

**The Paradox of Self-Organisation  
among Disadvantaged People:  
A Study of Marginal Citizenship**

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R.H.  
Trondheim, August 2001



**Part I**  
**Introduction**



## The problem of marginal citizenship

This dissertation compares the emerging attempts at social mobilisation among Travellers and people out of work claiming social-security benefits in Norway. This analysis is carried out against the backdrop of a discussion of social marginality, integration and citizenship. It traces how the organisations could promote fuller citizenship on the part of marginalized sections of the population, in spite of the obstacles they might face.

During the last two decades we have witnessed a growing self-organisation among the disadvantaged in a number of Western European countries. An increasing number of citizen initiatives, sometimes with surprising names, have achieved relatively extensive coverage in the mass media, and have contributed to a stronger focus on poverty, social exclusion, insufficiencies and failures on the part of the welfare state. There are a number of empirical cases of mobilisation among poor people. Such mobilisation efforts generally appear to be on the increase in several European countries, including France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Bagguley 1991; Berkel *et al.* (eds.) 1998; Bouget 1999; Bourdieu 1998c: 88-93; Bremen 1990; Cohen and Rushton 1982: 2-9; Coleman 1971 [1961]: 679-680; Gallas 1994; Hall 1995; Hjemdal *et al.* 1996; Humphrey 2000; Italy Daily [*Corriere Della Serra*] 15 July 1999; Jordan 1973, 1974: 60-74; Mann 1995 [1992]; Miliband 1974: 191-193; Rose 1973; Piven and Cloward 1977; Ruggiero 2000; Seim *et al.* 1997; Seljestad 1997; Thuen and Carlsen 1998; Wicks 1987: 38; Wilson 1987; Wolski-Prenger 2000; Wolski-Prenger and Rothardt 1996: 125ff.).

The disadvantaged have demanded moral redress, recognition and compensation for bad treatment, neglect and exclusion from full citizenship. This emerges as a relatively new welfare-policy condition that requires improved sociological understanding. The self-organisational efforts may be fragmented, local, fragile and short-lived. The members and participants may fluctuate and/or the extent to which the organisational efforts have been successful in pursuing their goals varies. Nevertheless,

this emerges as an important phenomenon of high relevance, both in terms of theory and practical policy.

The welfare-policy initiatives of the political and administrative elites and their activities are no longer only being challenged by political parties at the extreme wings, the mass media and a few critical voices among academics, they are also being challenged by a growing number of voices among individuals and groups who belong to the target group of the activities. These are the people that the political and administrative elites commonly have construed as ‘them’; the victims of financial and social exclusion others had to concern themselves about and do something for or with. They were not trusted with the capability to do anything to improve their own life opportunities to any particular extent, nor to present their own views on what their problem was and what could be done about it.

The study this dissertation is based on indicated that self-organisational efforts had relatively good success vis-à-vis the greater society. At the same time the “inner life” of the organisational efforts appeared to be characterised by turbulence, self-destructive and self-defeating internal conflicts, high turnover among the participants, and ambivalence about self-organisation and contact with others in a similar position. Taking this paradox as a point of departure, the dissertation seeks to account for some of the challenges and dilemmas the self-organisation efforts among the poor and marginalized face. How could it be that the self-organisational efforts among the marginal and the poor have made considerable achievements in the welfare-policy field, in spite of seemingly insurmountable subjective and objective barriers to self-organisation?

### **Unexpected successes vis-à-vis the greater society**

In our study, and contrary to what one could have expected, we discovered a surprising degree of success on the part of recent organisational efforts among the disadvantaged. For reasons I shall account for later, we have collected in-depth process data about five organisational efforts which we have followed in the period 1995-99. These sought to represent two categories of people who have been objects of extensive moral concern, help and control measures and surveillance from the political and administrative elites; Travellers as an ethnic minority and social-security claimants. Several of these achieved

considerable media coverage, especially in the local press. Through negotiations with the local and/or central authorities, some of them managed to obtain greater financial support for the organisation and/or specific projects and services. Some had more intermittent success or had achieved more in the past. Nevertheless, these were not insignificant. To some extent they were invited to participate in consultative processes, contributed to changing the policy agenda and achieved fuller citizenship on behalf of the subject population they sought to represent:

**Figure 1.1: Achievements vis-à-vis the greater society on the part of the organisational efforts studied**

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Achievements</i>				
	Granted financial support for the organisation as such	Granted financial support for projects and/or specific services	Involved in consultative processes (hearings, advisory committees, etc.)	Broad mass-media coverage, media break-through	Achieved significant change in public policy; fuller citizenship for their constituencies
The Romani People's National Association	X	X	x	X	X
The National Association Justice for the Losers of Society	X	x	x	X	x
The Poor House	X	x	x	x	0
The Job-seekers' Interest Organisation	x	X	x	x	0
The Fredrikstad Client Action	x	0	x	x	0

X = achieved to large extent, x = achieved to lesser extent, 0 = not achieved, by the end of 1999.

*The Romani People's National Association* first received NOK 100 000 in 1997 to initiate limited projects from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs and the Ministry of Culture. In 1999 this had expanded to NOK 400 000 to cover administrative costs, office rental and employment of a secretary in a half-time position,

and an additional NOK 190 000 for running different projects. The organisation published information about Traveller history and cultural heritage and social position in society for the general public, especially the education system and the mass media, sought to remove pejorative accounts in publications and to prevent negative discrimination of Travellers. The social mobilisation has received considerable response from the public authorities in Norway. Administrative authorities that wanted to establish a permanent exhibition of Traveller history and culture in a museum consulted the organisation. The organisation received more invitations to participate in hearings on policy issues of concern to Travellers from the public authorities. The organisation advocated stronger cultural rights and recognition of Travellers as a national or ethnic minority rather than a problem group. They contributed strongly to the central government and the Church of Norway, apologising for and distancing themselves from the former policy towards Travellers. The majority in the Norwegian Parliament (all parties except the Progress Party [*Fremskrittspartiet*]) has decided that Travellers can be regarded as a national minority to the degree that Travellers claim this status themselves (*St.prp.* 80 1997-98, *Innst.S.* 55 1998-99, *St.forh.* 11 December 1998). The majority in Parliament (all parties except the Progress Party) has also decided that people of Traveller origin may be granted semi-standardised individual financial compensation for insufficient primary education (commonly NOK 60 000). Several individual Travellers have received financial compensation from the national treasury.

*The National Association Justice for the Losers of Society* managed to expand their central government support from NOK 50 000 in 1994 to NOK 800 000 in 2000 (*St.prp.* no. 1 2001, Chapter 0614 “Development of social services, etc.”). Employing three people, the organisation achieved considerable media coverage of their focus on the wrongful treatment and neglect on the part of the public authorities of various categories of children in the past and the consequences in the present. The organisation advocated that new categories of disadvantaged people should be granted the opportunity to apply for financial compensation from the state for former wrongful treatment by public authorities. The secretariat helped individual applicants to attain financial compensation and moral redress. When the applications were successful it was “confirmed” that the individual was not to blame for his or her present life situation. In June 2001, the association reported having achieved financial compensation in 98 cases. Altogether these claimants had received about NOK 10 millions in compensation. They

were invited more and more often to give their opinion on law proposals and green papers.

*The Poor House* first received NOK 60 000 from the city of Oslo in 1996. In 1999, the annual support had increased to NOK 100 000. The organisation achieved relatively broad media coverage both in local and national media but less than the other two organisations mentioned above. Some of the participants had some, but intermittent, contact with the central government, the Federation of trade unions for social workers (*Fellesorganisasjonen for barnevernspedagoger, sosionomer og vernepleiere*), law students and social-work students who offered free advice. They also participated in a national policy forum for voluntary organisations (FRISAM) (Vestby and Østtveiten 1998) and social-policy conferences on invitations from social workers. Together with some other claimant organisations, they received NOK 240 000 from FRISAM to write a report on self-help groups; “A report on self-organisation among clients, users, poor, social-security beneficiaries, victims of debt, losers, convicts, relatives of prisoners and children under public child custody” (May 1999). The initiative included the Poor House, the Fredrikstad Client Action, the Alliance of Victims of Debt and the National Association Justice for the Losers of Society.

*The Job-seekers' Interest Organisation* mostly received indirect support. In 1993 the organisation received NOK 50 000 from the local authorities to run an ‘activity centre’ and ‘job invention workshop’ in free offices, as well as support from the labour exchange office to employ three people as a form of job training. In 1994 they achieved a lump-sum disbursement of NOK 210 000 from the county government to run the organisation, in addition to income support and job training funds from the labour-exchange office. They later managed to obtain financial support for two centres of voluntary work, a job exchange office and a small workshop for job training in the woodworking industry. In this way they managed to obtain employment outside the regular labour market for shorter periods of time for several social-security claimants. The media coverage varied but had been quite extensive before, especially when new initiatives were introduced and during campaigns against the central authorities.

*The Fredrikstad Client Action* achieved little financial support. The exceptions were a small grant of NOK 5 000 from the county government in 1992 and NOK 3 000 from the local authorities in 1996. In 1994, they received support from the labour-exchange office to employ one unemployed person as a form of job training. Moreover,

a student of social work had his internship at the office for three months that year. In spite of the scarce financial resources, they have received significant media coverage during some periods, especially in the local press, among others in connection with putting 'take-up campaigns' and petitions for more standardised and rule-based social assistance on the agenda. The organisation offered assistance to social-security claimants, especially in negotiations with the local social-services offices and the labour-exchange offices. The organisation was recognised as a representative of individual claimants in appeals cases. In co-operation with activists in the Poor House, they helped focus public attention on demands for back-payment of social assistance after tax refunds on the part of the public authorities in 1994. Eventually the Norwegian Parliament changed the legislation in 1995 (*Document 8: 19 1994-95, Ot.forh. no. 40, 587-593, 27 April 1995*). The organisation published a brochure on social rights together with the local authorities. The main activist had meetings with Members of Parliament and public authorities, contributed to teaching at university colleges for social-work students, published in the newsletter for the social workers' trade union and participated in social-policy conferences convened by the central government.

In a similar vein, other and previous Traveller and claimant organisational attempts managed to achieve, at least intermittently and/or temporarily, some scores on the above success measures. Representatives of people out of work have occasionally been invited to participate in deliberations over white papers and hearings in Parliament (*Ot.prp. no. 35 1995-96, St.forh. 20 February 2001, Ministry of Children and Family Affairs 2000*). During some periods they have attained a great deal of attention from the mass media and contributed to more public attention being focused on the services offered by public agencies (Andenæs 1992, Bach 1991).

