed as an actor with less power resources. For example, one could question if the Social services function as a pretend unemployment insurance fund. Furthermore, one could question what would happen if municipalities advocated for systematic change regarding the interaction. Would the municipalities be viewed as an

actor even remotely close to effecting change that would be sufficient when the state can be considered the actor with the greater veto possibilities? As one of the interviewees stated, it is a political issue how the social insurance schemes should be designed which is in accordance with the great veto possibilities that the national politics have.

If there is no political will to change the interaction change is more likely to happen through drift than through any formal changes due to the governments veto possibilities. In addition to the issue not being at the top of the political agenda one of the interviewees argued that there has to be some type of external shock for something to happen and that the LU 2011 cannot be considered enough of an external shock. No matter the type of the external shock, a change in demographics for example, it is probably unlikely to impact a systemic change since there are other more important components that impact the willingness to change policies, such as the political landscape and power relations.

Concerning power relations, there are just not enough people interested in these types of systematic changes and they are basically not listened to. Foucault (1980:156) states that the power works automatically and that “it becomes a machinery that no one owns”. In this case the power resources of those who would be interested in formal systematic change can be argued not to be enough to advocate for change since the interests of those who do not want formal change are stronger. The stronger interests that are allowed to prevail via the discourse and the discourse’s power dynamics are in a way viewed as the natural way of dealing with the poor. This links to the interviewee who underlines that society wants to keep its poor people in place which seems to be a foundational part of the discourse and the power relations within it. In order to attain the “normal” state in the discourse there are systems in place that measure, control and aim at fixing the abnormalities and in order to maintain this there are disciplinary arrangements at play (Foucault, 2017:252). Therefore, society controls the citizens that can be viewed as “abnormal” and the power works very efficiently since the controlled citizens interiorize the executed power (ibid.). The discourse underlines the importance of work and that the poor somewhat should be kept in their place and should not have much of

a say. The constant division between “normal” and “abnormal” that individuals are subjected to is one way to describe how society exercises power over individuals (Foucault, 2017:252). It can be an issue for reflection whether actors opposing change are worried that a changed interaction would cost more and would give unemployed more money and make them people with more agency. As of now, the controlling mechanisms within the institutions can be argued to be more powerful than the people who advocate for change are.

7. Conclusion

It has been more than ten years since the LU 2011 was issued. The aim of this study has been to investigate the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance and why the interaction has persisted over years despite the critique that the LU 2011 presented. In order to investigate the issue RQ1 aimed to elaborate on the function of the current interaction and the suggested reforms to change the interaction. RQ2 aimed at elaborating on how incremental institutional theory and power relations can help explain why the interaction has not changed.

When investigating the function of the current interaction the most pressing issue is that there are too many unemployed who are referred to social assistance since they have not qualified for unemployment insurance. It is emphasized in the LU 2011 and by one interviewee that social assistance seems to have become an additional unemployment benefit fund. The original function of social assistance has changed over time whereas the purpose of the unemployment insurance has remained truer to its purpose. This shows an example of drift (Mahoney & Thelen, 2012:21).

Considering the suggested reforms, if qualification criteria for unemployment insurance changes in the direction the way LU 2011 suggests, less unemployed would be referred to the means tested social assistance. In relation to the suggested reforms, some interviewees claimed that more will qualify with the recently suggested regulations for unemployment insurance in the report SOU 2020:37. However, it is emphasized that it should not be too easy to access unemployment insur-

ance, which can be understood in relation to upholding its main purpose as a readjustment insurance based on previous contributions. Another suggested reform is to transform social assistance into a daily allowance which will regulate the problematic structures of incentives. It is also emphasized that if the Swedish Social Insurance Agency would raise the financial aid amount to a slightly higher level some would not have to apply for social assistance. This initiates the discussion on distribution of responsibility between the state and the municipalities which is further developed in RQ2.

RQ2 aimed at elaborating on how incremental institutional theory and power relations can help explain why the interaction has not changed. Through incremental institutional theory it can be understood that there is some type of path dependence that affects the policy making and that there would have to be some type of external shock that is more powerful than the LU 2011. The political setting is relevant to drift. For example, the environmental surroundings, the neighboring policies and the reformation of the Swedish Public Employment Service. Furthermore, the role of the municipalities and the role of discretion can also explain what enables drift and leave the interaction formally unchanged. The aspect of increased costs can also be argued to explain why the interaction has remained formally the same.

Drawing on Foucault, the institution aims at controlling the unemployed with the idea of turning people from “abnormal” to “normal” and through this make them better fit the discourse. There are some that would want to change the interaction. However, it can be argued that they have too little power resources in relation to those opposing formal systematic change. On top of this, it is evident that there has to be some type of political will for systematic change to take place. The two different theoretical concepts can be argued to be complementary to each other. Both the institutional theory that describes the very institutional structures that are there independently of our thinking of it and the concepts of Foucault’s theory of power relations has added to the understanding of why the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance has not changed.