Giving a face to the poor and giving a voice to disadvantaged sections of the population emerged as the two most easily identifiable achievements on the part of the self-organisational efforts. In other respects, both types of organisations, Traveller and claimant, had not managed to achieve acceptance for their claims. This was an unfinished story. The organisational efforts had a high level of activity during brief or longer periods of time, but had problems maintaining this. In certain respects, they appeared to have greater difficulties co-operating among themselves and co-ordinating their initiatives towards the greater society.



## **Self-organisation among the disadvantaged as a theoretical challenge**

Disadvantaged and vulnerable categories of people have frequently been considered the passive objects of help and assistance programmes as well as the targets for surveillance and normalisation attempts by political elites. It has been assumed that their lack of resources turns vulnerable social groups into passive victims and objects rather than active actors and subjects in the welfare-policy arena (Berkel 1997, Bleiklie *et al.* 1989: 302, Dahl Jacobsen 1967, Jordan 1996, Offe 1973, Sæbø 1990: 39, Williams *et al.* 1999). In this respect it has somewhat imprecisely and in part misleadingly been assumed that the lack of resources, particularly financial resources, makes vulnerable categories of people into mere recipients of assistance and control measures from political elites. Being placed in a vulnerable social position in one respect, however, does not necessarily mean that a person is poor in resources in all respects. A paucity of certain resources is not the same as social vulnerability or subordination, nor are these issues necessarily interrelated. Different from what is sometimes assumed, I shall argue that poverty and a disadvantaged situation do not necessarily lead to silence and passivity. The relationship between political elites and vulnerable categories of people may be regarded as a more variable and ambiguous.

A number of studies of welfare regimes have examined the roles of actors such as employer federations and trade unions, political parties and their voters (Korpi 1983, Kuhnle 1983, Esping-Andersen 1990, Kolberg (ed.) 1992, Leibfried and Pierson (eds.) 1995). However, prior studies have only to a limited extent attributed agency to the users of the welfare state's services. Hence the viewpoints, coping strategies and counter reactions from the target groups of welfare measures and services have often been neglected. The dynamic between the government representatives and target groups has only to a lesser extent been addressed or focused upon. As a consequence of the tendency to construct pictures of recipients and potential recipients of welfare services and measures as univocally passive objects, much of the earlier research has failed to grasp the dynamic between the providers of social services and service recipients. It is thus an important challenge for welfare-policy research to conceive of welfare beneficiaries and claimants and target groups as active parties that help to shape their own social conditions and life opportunities.

The study of the mobilisation efforts or efforts at constructing collective agency among vulnerable categories of people may be considered as a strategic focus for

analysing the participatory dimension of citizenship and the conditions for agency by target groups and users of welfare-state services and measures. In the liberal tradition, the concept of citizenship has been defined as the status of membership in a community and in terms of the rights and obligations associated with such membership. Scholars have constructed models of the changing combinations of rights and obligations, appropriated advantages and disadvantages, regulating access to different forms of social services, exposure to policy measures and participation, as in cross-national comparisons of such institutional arrangements and their distributional consequences. Similarly, Charles Tilly (1995) has defined citizenship as a tie or set of transactions between the individual and the state on grounds of an individual's categorical membership. Although not necessarily in opposition to this, there are reasons to emphasise that citizenship also has significant *symbolic aspects* which affect the possibilities of participating in society, to speak up for oneself, and to be considered worthy of holding opinions.

In the republican tradition, citizenship has been conceptualised as a question of social practice, societal commitments and participation. Arguably, at its core, democratic states presuppose free and equal citizens that voluntarily take part in political activity and communication and thus contribute to society as active citizens (Habermas 1994: 25). If we include this participatory dimension in studies of welfare-policy regimes, we may avoid depicting citizenship as an unequivocally passive phenomenon. Citizenship as status may be considered as defining opportunity structures for claimants, clients, users and beneficiaries of the welfare state to act upon. Citizenship as practice emphasises the actors' judgements, reactions, coping strategies and initiatives in the welfare-policy arena (Lister 1998). Analyses of policies aimed at involving and including the disadvantaged will then not only look at the attribution of rights and obligations, but also the distribution of power and authority. This concerns the opportunities for meaningful participation, citizen involvement and self-determination (Beresford 1988, Croft and Beresford 1989, 1992; Hobson 1999).

To simplify somewhat, we can distinguish between organised activities geared to meet the needs of *others* and activities geared to one's *own* situation and one's *own* needs when it comes to voluntary welfare-oriented activities. Frequently, organisation forms of the former type – the target group being others in need of assistance – are what is meant by “voluntary organisations” (Klausen and Selle [eds.] 1995, Kuhnle and Selle

[eds.] 1992; Lewis 1995; Lorentzen 1994; Wuthnow 1991). Knowledge about the latter type, *self-organisation*, and its welfare-policy potential, is more limited, tenuous and unsystematic.

Self-organised activities imply by definition a certain degree of autonomy on behalf of the category of people involved. But the self-organised activities may in certain cases even be initiated by or involve participation from actors not considered to belong to the pertinent category of people. Obviously this will be moderated versions of the ideal, typical self-organisation. Self-organisation may vary from local activities dependent on a few persons to well-established and nation-wide organisations, but have in common that the disadvantaged in different ways attempt to gain control over their own lives through collective efforts. The emerging self-organised initiatives, and their outside supporters, have emphasised demands for a ‘voice’, empowerment, self-control, and being recognised as partners in the design and implementation of policy measures. The activities may be characterised by different degrees of co-ordination and public articulation of those activities; a continuum between individual and more collective and institutionalised strategies.

*Self-organisation* refers to a variety of forms of “external” activities, addressing the government and greater society, as well as “internal” activities, to develop services for or mobilise other people in a similar situation or with the same status (people “in the same boat”). Activities may include:

- ⌘ Advocacy and consultation, to act as authorised representatives: communicate and formulate demands to the public authorities on behalf of others.
- ⌘ Peer support from more experienced category members: provide information and transfer knowledge to others in a similar situation or among “equals”.
- ⌘ Self-help groups: conversation therapy organised with or without professional advisers or experienced users.
- ⌘ Protest actions: e.g. demonstrations, rallies, squatting, street theatre etc.
- ⌘ Cultural innovations and measures: e.g. cafés, cultural centres, production and sale of newspapers, social meeting places.
- ⌘ Participation in consultative mechanisms: e.g. reacting to public documents circulated for consideration by bodies entitled to comments, as well as hearings, contact forums and institutionalised negotiations.
- ⌘ Representation of interests in acting boards and public committees who give advice to local and/or national government.
- ⌘ Management of or control with welfare services: e.g. employment services and rehabilitation centres, medical services, ombudsman offices.

This is not an exhaustive list of the possible activities, but may help to illustrate what kind of activities I am considering here. The activities will most likely depend on ideographic features and which actions the activists and organisation representatives would consider more appropriate as a response to their situation. Over time, the action repertoire of organisations among the disadvantaged is also likely to change and the emphasis is likely to differ as to what the activists consider the best means for achieving their goals. Activists may for different reasons make divergent judgements, change their opinion or alternate between viewpoints and practices. The repertoire of the organisations may also change over time as the activists have new experiences, fail or succeed in their efforts. Thus we are likely to find fluctuations in the action repertoire over time in organisations of a given category of disadvantaged people or within the same context.

## **Research objectives**

This dissertation seeks to improve our understanding of the agency on the part of the disadvantaged vis-à-vis the welfare state. By agency I refer to the actors' space for manoeuvring and possibilities of choice between different strategies. Agency can be conceived as an analytic dimension of action depending on the self-monitoring or self-reflexivity and strategisation of actors (Mouzelis 2000: 760-61, n.13).

More specifically the dissertation seeks to understand the concrete patterns of relationships the self-organisation efforts develop

- €# internally among the activists or participants,
- €# towards other members of the same category, and
- €# towards society at large, especially political elites and the mass media.

The main research objective has been to analyse under which conditions self-organisation may contribute to fuller citizenship among disadvantaged categories of people. A key task has therefore been to clarify what factors or mechanisms promote or hamper social mobilisation among the disadvantaged.

Two main issues connected to this run throughout the dissertation: One involves questions of how the social category is constituted and maintained. The second examines how members of the category mobilise symbolic and other resources or types

of capital they have available in the self-organisational efforts, and how they convert the symbolic resources into more concrete resources, such as members, outside supporters and financial support. These two issues are interrelated in that both affect the prospects that members of the disadvantaged social categories will manage to constitute themselves as masters of their own lives and take a subject position, or remain objects acted upon by others.

To answer the main question of under which conditions self-organisation may contribute to fuller citizenship, I have sought a step-wise evaluation of a number of connected and more isolated questions:

- €# *What do concepts such as marginality, poverty, social exclusion etc. imply? What are the more precise meanings that have been attributed to them, which perspectives and types of accounts can they be connected to?*
- €# *Which conditions hamper and further constitution and maintenance of such organisational systems? What are favourable conditions for self-organisation among the disadvantaged? To what extent is self-organisation associated with community among the participants? Which goals and activities do they start out with? Do the activities change during the life-course of the organisation? Does a limited time-perspective on their individual life-situations hamper participation in such organisations?*
- €# *To what extent do they succeed in presenting alternative images of the category in the public sphere? Are the categories of the disadvantaged defined by their relationship to the government, or can there be opportunities for self-definition, independent of the help and control measures presented by the political and administrative elites?*
- €# *How autonomous does the self-organisation have to be? What kind of relations develop between sympathetic supporters and the disadvantaged? What are the possibilities for participation in the self-organisational efforts on the part of better-positioned supporters? Is the self-organisation associated with tensions between the disadvantaged and better-positioned supporters? Can participation from such supporters limit the relative advantages of self-organisation?*
- €# *Will the organisations remain at the outside of the established channels for policy discussions and design, or will they be involved in these channels and thus “included”? Or will they end up in an ambiguous position, partly inside, partly outside the politico-administrative system?*

To answer these questions I shall proceed as follows: In the next chapter I account in more detail for the welfare policy and empirical context of the self-organisational

efforts. I will further substantiate the practical policy relevance of the self-organisational attempts among the disadvantaged. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical perspectives that have served as the inspiration for the analyses. Chapter 4 gives the reasons for my choice of research design. Together these chapters constitute the introduction to the analysis of the empirical cases.

I have not attempted to account for all the substantial features of the organisational efforts. Rather the analysis has been organised around the *relations* of concern to the self-organisational efforts that we can analytically distinguish from each other. Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship between the different organisational efforts among Travellers and claimants. Chapters 6 to 9 focus on the relationship between the organisation representatives, the more passive and potential users or members, and the organisational efforts as such. Indirectly, Chapters 5 to 9 also elucidate their relationship to the greater society, especially the political elites and the mass media, the way this was reflected in the relations among themselves. Chapter 10 turns to the direct relationship between the organisation representatives and the social and political elites. Chapter 11 focuses on the relationship between the organisations and the mass media as a third party in making the disadvantaged visible and efforts to seek recognition. For each of the chapters I have identified the mechanisms that tend to affect this dimension of the self-organisational efforts. A final and more conclusive discussion of agency on the part of the disadvantaged is provided in Chapter 12. The last chapter also briefly examines some implications for public welfare-policy.

## **Welfare-policy contexts of the attempts at self-organisation**

This chapter examines the welfare-policy contexts of the self-organisation among the disadvantaged. In addition to obvious “bottom-up” considerations, there are more technocratic or “top-down” reasons why self-organisation among the disadvantaged has emerged as a phenomenon of significance for practical welfare policy. In this chapter I focus on the concerns among Western European policy makers, and discuss the substantial reasons for comparing the self-organisation attempts among Travellers and social-security claimants. I argue that indirectly, our focus on the self-organisation attempts among Travellers and social-security claimants in their context will illuminate some of the criteria for being endowed full citizenship in Norway.

### **Steering problems and problems of democracy**

A number of Western European countries are now seeking genuinely new measures which may enhance integration or inclusion of disadvantaged sections of the population. Politicians and planners in the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and their member states are examining existing welfare policies to ascertain whether more appropriate and up-to-date programmes, organisation and provision of welfare can be designed. The desire to mobilise as many citizens as possible for active and meaningful participation in society has received particular attention. In the on-going European debate, or more precisely the public and official meaning production and information exchange, the aim is often called “*active citizenship*” (Chanan 1997; Chanan, West, Garrat and Humm 1999; European Foundation 1993).

There is a growing concern that Western European welfare states are now facing greater challenges than key decision makers can handle through existing welfare-policy programmes, regulations and steering mechanisms (Conway 1998, OECD 1996). With the growing demands for flexibility and reorganisation in working life in Western

European countries, new temporary lifestyles and more transient and individualised family forms, more people now require support from the welfare state during phases of transition (Brückner 1995, Leisering and Walker (Eds.) 1998, Leisering and Leibfried 1999). At the same time, a growing proportion of the population in many countries is slipping into permanent economic inactivity and becoming long-term benefit recipients, for example due to disabilities or age through early retirement or through the general ageing of the population. Thus a larger segment of the population appears to be under the genuine risk of vulnerability and unpredictability.

Because of this uncertainty and the trend towards an overloading of public-control mechanisms and cash-benefit schemes, both the EU and national governments are now experimenting with supplementary and alternative welfare-policy strategies to design more sustainable schemes for social protection. One area of focus is the possibility of mobilising new actors, stimulating alternative welfare producers and finding innovative measures. This means not least the possibility of strengthening the involvement of ‘claimants’, ‘customers’, ‘clients’ and ‘users’ of welfare-state services and measures. Important new measures include striving for greater user involvement, supporting self-reliance activities and encouraging more systematic participation by users of welfare-state services in advisory bodies, policy consultation groups and negotiating systems. Such participation could be individual, on the basis of small groups, or more collective, through co-ordinated and negotiated forms of identity and interest representation. Examples of this may include individual schedules to ensure progress in treatment and agreements on individual action plans for job applicants and people on vocational rehabilitation to ensure regular contact and follow-up. Other possible channels are focus groups and surveys among the users to evaluate services and measures, and self-organisation. Activities may be based on initiatives from “below”, from single individuals among the disadvantaged, or from “above”, coming from government representatives and professional helpers as part of experiments with new welfare-policy strategies. Common to these alternatives is the focus on mobilising new actors, resources and means in order to promote cohesion and integration.

The concern among European policy makers has its counterpart in sociology: Several scholars who have examined theories of modernity have pointed to processes of *individualisation* as a major feature in ‘information society’, ‘risk society’ or ‘reflexive modernity’. The individualisation processes are not new but have escalated. The



German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1994 [1986], especially 87-90) has argued that individualisation to greater extent than before impedes the experience of a collective fate. People are increasingly released from the social forms of industrial society. A move in this direction includes the demise of traditions, and the advent of social mobility through education, destandardisation of labour, geographic mobility demanded by the labour market, flexible working hours, increased divorce rate and repartnering. Individualisation implies freedom, but also makes one more vulnerable and prone to search for personal and social identity. An individual has the opportunity to shape his or her life to an increasing extent, but is also forced to make choices. People are under pressure to direct, give meaning and content to their own lives. Each person is under increasing pressure to choose, either by his or her action or non-action. Beck argued that the individualisation processes are followed by the development of new commonalities, citizen's groups, self-organisation and new social movements; "sub-politics" or politics outside the political parties and institutions of representational democracy that are formed in relation to the risk situations of reflexive modernity.

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) has made a similar diagnosis: Questions of lifestyle choices, the search for personal meaning and self-expression, being able to control one's circumstances and appropriation of a self-identity have become more pressing in 'high modernity': the fragmentation of experience, diversification of contexts of interaction, emergence of more specialised institutions and expert knowledge, and the shifting experience of everyday life. This is reflected in the emergence of self-help groups, self-help manuals and guides to self-development. On a more collective level we see efforts at revitalising vanished traditions and inventing new ones, as well as efforts at "collective reappropriation of institutionally repressed areas of life" through new social movements (ibid. 207).

Reorganisation of welfare policy and challenges to the existing models of citizenship are associated with problems of democracy and power. Resources and means to control the new societal conditions are not only of concern to policy makers and leaders, as seen from "above" or the policy makers' point of view. The question is also whether the individual citizen has the opportunity and the resources or capital to take a subject position in his or her own life, shape his or her own life chances, creating meaning and continuity, and controlling and maintaining one's own dignity, as seen from "below" or the individual citizen's point of view. A disempowered position may

imply that one does not control one's own life and reputation. The struggle for recognition, the search for moral redress and to be recognised as autonomous and responsible subjects, to be given information about and be listened to in the decision-making process, may be options in a person's efforts to resist and escape a disempowered position (Gullestad 2000, Hobson 2000).

### **Citizenship, inclusion and exclusion**

In his now classic essay *Citizenship and Social Class*, T. H. Marshall (1965 [1949]: 71-134) distinguished between *civil*, *political* and *social* aspects of citizenship. Participatory and material rights were added to the earlier protection of individual autonomy against state intervention. This included protection of private property, freedom of speech and association, the right to vote, the minimum wage, regulated working hours and social security. The legal, political and welfare-state institutions were constructed as mechanisms for integrating the individual citizen in the greater society. The institutions included the courts of justice, the parliament, local government, education and social services.

We may read T. H. Marshall as an investigation of societal inclusion, regarding society as a large, inclusionary system (ibid. 101, 106). Citizenship can be regarded as inclusionary social institutions, codifying societal membership as well as a contractual relationships between the individual citizen, groups and categories of citizens and society at large. Inclusion or incorporation of new categories of people as full citizens by conferring equal rights and duties, as well as opportunities for participation, can be regarded as a civilisation process. More people are considered on an equal level or as 'gentlemen' and attributed the same level of autonomy. "Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (ibid. 92).

The duality of rights and duties implies that Marshall's notion of citizenship has both an individual and a collective aspect. The welfare of the individual and the community had to be balanced. It was the responsibility of the state to harmonise the two. The rights codified the status of the individual citizen or a social category of

citizens in society. An individual was not a full citizen if he or she was excluded from one or more of these rights. The rights were legally enforceable, which was not the case with all the duties associated with citizenship. While there have been legal duties to pay taxes, take an education and serve military service, some duties have been in an intermediate position; the duty to work may have been enforceable for those claiming cash benefits, as a condition for the benefit, but not for others. Some had the nature of moral or civic virtues; to take care of those closest to you, keep updated about society, participate in general elections and, for the affluent and better-off citizens, to work for the benefit of the disadvantaged and underprivileged and participate in charitable and voluntary work (*noblesse oblige*). In general, these have been moral duties to contribute to what has been perceived as the common good and the best for society as a whole.

Marshall's conceptualisation of citizenship is reflected in his extensive occupation with education as an aspect of social citizenship. The rights dimension is not so much the right of children to attend school as the right of adults to have received elementary education so that they can function as full citizens and make use of their other citizenship rights. Through education, one becomes able to exercise one's civil and political rights. Education is not only a right; it is also a duty. According to Marshall (1965: 71ff., 257ff.), the purpose of education is not only, or even primarily, to satisfy individual needs. Society needs educated workers to maximise the welfare of the community. The duration and content of compulsory education has changed as society's needs have changed. Citizenship operates as an instrument of social stratification by allocating people in occupational groups. In part, people are categorised in working life according to their achievements in the educational system.

Bearing in mind both the liberal and republican aspects of citizenship, Marshall understood citizenship in terms of both rights *and* power. Endowment of full citizenship should furnish a sense of community membership and common heritage, but also material enjoyment. "By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to standards prevailing in the society" (ibid. 78). His ambiguity with respect to the participatory dimension was reflected in his remarks on the emergence of trade unionism and recognition of the right of collective bargaining since the late nineteenth century. Civil rights in industrial society were used collectively in the economic and political system to improve social-

citizenship rights. On the one hand, industrial citizenship facilitated opportunities for pursuing the self-interests of individuals and groups of workers and more bounded loyalty and community membership with co-workers rather than the nation state. On the other hand, you have a moral duty not only to have a job and hold it, but to work hard and put your heart into it.

Citizenship rights coincided with the rise of capitalism in the early nineteenth century. Whereas capitalism created inequality, citizenship at the same time made individuals more equal. This emerged as opposing principles; the value of egalitarian society and meritocracy. Basic human equality associated with the concept of full membership in a community was combined with inequality in the allocation of resources in the economic system. In feudal societies, citizenship had been the privilege of the elites. Modern society tried to combine two apparently contradictory principles. How could they grow in the same soil? Marshall argued that the apparent inconsistencies are in fact a source of stability, achieved through a compromise. To some extent he appears to argue that the two allocation principles could be complementary, although he does not rule out the possibility of conflicts between the two.