Approaching the research problem and the research questions the thesis presented relevant previous studies regarding social assistance, unemployment insurance and

the interaction between the two system for benefits. The theoretical concepts applied to the empirical results was institutional change theory and concepts of Foucault's theory of power relations. The methodology has been a combined approach of interviews and document analysis. The empirical material was presented following the logic of three constructed themes that were deducted from the LU 2011 and were also used to structure the interviews.

Conducting both a document analysis and interviews was of interest to the researcher since it has been more than ten years since the report was issued. In a way the mixed approach gave new insights to a somewhat "forgotten" report. Working deductively, the researcher drew on the themes that emerged in the report and applied it to the interviews and anticipated the interviews to corroborate and/or add to the understanding of the interaction. It was of interest to use the report as a point of departure and through the interviews investigate whether the descriptions of the interaction and the suggested reforms are still accurate. The way that the LU 2011 was used gave the researcher a pre-understanding of the subject which affected the way the interviews were constructed since the findings from the report was used to construct the interviews. The aim was to conduct the research with a normative approach. In order to avoid biased interviews the interview questions were constructed using a normative approach in a combination with the interviewees' reflections on the interaction. Even though the mixed approach gave interesting results it could be elaborated on what the research would have been like if it only consisted of interviews. This could have allowed for more interviews which perhaps could have provided a deeper understanding of the interaction. However, finding and contacting interviewees is a rather time-consuming process and due to the limited scope of the investigation this was not the chosen method.

The interviewees were chosen on the basis of their different occupations. It is possible that additional interviewees could have contributed to a broader understanding of the interaction. Possibly, it could have been of use to interview recipients of unemployment insurance and social assistance. This way the perspective of the ones receiving social assistance and/or unemployment insurance could have been emphasized as well. However, concluding the findings in relation to the theory the

triangulated approach served its purpose showing that some components in the LU 2011 corroborated with what was mentioned in the interviews. There were also some components that were only mentioned in the interviews. After completing the study it is rather unexpected that national politics play such an important role. On the one hand it is obvious that there will not be any change if there is no political will to change the system. On the other hand the role of national politics was not really emphasized in the report which is why its role initially may have been underestimated. After conducting the interviews the role of politics emerged and through this it is made apparent that the interviews offered complementary explanatory reasons to the findings in the LU 2011.

Considering Sweden's immigration and the fact that people will likely continue to immigrate to Sweden the discussion regarding the design of the social insurance schemes is likely to continue to be of great importance. When newly arrived immigrants have trouble participating in the labor market they will be referred to the means tested social assistance. One component to elaborate on is the question regarding how long the municipalities will endure the distribution of responsibility since social assistance is a great cost to many municipalities. What if this cost increases due to the fact that the number of people not eligible for unemployment insurance continue to rise and in turn lead to an increased numbers of social assistance recipients? In the end, whether there will be systematic change or not is dependent on for how long the national politics continues to have great veto possibilities. As long as they do the actors with less possibilities to impact change would have to adapt to the environmental surroundings for as long as it will take for systematic change to happen or not ever happen. A mix of components indicate that the interaction will remain without formal systematic change. Instead of dealing with questions regarding large systematic changes to the system of benefits the debate has instead emphasized the recipients' lacking will to take up work and their committing of welfare fraud (Salonen, 2013:6). If there is no political will to change the system any changes will not happen. Perhaps people share the frustration that Salonen (*ibid.*) expresses – the fact that politicians could actually act and do something that would improve the system for benefits instead of only making the debate

about portraying individuals on unemployment benefits as a lazy group that needs more control in order to go from welfare to work.

The most recent suggested reform regarding unemployment insurance is the Swedish Government Official Report SOU 2020:37. This suggestion will make it easier for some to qualify for unemployment insurance but does not specifically emphasize the interaction between social assistance and unemployment insurance. One group that will likely continue to be referred to social assistance are those who are far away from establishment on the labor market, for example those with poor educational background. The role of the distribution of responsibility have over the years been a topic for discussion and it will likely continue to be discussed. The whole interaction also appears to be an issue that no societal actor alone holds full responsibility over. The state is responsible for unemployment insurance and the municipalities for social assistance but no one has the overarching responsibility for the two which is shown by the way that politics have neglected the interaction in the SOU 2020:37.