Marshall argued that the poor law did not really represent an attack on what he called the 'class system'. This referred to the stratification system of wage, fortune and prestige associated with occupational statuses rather than property or ownership as such. Poor relief made the stratification system less vulnerable to attack by alleviating its less defensible consequences. Minimum social rights abated the nuisance of poverty without disturbing the pattern of inequality. The social-security system promoted relief of destitution and eradication of vagrancy. The poor law was also an aid to capitalism, as it relieved industry of social responsibilities outside the contract of employment. The state guaranteed a minimum supply of certain essential goods and services, including medical supplies, shelter, education and/or a minimum income. Inequalities at the bottom of the scale were ironed out without altering the stratification system.

The nineteenth century poor law did not see claims on social-security benefits as an integral part of the citizens' rights but rather as an alternative to them. The stigma associated with receiving social-security benefits, especially means-tested social assistance, symbolises the social gap between citizens and social-security recipients. Social-security benefits are conferred on the condition that personal freedom or

autonomy is relinquished. The extent of this depends on whether the rights are stronger or weaker. The lives and habits of the poor are conceived of as requiring intervention; they are in need of help and are objects of scrutiny. The benefits are offered as alternatives to the rights of citizenship rather than as additions to them. Social security is to a greater or lesser extent divorced from the status of citizenship. Protection or relief from market forces is conferred in exchange for one's citizenship status.

Following this line of thought, Lewis Coser (1965) argued that a person's acceptance of assistance represents his or her declassification from the status of citizenship. The assistance is forthcoming only at the price of a degradation of the person who is so assigned. The expression of this declassification is that the social-security recipients are denied the fundamental right to conceal parts of their lives from public scrutiny. They become objects of scrutiny by social workers and other investigators. It is the job of welfare functionaries to oversee the conduct of those who require assistance (Mazta 1971: 641-644). The poor are assigned a low status, as they by definition cannot contribute to society themselves. The belief that they are non-contributors is incorporated in the relief system.

Coser (ibid.) argued that the poor can only be fully integrated if they are offered the opportunity to give. Here he referred to the involvement of non-professionals recruited among the poor in community-development programs, self-help groups and social movements. Reciprocal processes of mutual aid among peers would represent fuller citizenship than unilateral dependency on professional welfare functionaries, patronage and charity. He argued that the task is to create valued status positions for those who were formerly passive recipients of assistance. If the claimants become active partners in a joint undertaking of mutual aid, this would help eliminate the despised status of being a receiver of assistance. When the poor begin to react actively and refuse to continue to be passive recipients of aid, this could be conceived as an avenue of activation. This would then promote relations of interdependence rather than unilateral dependency among the social-security recipients, and between the recipients and greater society.

Compared to Coser, Marshall appeared to be more concerned about the needs of society as a whole or the *other* community members. Marshall argued that if social-security systems are designed to meet individual needs, some discretion is needed. Furthermore, he asserted, if you concede to a poor person an absolute right to relief, the

question arises how to deny him or her the right to become poor if he or she so wishes (Marshall 1981: 90). All in all, he appeared to express an ambiguous perspective on the welfare state. His concern about the moral duties connected to citizenship seems to have been more prevalent than sometimes suggested when only his three types of rights are focused upon. It appears that he was not concerned as much with the redistribution of resources or the modification of the stratification system as he was with the constitution of basic minimum guarantees to everyone as a subsidiary system that would complement market mechanisms.

A large industry has developed around criticism of Marshall's essay on social class and citizenship and there have been numerous attempts to expand and revise his scheme (Jæger 2000, Steenberg [Ed.] 1994, Turner 1990). Many critics appear to have read his essay only as a historical account of the emergence of the three institutions. Thus they have pointed to shortcomings in his historical account rather than finding inspiration in applying his general approach to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in society.

An example of the later is the work of political scientist Helga Hernes (1988). She identified three research questions connected to the participatory aspects of citizenship: Who participates? What are the rights and duties associated with participation? Which values and resources are institutionalised, defended and distributed by the public authorities? Hernes argued that Scandinavian welfare states saw the individual as an active subject that required individual action. A central social-democratic policy assumption was that only 'full employment' and economic growth could defend generous benefits and services. Her examples were particularly connected to the position of women within the Scandinavian welfare states:

Social democratic hegemony after the Second World War concentrated its attention on the worker. Your status and rights, identities and participation patterns were determined by your ties to the labour market as well as associations and corporate structures which had developed around these ties (the "social partners"). Male, industrial trade union members were the prototypical social democratic citizens. In contrast, housewives, women who did not have paid 'work' or were on leave to take care of children, and single mothers dependent on social-security benefits, were objects of concern because they represented burdens on the public purse. If some of them had paid work, they were seen as threatening the work moral and solidarity among their co-

workers. This was associated with segmented citizenship patterns, a power bias in participation according to gender and consequential for political democracy. Increasingly, gender struggles took place inside the corporate structure and along sector lines, as women were more often employed in the public sector and the welfare-state professions.

In theories that assumed an adversary relation to the state, the individual's capacity to act as a subject and full citizen had been construed as appearing in *other* areas, the family, market or civil society. The state had been seen as limiting or oppressing individual freedom and autonomy and participation as citizens. Hernes argued that such perspectives ignored the citizen aspect of the client, consumer and worker role. An individual was not univocally "pacified", "clientified" or "colonised" by the state. Such theories appeared to have been developed from Anglo-Saxon and Continental European experience that did not apply to the Scandinavian countries. At least potentially, the welfare state could foster citizen competence by providing material and participatory rights:

"In the light of the Scandinavian historical developments one must at least consider the possibility of political identity formation also within the legal-administrative system. Legal and political reforms have in some ways developed in such a way that they have mobilized rather than distanced individuals from the system. Clients of the system have become more active in negotiating both the content and the forms of the delivery of their entitlements, which are considered an integral part of welfare state citizenship" (ibid. 212).

Potentially participatory rights furnished citizen competence, a feeling of self-worth and belonging, and counteracted "clientification" and welfare-state paternalism. The welfare state could promote or inhibit the capacity of citizens to act and influenced the conditions under which they could pursue their own interest and agendas and form their own future life plans.

This leads to a more benign view of the state. In some cases this will be a counterfactual development pattern or unfinished project. Whether individual autonomy has been sufficiently protected in the Scandinavian system, which sets such a high premium on participation, remains an open question. For a long time, there has been greater emphasis on meeting collective perceived needs and guaranteeing citizens certain standards of material well-being than on extending individual autonomy. Securing material rights and entitlements for the population as a whole has been given more priority than protecting individual autonomy. Following Hernes (ibid.) one could

argue that participatory rights have been so strongly focused on problems, interests, claims and demands tied to working life that other aspects of our public identities, such as consumer, cultural and client interests, have not been included or absorbed in the politico-representative system. At the same time it seems to have taken place some changes in Norway in this regard during the 1990's. More emphasis has been attributed to a more limited and contractual relationship between the state and the citizens. For instance it has been suggested that pupils and patients should be equipped with vouchers. If they are dissatisfied with the services they should be able to turn to an alternative public provider, as in a quasi-market. In this perspective the citizen is conceptualised as a rational consumer and the state is modelled as an enterprise. This development trend seems to have been more limited in Norway than in some other Scandinavian countries.

### **Activation from above, participation from below**

It has been suggested from various quarters that income maintenance schemes, such as a basic transfer to all citizens, independent of economic standing, a guaranteed minimum income or a citizens' salary paid over one's life span, should be introduced. It has been assumed that in this way the economic risk and administrative costs of means-tested social assistance could be reduced, and disincentives to participate in the regular labour market could be avoided (Atkinson 1995, Offe 1996, Parijs 1995). The proposals appear, however, to some degree to counteract several of the measures that have been introduced in a number of Western European countries during the last decade. For various reasons, there has been resistance against giving up participation in paid work both as a norm and means to increased exchange value on the part of the nation state and integration of disadvantaged sections of the population in the greater society (Applebaum 1992, Gorz 1994; Wolski-Prenger and Rothardt 1996: 43-44, 79-80). At the same time, many have questioned whether it is possible to organise the public economy so as to provide paid work for everyone, for instance due to super-national legislation to promote the free flow of commodities, services and labour ("globalisation of the economy"), or technological innovations (Beck 2000, Hinrichs 1999).

Although there is no absolute limit on which and how many activities can qualify and become institutionalised as income-providing work, differences in skills and



productivity rates appear to hamper redistribution of the available paid work, for instance through changes in working hours. The decreasing de facto retirement age due to early retirement and transfer to disability benefits or the reduced use of overtime appear not to provide job-opportunities for others, for instance for younger people out of work (Esping-Andersen 1999). It should therefore be of significance to develop forms of financial support and measures that both provide a reasonable level of safety and predictability, and at the same time stimulate participation, whether in the regular labour market or in other arenas.

Movements towards the European monetary union and further possible deregulation of the labour market have been perceived as threats to the future of social entitlements in the integrated European market. Many fear that the monetary union and globalisation of the economy will undermine social-security schemes, and this has also been perceived as an assault on the public sector and public healthcare. In practice, internal difficulties in funding social provision appear to be equally or more important, for example due to productivity stagnation and ageing populations (Pierson 1998). For instance, despite the fact that Norway has increasingly improved her solvency, welfare-policy schemes and measures have been under reconstruction. The main argument has been that oil revenues will eventually decline so that the social-security schemes will have to be modified to make them more sustainable and ensure economic growth in other sectors of 'post-industrial society'.

Governmental bodies, both on the national and the supra-national levels, have been troubled by the assumed low level of social and cultural participation on the part of recipients of income-maintenance benefits. These bodies fear that the benefit schemes are too generous and weakly controlled; there should be an imbalance between the benefit level and the wage level one is able to achieve in the labour market. This overgenerosity has been construed as representing a financial disincentive to entering the job market and exiting benefit schemes. There has been an increase in the emphasis on the obligations connected with citizenship in Western European countries and calls for a renewed social contract between individual citizens and greater society, a refurbishing of the 'Protestant work ethic'.

Many actors have seen a need for modernisation of the welfare state and redesign of the welfare schemes to make them more sustainable and to promote continued economic growth in a more globalised economy. Active citizenship has been

described as the obligation of citizens to participate in the regular labour market, or possibly in measures and assistance programs to become self-sufficient in return for social protection (“no rights without responsibilities”, Giddens 1998). In a number of European countries, sanctions have been introduced against those unwilling to participate in government-initiated activation measures. Government agencies have also argued that requirements to participate in measures are effective ‘work tests’ and ways of keeping track of the movements of people out of work, in addition to combating the abuse of cash benefits (Kautto *et al.* [Eds.] 2001).

The new emphasis on obligations has fuelled the criticism of an authoritarian streak in recent European welfare policy. Ralph Dahrendorf (1999) has argued that there has been a lack of sufficient sensitivity with respect to fundamental values of freedom and the protection of personal integrity: “The key issue confronting all European countries today is how to create sustainable welfare states and economic growth in a global market while not sacrificing the basic cohesion of their societies or the institutions that guarantee liberty” (ibid. 14). I take this to mean that Dahrendorf positioned himself within a tradition in which societal cohesion has been connected to social rights and security as codification of social commitments. This implies that society is not reduced to a market, in line with T. H. Marshall’s reasoning. Furthermore, there has been concern that the new emphasis on obligations would not sufficiently protect individual autonomy and recognition of the fact that most people are capable of making sound decisions about their own lives, allowing for flexibility and pluralism and avoiding attempts at forced forms of integration.

Arguably, a vibrant democracy depends on citizens who do not only conceive of themselves as passive consumers or “customers”, but who are willing to be co-responsible and active partners in the development and maintenance of their society. On the other hand, delegating the management of social-assistance services to users’ organisations has to some degree been perceived as and associated with “privatisation” and rejection of public responsibility. Some actors have considered this to be incompatible with the efforts to maintain and develop universal services, available to everyone, independent of personal economic standing, or at odds with public responsibility for the assistance services and accountability for public spending.

Ulrich Beck (1998, 1999) has emphasised the potential self-organised activities and participation in other arenas than the regular labour market may represent when it

comes to vitalising participatory democracy. More generally, one can imagine a number of activities that could serve in part as *alternatives* and in part as *transition* stages to or from participation in the mainstream labour market. Such activities at the outskirts of the mainstream labour market could include voluntary work, self-help and self-organisation. The initiatives may come from “below”, from single individuals and entrepreneurs among the disadvantaged, or from “above”, as part of experiments with new welfare-policy strategies on the part of the public authorities. In both cases, mobilising new actors, resources and means is crucial. Seen from the point of view of disadvantaged groups, this may include efforts to compensate for limits and shortcomings of the public assistance service or articulate needs and interests perceived as not sufficiently covered or taken into consideration. As seen from the point of view of the public authorities, such activities could be seen as a possibility to involve a larger proportion of the recipients of assistance in specific sub-sections, in given arenas, and/or in society as a whole. Pertinent means applied by governments could include efforts to accommodate or facilitate opportunities for increased involvement by individual users, support to self-help activities and more committed forms of participation by representatives of the users of welfare-state services through consultative mechanisms and institutionalised negotiations. Such means have been tried on a number of institutional levels.

A clear tendency in recent years is that the Directorate General (DG) for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission has been given a more prominent role at a trans-national level. During the last 10-15 years, the DG has provided significant financial support to different user organisations, other voluntary associations and non-governmental organisations (“Social NGOs”). Fairly intensive systems for contact and consultations with representatives and participants have been established in trans-national forums such as the European Anti-Poverty Network, the European Disability Forum, Social Policy Forum and Platform of European Social NGOs. It appears as if the European Commission in this regard has gone further than many of the member states. Through extensive subsidies and formalised contact, the commission has contributed to easing the work performed by the user organisations to advocate the interests and views of their members. In the next instance, the associations that have in this way been facilitated and constituted on the European level have

performed extensive campaigns and lobbying within and towards the EU system (Lahusen 1999).

By facilitating users' associations, the Commission has probably given the EU greater legitimacy among the user groups, possibly also in the general population ("Citizens' Europe"). At the same time, the Commission may have obtained allies with high legitimacy in the struggles with those members more reluctant to introduce new and more demanding standards, or to set more ambitious objectives for services and benefits. Such ambitions have to some degree been underpinned by the emphasis on "EU citizenship" in the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), especially Article 13, which is against different forms of negative discrimination. The trans-national user organisations were most active in their efforts to ensure that the article was included in the Amsterdam Treaty.

There is reason to believe that the amount and type of support user organisations receive from the government of each member state, the forms of consultative mechanisms and the opportunities for dissemination and contact that have been institutionalised vary a great deal, including whether this is given on the central or local level. Hence, user organisations may in some respect have a greater influence on the European level than on the national level. This could lead to a change in the organisational work in the direction of a European rather than national level, and in some countries lead to a larger democratic deficit and less holistic contact between the public authorities and the users on the national rather than the European level.

## **Multiculturalism**

In Western Europe, more attention has been paid in recent years to *cultural citizenship* as a fourth dimension, adding to the three outlined by T. H. Marshall (Pakulski 1997, Turner 1994). Recognition of cultural diversity within the nation state has often been referred to as 'multiculturalism'. Attribution of cultural rights has been considered a possibility for democratising modern culture. In some respects, attribution of this type of right differs from the distribution of the former three dimensions which were based on principles of equality and inclusion on the basis of universal principles, in the sense that they applied equally to all people who were conferred full citizenship. In such cases, the state would be difference-blind and egalitarian, neutral and non-

discriminatory. In comparison, attributing cultural rights has been based on principles of differential treatment rather than difference-blindness. This differs from ‘affirmative action’, such as quota programs to compensate for a disadvantaged position in a transition phase before one can return to difference-blindness. It rather refers to a sustained policy to protect and foster differences in language, tradition, belief, religion and lifestyle – in short a “politics of difference”. The new tendency to attribute cultural rights and cherish ‘multiculturalism’ assumes that we not only recognise what makes us all alike but also what makes us different. This diverts from the idea of equality to the law, as some categories of people will be attributed rights not conferred to others, for instance self-government, different holidays or days of rest. At the same time, this is based on the principle of universal equality; that we are different but of equal worth.

Charles Taylor (1994 [1992]) has argued in favour of a *politics of recognition*: One should not only let cultures survive, but also acknowledge their worth by actively supporting and protecting them. “Difference-blindness” would in practice misconstrue or underestimate the centrality of dialogue in human life. Identity is shaped by recognition, mis-recognition and non-recognition, developed and maintained through reciprocation. We are vulnerable to the recognition given or withheld by ‘significant others’, not only in the private, but also in the public sphere. Official policies will be consequential for whether they promote pride and dignity or self-depreciation and self-hatred on the part of social categories of people.

Following Taylor’s argument (ibid.), we may contend that a politics of recognition would be necessary to provide equal dignity to members of different communities within or across the boundaries of the nation state. We may consider a development in this direction as a civilisation process in the realm of culture by way of equal recognition and rejection of second-class citizenship. Cultural rights could be construed as a basis for forming and defining one’s own identity and having this recognised and approved by others. In comparison, “difference-blindness”, passive non-interference and blunt reference to the virtues of “free speech” would imply non-recognition of other people’s identities and cultures, ignore cultural diversity and risk reflecting or supporting one dominant or hegemonic culture, associated with assimilation or exclusion and segregation.

The Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have in the 1990s recommended various measures and minimum

standards to meet recently recognised needs and attributed cultural rights to *national minorities* (Council of Europe 1995, OSCE 1998a and b). Additionally, several European initiatives against negative discrimination have been introduced. The European Commission has initiated actions and campaigns to combat ‘racism’. It has sought to introduce regulations and recommendations to prevent exclusion from or to limit opportunities for participation on the part of EU citizens. Such limitations could be defining some categories of citizens as ineligible, unqualified or inferior, and thus constituting social clubs, closing the ranks, keeping privileges to oneself and denying access along lines of ethnicity, ‘race’, religion, belief, disability, gender, age or sexual orientation (European Commission 2000).

Those sceptical to this trend have feared that social cohesion will not prevail with greater diversity. The integrated society has been pictured as a tightly bound unitary whole of people subscribing to the same values and having the same lifestyle, beliefs, language and traditions. From this perspective, rights-oriented liberalism and focus on individual freedom, moral autonomy and human dignity, have been construed as too abstract and atomistic, allegedly focusing only on negative freedom and universalism devoid of content, rather than integration through substantial and shared norms. According to this view, common values and norms and lifestyle are preconditions for the integration of society. Membership should be based on the same culture, assuming that ‘cultures’ are holistic and united wholes.

Such views may be seen as an expression of “cultural” or “symbolic racism”. They appear to be based on constructions of ‘Otherness’ rather than attribution of inferiority, and are justified on cultural rather than biological grounds. Here co-existing cultures are considered irreconcilable and it is assumed that social categories with very different cultures should live apart to avoid social conflicts or “clashes of cultures”. In its ideal typical form, one does not claim that one culture is better than the other, but that it is incompatible with another one. Homogeneity is preferred to diversity. In comparison, biological racism, previously given a scientific gloss by numerous scholars, has been used to justify colonial domination and the eradication of cultures. Today, biological racism has to a large extent been discredited and rejected as an illegitimate expression of exclusion and domination. Cultural racism would appear as a less overt attempt at seeking cultural purity, without the use of physical violence. Although conceptualisation of cultural fundamentalism as a variant of racism has been criticised

for ignoring qualitative differences from the biological forms of racism, there are advantages in looking at the two phenomena as related. In this perspective, both cultural and biological forms of racism are seen as versions of official policy, politics of inclusion and exclusion, rather than expressions of individual prejudices (Gullestad 2000, Touraine 2000: 116-17).

In contrast, the “Taylorite” form of multiculturalism has emphasised integration through consent to universal values (equal dignity and mutual recognition) and protection of coexisting but separate cultures (“meetings between cultures”). In both cases the model of the nation state has been one united by shared values and beliefs. But the “Taylorite” model of society has emphasised integration through universalistic values rather than maintenance and defence of particularistic traditions, cultural dominance or even rejection of everything that is perceived as foreign by the social and political elites.

### **Norway as laboratory**

In a Norwegian context we could expect the desire to be “like all other people” and play down and under-communicate social and cultural differences to be particularly strong. Norway has been characterised by relatively modest affluence as well as poverty, and a more homogenous population (Ringen 1999). Many observers have emphasised the relative homogeneity of the Norwegian population, but also the strongly stated egalitarianism. It has been legitimate to earn money, but affluence has for a long time been supposed not to be too visible. Class and status differences have been smaller than in many other Western European countries but also less legitimate to discuss. For instance, different from some other Scandinavian countries Norway has not had an officially recognised aristocracy since the early 19th century. Arguably, visible differences in wealth may have become more legitimate the last ten to fifteen years.