The differences between being on unemployment insurance and on social assistance needs to be researched further and this may be investigated through studying recipients' experiences. In relation to power resources it would be of interest to hear how recipients of social assistance and how recipients of unemployment insurance experience their mandate in society, how they experience the level of control and discipline in order to take part in unemployment benefits and if there are any differences in experiences based on type of unemployment benefit. In order to change the interaction, research on what the output would be from changing the system needs to be conducted. This could possibly investigate what the effects of making it easier for people to qualify for unemployment insurance would imply financially and be based on the discussion concerning the structures of incentives. Before this type of research is conducted, perhaps there has to be some external shock that fundamentally initiates the debate on formal systematic change. The conducting of further research is likely one important component that could contribute to formally changing the interaction. Whether or not such an investigation can be considered

enough to impact formal systematic change or if such an investigation will be considered just another report remains an unanswered question and will probably be dependent on the political will at the time.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Jag heter Sarah och studerar masterprogrammet Welfare Policies and Management vid Lunds universitet. Inom ramen för min masteruppsats blev jag nyfiken på att efterforska ersättningssystemet för arbetslösa och gör detta genom ett antal intervjuer och genom att analysera Långtidsutredningen 2011. Jag vill undersöka detta eftersom det gått drygt 10 år sedan Långtidsutredningen 2011 underströk ett behov av att reformera ersättningssystemet och är intresserad av din uppfattning i frågan.

Några problem med det nuvarande ersättningssystemet för arbetslösa som inte kvalificerar sig för a-kassa nämns i LU 2011 och jag är intresserad av att veta hur detta följdes upp eller inte följdes upp och huruvida du håller med om att det finns ett problem med nuvarande ersättningssystem för arbetslösa? LU 2011 säger att den största bristen är att:

“Arbetslösa bör inte få ersättning i form av ett behovsprövat försörjningsstöd, vilket idag är fallet för en del av de som inte omfattas av arbetslöshetsförsäkringen. I stället bör sökanden som inte uppfyller arbetsvillkoret få möjlighet att gå in i ett garantiprogram efter tre månaders arbetslöshet och därmed få rätt till ersättning enligt samma princip som i dag gäller ungdomar. Ersättningen bör motsvara dagens grundbelopp i arbetslöshetsförsäkringen”. Rapporten föreslår ett antal förändringar så jag vill undersöka vad som hänt sedan dess.

Tema 1: Bakgrund och kännedom om ämnet

1. Berätta gärna lite om dig själv och ditt arbete samt inom vilken organisation du arbetar.
2. Hur har du varit i kontakt med frågor som ersättning för arbetslösa? Har du innan denna studie haft kännedom om Långtidsutredningens 2011 och föreslagna reformer för arbetslösa utan arbetslöshetsförsäkring?

Tema 2: Samspelet mellan systemet för ekonomiskt bistånd och arbetslöshetsförsäkring

1. Ekonomiskt bistånd:
 - Vilka grupper syftar ekonomiskt bistånd att hjälpa?
 - Ekonomiskt bistånd ska fungera som samhällets yttersta skyddsnät. Hur anser du att ekonomiskt bistånds funktion som yttersta skyddsnät fungerar?

2. A-kassa
 - Vilka förklaringar finns till att vissa arbetslösa inte kvalificerar sig för arbetslöshetsförsäkring?

3. Samspel

- Varför framställs det i LU 2011 som ett problem att för många är hänvisade till det behovsprövade försörjningsstödet och inte har rätt till arbetslöshetsförsäkring? Håller du med om att det är ett problem?

Tema 3: Föreslagna reformer i förhållande till olika aktörer

1. Aktörers intressen:

- Vad skulle lättare tillgång till grundersättningen i arbetslöshetsförsäkringen betyda för socialtjänsten och enheten för ekonomiskt bistånd?
- Vad skulle lättare tillgång till grundersättningen i arbetslöshetsförsäkringen betyda för a-kassan?
- Vad är din åsikt kring att göra det lättare för arbetslösa att få tillgång till grundersättningen i arbetslöshetsförsäkringen?
- Är det önskvärt att ändra systemet? Varför/varför inte?

Tema 4: Identifiera motstånd till institutionell förändring

- Det nuvarande samspelet mellan systemet för försörjningsstöd och arbetslöshetsförsäkringen har kritiserats i Långtidsutredningen 2011 men systemet har inte förändrats. Vilka förklaringar tänker du att man kan se i förhållande till detta?
- Enligt din egen uppfattning, hur lätt eller svårt skulle det vara att ändra på samspelet mellan ersättningssystemen?
- Vilka institutionella utmaningar finns i relation till en ändring av samspelet mellan ersättningssystemen? Det kan exempelvis handla om samarbete mellan myndigheter på statlig och kommunal nivå.
- Kan betydelsen av ansvarsfördelningen mellan stat och kommun vara en förklarande faktor till varför samspelet mellan ersättningssystemen inte har förändrats?
 - Är det troligt att en förklaring till varför samspelet mellan systemet för försörjningsstöd och arbetslöshetsförsäkring inte har förändrats beror på att det nuvarande samspelet har varit gällande under en längre tid och att det därför är svårt att ändra på?
- Kan en förklaring till varför det inte skett någon förändring sedan förslagen i Långtidsutredningen 2011 presenterades vara att det är kostsamt att ändra på samspelet mellan ersättningssystemen?

Tema 5: Samspelets framtid

- Om du blickar framåt, tror du att systemet i framtiden kan ändras eller fortsätter samspelet mellan systemet för ekonomiskt bistånd och arbetslöshetsförsäkring att se likadant ut?

Frågor eller något att tillägga?