The state has played a central role in regulating the lives of individual citizens. The demands presented to people out of work or with loose links to the regular labour market, disabled people, single parents and ethnic minorities can be regarded in connection to the heavy emphasis in Norway on central planning and the facilitation of services. Mutual dependence between state and citizen has been considered a social good and preferable to private forms of dependency; between male breadwinner and

wife, worker and factory owner, the poor and social NGOs or charities. This has been associated with a widely accepted benign view of the welfare state as provider of health services, education, social security, assistance and advice. Assistance for the poor has been justified on the grounds that it is in the best interests of the individual and efforts to improve his or her life chances *and* in the interests of society as a whole. It has often been argued that welfare policy has had this dual purpose and that the interests of the individual and society were alike.

According to the Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (1992), the assumption that one needs to be similar to be of equal value has been especially emphasised in Norway, where it has been formative in the development of social ties. Nonetheless, this has not resulted in submission of the individual to the collective. Conformity has rather been combined with a strong emphasis on individualism; and the idea of being independent of others and self-sufficient has been valued. Ethnically, the population has been relatively homogenous. Perhaps the smaller differences have also been attributed larger significance because of the relative homogeneity. Nonetheless, there have been significant cultural and lifestyle differences between the geographic regions. Status differences and hierarchy have been maintained by emphasising equality in social interaction, avoidance of conflicts and distance from and rejection of people who are considered different.

In a seminal case study of interaction patterns among blue-collar workers at a cellulose factory in Norway, Lysgaard (1985 [1961]) reported how sameness functioned as a pre-condition for in-group ties and inclusion at the workplace. This illustrated an important aspect of the informal basis for the labour movement, institutionalised in the Norwegian Labour Party (*Det norske Arbeiderparti*) and LO, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (*Landsorganisasjonen*). Equality as similarity structured a protective community among subordinated employees against management, including superior employees, such as seniors, officials and foremen. The subordinated workers emphasised equality in status despite differences in the work they performed. Social ties and identification presupposed equality in status; nobody should push oneself forward and management should treat everybody equally. A subordinated status prevented extensive social interaction with superiors. It was conceived as difficult to combine respect with informal and relaxed interaction with one's superiors. The interviewees felt uneasy about friendship among employees and employers, and informal interaction



between superiors and inferiors was conceived as “unnatural”. One’s own ambitions could easily be interpreted as pretending to stand *above* other people.

Describing the conformity pressure as experienced by a person who did not live up to the normative expectations, the novelist Axel Sandemose (1936 [1933]: 77-78) outlined “The Law of Jante”:

1. Thou shalt not believe thou art something.
2. Thou shalt not believe thou art as good as we.
3. Thou shalt not believe thou art more wise than we.
4. Thou shalt not fancy thyself better than we.
5. Thou shalt not believe thou knowest more than we.
6. Thou shalt not believe thou art greater than we.
7. Thou shalt not believe thou amountest to anything.
8. Thou shalt not laugh at us.
9. Thou shalt not believe that anyone is concerned with thee.
10. Thou shalt not believe thou canst teach us anything.

The idea of a homogenous nation has been a popular myth among Norwegians. As a myth it has had a mixture of reality and fiction, been true and untrue, and has structured both social action and the perception of the social world. The myth of homogeneity appears to have promoted mis-recognition of differences in lifestyle, belief, language and culture within the nation. The official picture of the nation, the normative standards and lifestyles given voice and form in public, appears to have been a contradiction to the actual lives, visions, perspective and values of many Norwegians. The under-communication or mis-recognition of differences has run the risk of enforcing normative standards assumed to be shared by everybody on the people, a kind of forced integration.

The Norwegian welfare regime as it came to be known during the post World War II era has been characterised by equality as a political ideal, not only when it comes to wages, social-security benefits and employment but also in culture, lifestyle, language and religion. Everybody was supposed to have not only equal life chances but also hold the same normative standards of living, and equality in the standards of living should preferably also appear as sameness in lifestyle. Equality, unity and homogeneity have been stated goals for education, culture and politics. Society has tended to be conceived of as a moral totality of norms everybody subscribes to and shares responsibility for, rather than a model of society as a more or less coincidental result of competition among equals, which seems to have been prevalent in the United States, or

conflicting social classes, which appears to have been a more outspoken and generally accepted view in the United Kingdom.

Recently public attention has centred on the former social policies, especially the use of involuntary sterilisation in social planning and development of the Scandinavian welfare regimes (Broberg and Roll-Hansen 1996, Freedman 1997, Zaremba 1999). This has challenged our conceptualisation of the welfare state as benevolent helping services facilitating improved life chances and quality.

From 1930 to 1960, Norwegian policy makers supported the idea of scientifically based social planning. There was broad support for a mild form of eugenics in the Norwegian parliament. A sterilisation law was introduced in 1934 as part of the general program for integrating society and remained in force until 1977. Their concern for the interests and future of society appeared to be more profound than the emphasis on individual rights against state intervention. The law provided for sterilisation, with the consent of a guardian or corresponding authority, if the patient was found to be incapable of deciding on the operation, motivated by a consideration for the possible future offspring, either because the parent was considered unfit to take care of the child or would expose the child to an alleged miserable and immoral lifestyle, or due to the likelihood of a hereditary disease being passed on to the child (Broberg and Roll-Hansen 1996).

In most social-policy areas, the state expanded its responsibility after 1935, private initiatives were gradually taken over by the state and the social-liberal state became a welfare state (NOU 1988: 17; Seip 1994b). The social policy aimed at *Travellers*, however, remained the example of privatisation of public social policy par excellence in Norway. This can be interpreted as a sign of how *Travellers* in certain respects came to be perceived by the political establishment as standing *outside* Norwegian society. This makes the policy focusing on *Travellers* a particularly important case that can be used to assess qualities of the Norwegian welfare state as it has developed historically. Similar to the situation in many other countries, *Travellers* came to be constructed as ‘the Other’ among us (Riggins 1997b, MacLauhlin 1999).

When compared to other Western European countries, it is surprising that *Travellers* were seen as a problem and a threat as they were during the 20th century, given their fairly small numbers. In an 1845 census, *Travellers* were distinguished as a separate category and 1145 *Travellers* were registered (Sundt 1974 [1852]: vii-x). The

Norwegian Mission Among the Homeless had registered 5129 “itinerants” in their archives during 1900-1959 (Haave 2000b: 167). These were the figures that concerned the elites. The policy that was introduced appears to have been particularly strict, also when compared to how other ‘minorities’ were treated in Norway. As opposed to the other Scandinavian countries, a special Christian mission institution was delegated responsibility for the settlement of Travellers. The Norwegian Mission Among the Homeless (“the Mission”) was a private charity organisation given considerable legal, moral and financial support from the state. The policy had broad support in parliament. A number of central actors in the Norwegian State Church were involved in the Mission. Moreover, a large number of volunteers participated in local branches of the Mission and in fundraising campaigns. Thus Norway developed a particularly Christian organisation that acted as a pressure group working in close collaboration with the central and local authorities. The ultimate goal was to eradicate the “itinerant problem”, in part by forcing and helping Travellers to find permanent residence and occupation, and in part by undertaking a large-scale forced separation of children from Traveller parents who lived a more traditional life.

Although more public attention has been given to sterilisation, childcare interventions were used more often in relation to Traveller families. In the 1850-60s, one of Norway’s first social scientists, the priest Eilert Sundt, had shown that it was difficult to settle Travellers. With these experiences in mind, the assumption was that it would be easier to settle the children, as they were not yet too influenced by their parents, than teaching the adults new lifestyles, habits and traditions. Local authorities were also reluctant to allow whole Traveller families to be settled in their community, especially as this would also have demanded much larger resources. The Mission stressed that it was important to remove the children from what was presented as a negative, unfortunate or damaging environment. The Travellers’ culture and lifestyle challenged the dominant ideology of equality as sameness or similarity, and this was in itself considered a reason to condemn and intervene. In other words, Travellers had to relate to an ideology of sameness that existed before the emergence of the welfare state and to large extent came to exclude them from participatory parity in the greater society (Pettersen 1997, 1999).

The *domicile criterion* has traditionally been decisive for whether the local authorities assumed responsibility for the pauper. The poor-relief system was the

responsibility of the local authorities, and the wanderers did not have the same proximity to and identification with the local residents. Those without permanent residence were perceived as a threat to those who owned real estate, and to tax collection and public order. Wanderers represented a social and symbolic threat, as well as potential financial costs. All in all this fuelled the sentiment to refuse responsibility and drive itinerant paupers away. The relationship between local authorities was similar to a black-man game (Swaan 1990). To compensate for this, the Mission was attributed nation-wide authority to act and co-ordinate the assimilation policy aimed at Travellers across local borders, and the state came to cover all expenses for people of Traveller origin.

Since the Middle Ages, numerous attempts have been made to distinguish the deserving and the undeserving in need from each other (Midré 1995, Stone 1985, Swaan 1990). The disabled, elderly, children and sick should be given assistance and treated with compassion and lenience. The able-bodied without permanent work have been regarded as the undeserving in need. The latter were considered in need of retraining, and as persons who should be punished and forced to work. When there appeared to be no 'obvious' reason for not having regular work this has been interpreted as a moral problem. It was assumed that the unemployed were "work-shy" and preferred to live on welfare, begging, stealing or only taking on shorter vacancies and travelling around rather than taking on more long-term responsibilities and regular work. In other words, in folk theory that structured much of the welfare policy, the distinction was closely interrelated with the domicile criterion.

The same legislation applied to Travellers as to other 'clients' of the welfare state, but a number of laws had particular clauses about "itinerants" and authorised special targeted measures against this category. In particular the 1900 Vagrancy Act (*Løsgjengerloven*) was crucial in defining who the Travellers were, according to the public authorities. The Act gave extensive authority to enforce settlement of 'itinerants' and other vagrants. The 'itinerant' was seen as representing a poverty problem caused by a weak workmorale. An 'itinerant' was seen as a work-shy person not willing to take responsibility for himself and his family through paid work. It was generally assumed that he or she was living on begging, theft or other crimes.

Nor was it found to be adequate if one was self-sufficient to avoid incarceration for vagrancy. According to an authorised comment on the Vagrancy Act: "An itinerant

(...) will usually have a legal trade to refer to as an excuse. He may say that he is a horseman, a tinsmith, peddler, or the like, nevertheless he is the same dangerous person. The trade he lays claim to is only pretence. If he is to be approved it is required that the trade must be of a regular kind” (Hartmann 1934: 19). It was not only a concern to ensure that people were financially self-sufficient. The public authorities clearly wanted to bring other parts of their lifestyle to an end as well. One should have a permanent residence and not travel around. It was also claimed that Travellers had low family and sexual morals. Their itinerant lifestyle prevented their children from receiving a proper Christian upbringing and thus meant that they would not be confirmed in the church. Their way of living placed the Travellers in a partly contentious, partly symbiotic relationship to a diminishing agrarian population. In the emerging industrial society the Travellers fell outside the main pattern of wage earners organised in trade unions, as the prototypical social-democratic citizens.

In *Sweden*, the social and moral concern and anxiety for Travellers was responded to by applying the general social-policy legislation, rather than developing separate institutions and measures as one did in Norway (Lindholm 1995, Svensson 1993). In *Ireland* it appears that in the public debate the government found it too drastic to remove the children from their parents and rather sought to assimilate Irish Travellers through the educational system (Irish Traveller Movement 1993, Kerry Travellers Development Project 1996, Pavee Point 1997). In *Scotland*, more people were visibly poor, not particularly Travellers. Whether a family was poor and the children grew up in poor material and economic conditions does not seem to have been sufficient grounds for Travellers’ children to be taken under public care or control (Save the Children Fund Scotland 1996).

The Norwegian policy of forced assimilation of Travellers was reconsidered as late as the 1970s. The film director Vibeke Løkkeberg produced a documentary on the Svanviken settlement camp run by the Mission. The documentary, broadcast on Norwegian television in 1973, represented a break with public consensus on the policy and was followed by public discussion. An interpellation in parliament from MP Torild Skard of the Socialist Left Party indicated that many still defended the policy (*St.forh.* 1975). However, a public committee was established in 1976 to evaluate the policy. After the committee had given their recommendations (NOU 1980: 42), the special targeted measures were gradually rescinded during the 1980s and the Mission was

relieved of its mandate. The public committee argued that the special targeted measures should be rescinded in part because they were counterproductive and prevented full assimilation of Travellers in society, stopped them from having regular paid work and permanent residence and from being regarded on equal terms with other Norwegian citizens, and in part because it was considered unnecessary and superfluous as most Travellers were now settled (ibid. esp. p. 10). In other words, the stated reasons for reforming the policy were equivocal.

After the assimilation policy was abolished there followed a period of difference-blind universalism. Whereas the former assimilation policy represented 'naked surveillance', the policy of difference-blind universalism appeared to make exclusion and marginalisation of Travellers invisible and unrecognised, taking place outside or in spite of official politics. This new policy left Travellers in a discursive vacuum, as they could not claim inclusion on the basis of their Traveller status. Only recently have Travellers experienced some recognition of their status and been attributed the right to participatory parity *qua* Travellers, a right to legitimate representation and propagation of identity and lifestyle, not only as long as the Traveller status was bracketed and claimed to be irrelevant (Lister 1998: 81).

From the 1970s, Travellers' culture, crafting skills and contributions to greater society as self-employed tradesmen were more systematically documented (Moe 1975, Schlüter 1990, 1993). During the 1990s we witnessed a dramatic change in the relationship between Travellers and Norwegian society at large. Travellers received a great deal of media attention and were no longer only talked about as *others*. They were increasingly also regarded as subjects and were attributed a right to speak for themselves and a right to be heard. Travellers have become more and more involved in documenting their culture themselves. We witnessed an emerging social movement among Travellers who demanded recognition of their identity, moral redress and compensation. At the same time, society's attitude to Travellers was changing. This development could have stopped with the end of the targeted assimilation policy and introduction of a "difference-blind" policy, but more attempts have been made at positive recognition of difference and the attribution of cultural rights.

Norway has followed some of the recent Western European or even international trends towards larger acceptance of the rights of minorities to participatory parity, respect and self-expression. It has been argued that due to the immigration from non-

Western countries over the last twenty-five years, Norway has *become* a multicultural society. In the recent public discourse on multiculturalism it has commonly been understood as representing a *new* situation. But to some extent, this can preferably be understood and reformulated as increasing recognition of the fact that Norway has been a multicultural society for a long time, regardless of the new immigration to Norway after 1970. This has, for example, been reflected in the ratification of the 1995 Council of Europe Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities and attribution of cultural rights to the Sami people, Jews, *kvener*, *skogfinner*, Rom (“Gypsies”) and Travellers.

### **Concluding remarks**

This chapter has argued that ethnic minorities, social-security claimants and lodgers of complaints about wrongful-treatment and neglect by the public authorities all appear to represent social categories of high policy relevance for understanding the present challenges to the Western European welfare states and participatory democracy. Both in a Norwegian and a Western European context, the former assimilation policy towards Travellers in Norway appears to represent an extreme case of social control. Still this case can help us clarify more common features in the dynamic between those perceived as ‘socially excluded’ and the social and political elites. Both Travellers and people out of work claiming social-security benefits represent *contrasts* to employed wage earners who are seen as the prototypical social democratic citizens. This makes it meaningful and worthwhile to compare these two categories of marginal citizens. The focus of the comparison will be the emerging social mobilisation efforts among these two categories of people. The two categories are not mutually excluding, but when they were overlapping, the organisational efforts tended to be based either on the status as claimant *or* as Traveller.

I use Norwegian data here to develop perspectives and improved understanding of the mechanisms in force. However, the present analysis is not an account of Norwegian society per se. I have sought to de-emphasise the ideographic features as much as possible. The extent to which the analytic concepts and theorisation developed here in the dissertation have broader analytic validity should be evaluated against other organisations and organisational efforts, social categories and national contexts in the

future. In the next chapter I examine the theoretical perspectives for development of the analytic themes.



### 3

## **Theoretical perspectives on mobilisation and marginality**

This chapter presents some theoretical perspectives that have served as an inspiration in this study and shows how these perspectives can be used to clarify and elaborate the research questions. It discusses the alternative perspectives concepts such as marginality and poverty may be connected with and the more specific meanings they can be associated with. The discussion will serve as a backdrop to arrive at a better understanding of the social and symbolic consequences of marginality.

What the emerging self-organisational efforts among Travellers and claimants have in common is that from their preconditions and their own perception of their position in society, options and opportunities they have sought to improve the social position of the category of people they claim to represent. They have sought recognition, moral redress and compensation for wrong-doing by the welfare state, opposed what they perceive as pejorative labels and advocated more positive public images of who they are. We may understand this as efforts to achieve fuller citizenship or inclusion for their members and users, as perceived and defined by the organisation participants themselves. However, the organisation participants' viewpoints and the model of society they pursued, differed sometimes from those advocated by the social and political elites.

Although the organisations claimed to work for fuller citizenship for their category members, it was not self-evident whether and in what respect their activity contributed to an increase in such integration rather than to marginalisation and exclusion. A conceptual clarification will not only be of importance for our understanding of the disadvantaged and their self-organisation attempts, but also of the often underlying and unspoken assumptions about and images of society as a whole in official welfare policy. In my opinion, the self-organisational efforts among Travellers and claimants did not only reflect their social positions. The success and failure of the self-organisational efforts also characterised the qualities of society as a whole. As I have already indicated in Chapter 2, the social democratic citizenship regime appears to

have been connected to models of the integrated society which have in part been taken for granted as unspoken models. These are underlying assumptions about what is necessary to keep society as a whole together. We find similar assumptions in sociological analyses.

### **Perspectives on marginality as poverty**

*Poverty* is a term that rarely has been used in the Norwegian public debate (Aubert 1970). For all intents and purposes, it appears to have been a taboo word. As opposed to most other Western European countries, Norway has neither had an officially recognised poverty line, nor developed standardised criteria to decide what is required to meet the basic needs of human existence and when public authorities should take on responsibility, a so-called subsistence-level conception of poverty. The poor have rarely if ever been addressed as poor. Nor do the poor appear to have used this terminology about themselves either, possibly because this has been perceived as too loaded or stigmatising a term (Hvinden 1994b). It has been more common to apply euphemisms such as ‘low-income group’, ‘less fortunate’, ‘excluded’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘weak’. In a similar vein, actors in the European Union and other transnational bodies have tended to speak of ‘exclusion’ with reference to what in other contexts have been construed as ‘poverty’ (ILO/UNDP 1994, Rodgers 1994, Room 1995, Yépez del Castillo 1994). These other concepts also have other connotations. To be ‘vulnerable’, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘marginalised’ or ‘excluded’ does not mean that one is without resources. The ‘marginalised’ and ‘socially excluded’ are not necessarily poor in terms of resources. This indicates that marginality and poverty in terms of resources are not the same and not necessarily connected, or that our conceptualisation of poverty needs further elaboration.

One problem has been that concepts such as exclusion have been seen as self-evident and are used without further elaboration despite different and in part contradictory meanings. For instance, Rodgers (1995) appears to have assumed that it was an advantage if exclusion both referred to conditions and processes. But if this leads to a low level of accuracy, it should be considered a weakness for purposes of research. I would assume that different theoretical perspectives and models, with more accurate and elaborated understandings of concepts such as marginality, vulnerability

and poverty, play an important role in how we interpret the mechanisms behind systematic inequalities, biased distributions or constructions of ‘Otherness’ that we want to elaborate on.

Both in Norway and other European countries, concern has been growing that we may be disenfranchising an ‘underclass’, that is, excluding a segment of the population more or less permanently from “mainstream society” (Brox 1994, 1997; Dahrendorf 1990; Murray 1996; Wikan 1995). An underlying assumption is that the population may eventually become dichotomised and divided between those “inside” and “outside” society. It appears as if the perceived alternative to integration is individuals and groups unequivocally excluded from participation and citizens’ rights, as it were. The terminology seems to presuppose at least that society has a given centre or core. The ‘underclass’ terminology was first coined by Gunnar Myrdal (1962), and referred to those economically marginalised due to the emergence of ‘post-industrial society’.

In part because of the theoretical approach or perspective, it has often been assumed that disadvantaged categories of people univocally fall or have been pushed “outside” the mainstream. A large proportion of the research literature on poverty has focused on quantitative analyses of distributional patterns and processes, but has stopped short of developing more sociological explanations. Research on poverty and marginality has often used individuals, rather than the actors’ social positions or relations, as analytic units. In this respect, distributional analyses have to a large extent been individualistic or “atomistic” approaches. Distributional analyses appear to a great extent to have examined who the underprivileged are, their characteristics and their distribution in the population. A central concern from this perspective has been to document whether individual persons have resources available to participate in central arenas and purchase goods and services that are considered normal for all members of society. Distributional analyses have sought to map and account for the individual features and social background of those who from a given theoretical definition have been construed as poor, for instance by defining the poor as individuals or households with fifty percent or less of the national median in disposal income (Fritzell 2001, Ringen 1987, Stjernø 1985).

From the 1950s, the British sociologist Peter Townsend developed in several publications the argument that poverty should be defined as relative deprivation,

arguing that all measures of poverty will have to be relative to social circumstances. Earlier British scholars had attempted to estimate what an individual needs in nutrition, clothing and housing to meet the basic needs of human existence, and then defined the subsistence level where the state should offer income support. From this perspective, the people who were considered to be poor were those who could not secure the means for their own survival. The efforts to define necessities had tended to equate poverty with starvation. These efforts represented attempts at measuring poverty in absolute terms using univocal measures. Townsend (esp. 1979) argued that what might at first appear as objective measures actually implied moral judgements, and that all poverty measures would have to be culturally and historically relative. What is perceived as necessary clothing will vary. Even the needed nutrition level will vary between people, depending, among other things, on what kind of work you are performing. In *The Affluent Society*, John Galbraith (1998 [1958]) argued in a similar vein that those people who were poor were those who could not afford what was perceived as the minimum for a decent living, even if it sufficed for survival. Living in poverty, then, would be the experience of social deprivation due to limited resources and the subsequent inability to meet the costs of socially expected standards of life. Usually, there will be a range of acceptable ways of living. Townsend understood deprivation as the failure to meet any of these modes of living (Scott 1994).

Townsend (1979) contributed significantly to the development of a more relative and relational understanding of poverty, but had difficulties constructing a deprivation index that matched his theoretical conceptualisation of poverty. Ideally, one should survey all lifestyles in a society to map what is frequent and commonly considered reasonable for a decent standard of living in the society in question. One would then be able to use society's own prevailing standard of living as a reference point. In practice, an index was developed from expert advice. Although he argued that participation in society would decline when people drop below a certain deprivation line, due to withdrawal and exclusion, the main focus in his index was the individual and household rather than their network of social relations, which meant that the consequences for participation in different sectors of society remained to a large extent an unexplored assumption (Hvinden 1994b, Scott 1994).

From a distributional perspective, marginalisation can be viewed as mechanisms that bring about a decline in participation, passivity and lack of resources, while

integration or inclusion can be regarded as a question of making the actors able to facilitate opportunities to participate on equal terms, although not necessarily in the same way, in important arenas. Social exclusion can be regarded as a univocal impediment to participation in central arenas, while marginality has been used to refer to the grey area between being entirely inside or outside, for instance when you have some, though weak, connections to the mainstream labour market (Svedberg 1995). Participation can then be measured on a scale from full participation to non-participation.

The distributional perspective has, however, some shortcomings: There has been no obvious way of estimating the score at which poverty starts so that arbitrary cut-off points have been used. For instance, relative poverty could just as easily have been defined as less than forty or sixty per cent of the average income. There has been no theoretical reason for choosing one over the other. Accounts of individual poverty have tended to be based on a number of factors that have been regarded as contributing to poverty. A number of common-sense understandings have been mobilised to measure the effects of various variables. Although this can be useful as a step in identifying and developing improved understandings of the relational processes behind poverty, the substantial properties attached to the actors have often been taken as the ‘explanation’ and been conflated with the social forces underlying the statistical correlations. The intuitive explanatory power has relied on the common-sense understanding of the substantial properties as important rather than explicit accounts of the underlying relational processes (Bourdieu 1984: 22, Marklund 1990: 132). The distributional perspective may also come to legitimise the understanding of poverty as eliminated by the welfare state if you find small or relatively small distributional differences in income, health, education and so on (Hvinden 1995).

From a relational perspective, distributional analyses would only be a possible starting point. While distributional analyses focus on individuals, cohorts and social categories, relational analyses will focus on the relations between actors and social positions. From this perspective, the more or less understated mutuality between categories and groups will be of significance. In accordance with this, John Scott (1993) has argued that poverty and wealth are connected through internally related processes, the one cannot be understood without the other, and associated with the construction of citizenship. Poverty will then not only be a question of lack of resources but also about

social relations. Relational perspectives can analyse how different actors relate to each other, directly or indirectly. Relational analyses will map and analyse relational processes between the poor and their social environments (Hvinden 1995). Such analyses may focus on the processes, mechanisms and interaction patterns (“networks”), coping and resistance strategies, reactions and counter reactions of the disadvantaged and the elites.

There are, however, areas where both distributional and relational analyses can be applied, depending on what you want to focus on. Gore (1995) argued that the concept of social exclusion had the advantage of viewing poverty as relative deprivation when it comes to economic, social and political opportunities and rights to participation. If we understand relative deprivation as subjective consciousness about having less, being weaker or worse off than others, then relational perspectives cannot be reduced to studies of relative deprivation. Such studies may include life-quality studies, studies of subjective well being and often have individuals, cohorts or categories as analytical units. Such approaches to the study of subjective welfare would by definition be distributional analyses. However, what you believe you need depends on the life goals you have adopted, the ways of life and values that you regard as standard for the good life and the qualities you attribute to yourself. This will depend on, among other things, who you identify yourself as and would like to identify with. Such aspects will probably be easier to focus on in relational analyses. The way social exclusion has been applied by Gore (ibid.), studies of exclusion can include both distributional and relational aspects of relative deprivation.

A seminal contribution to development of relational accounts of poverty and marginality was George Simmel’s essay *Der Arme* (1971 [1906]). Differing from much of the contemporary research on poverty, he argued that the poor were not univocally excluded from society. Disadvantaged sections of the population could in certain respects be more appropriately considered as inside and outside society at the same time. This is not the same as developing models of different degrees of participation and degrees of access to resources in different areas. Drawing on Simmel’s mode of reasoning, we may argue that the welfare state has created or reproduced, rather than eliminated poverty, and has sustained biased distributions and inequality (Hvinden 1995).

A central argument for Simmel was that poor relief appeared to be as important for the giver as for the recipient. In the Middle Ages, it was assumed that alms improved the chances of salvation for the giver and concern for the poor was apparently of secondary importance. The alms appeared to be motivated by the self-interest of the giver rather than altruism and compassion with the poor. Correspondingly, modern poor relief appeared to be designed for the sake of society as a whole or the providers of relief rather than for the individual poor. Although the proclaimed motive of assistance was to alleviate individual needs, it had been designed in such a way that one could argue that the self-interests of the others were equally or more important. Present day examples of this could be the efforts to ensure that social-security recipients work for their benefits and/or return to the mainstream labour market, or that they maintain their energy to fulfil family obligations and not become greater burdens on the public purse or that they do not accept wages below the level negotiated by the trade unions. If the sole purpose were to ameliorate the distress of the poor, the help and assistance offered by others would have been more generous. The assistance would also have been unconditional. But, argued Simmel, the purpose of assistance was only to mitigate the most extreme manifestations of inequality so that the social structure could continue to be based on this differentiation.

The poor participated in the assistance as objects of other people's concern and for the purpose of others rather than as ends in themselves. The poor stood *outside* the group as objects of the actions of the collective, but this was viewed as a particular form of being *inside*. In economic and material terms the poor were *outside* society. They have hardly had unequivocal rights to support. The poor stood outside as a particular type of stranger, sometimes pitied and sometimes looked upon as a threat to society ('enemy of the state', 'scrounger', 'outcast'). In other respects the poor were *inside*. The poor belonged organically to the whole through their purpose for greater society and because others had moral obligations to assist them. The poor were also citizens, and acted as subjects by participating in community life, general elections, in some form of work, enacting family responsibilities, and so on, and thus inside society along other dimensions.

This twofold position of the poor, with them being both inside and outside along the same citizenship dimension, applied only to a specific type of poverty and not to everyone with scarce resources. There were poor who did not receive help or were

exposed to welfare-policy measures. One who was poor in his or her own view was not necessarily poor as viewed by others and vice versa. “The poor, as a sociological category, are not those who suffer specific deficiencies and deprivations, but those who receive assistance or should receive it according to social norms” (Simmel 1971 [1906]: 175). People may subjectively or objectively lack resources or have unfulfilled wants and needs, but nevertheless not be conceived as in need of help or assistance by others. This will be a kind of poverty that does not elicit reactions from others and could rather be viewed as an individual destiny. There may be individually poor farmers, artists, students, and so on, but only if they receive assistance or should receive assistance according to prevailing norms, will they be regarded as belonging to the category of poor rather than farmers, and so on. “The binding function which the poor person performs within an existing society is not generated by the sole fact of being poor; only when society – the totality or particular individuals – reacts toward him with assistance, only then does he play his specific social role” (ibid. 176). In other words, the measures and assistance served to establish and maintain the poor as a social category.

From a relational perspective, we may then argue that sociologically speaking *only those who are targets of other people’s concern, help and control, are poor* (Hvinden 1995). This is poverty of the kind we can expect in a country with a predominantly wealthy population. Simmel argued that a tragedy of the minority was their serial existence as a social category. They existed only in the negative, as objects of other people’s concern and not as subjects. This differed from a situation where most of the population was poor. Increased prosperity, surveillance and demands that the poor not become too visible in public (“offensive begging”) served to keep the poor well in the background and impeded the poor from emerging as social collectives. Mutual identification among the poor was also prevented by their origin in different social circles and absence of common features in lifestyle and culture.

In a mainly affluent population as in modern Norway, the poor have been scattered in the greater population and are thus invisible in public life (Aubert 1970). Those who have been categorised as poor according to the aforementioned relational definition have also come under different names; as ‘people with disabilities’, ‘ethnic minorities’, ‘single mothers’, ‘social-assistance claimants’, ‘Travellers’ or ‘unemployed’. Recalling Simmel’s argument that taxpayers have stronger rights than



the poor – the same person may hold both statuses – we may argue that status from which a person pursues his or her interests will have a great deal of importance.

Bearing this in mind, I would argue that poverty is a mirror of society at large. In our case, the organisational efforts by the disadvantaged may serve as a strategic focus for studying the design of social democratic citizenship. Bearing in mind Simmel and Hvinden's (1994b, 1995) later elaboration, we may argue that both Travellers and claimants have been poor in sociological terms. Both categories of people have historically been objects of extensive help, control and surveillance from welfare-state representatives (Hvinden (Ed.) 2000a, Midré 1995, Sandmo 1999, Seip 1994a and b). In this respect they have been *outside* society. Their experience of vulnerability, shame and powerlessness can be understood as emerging from these relations. From this perspective, the "rest of society" is the unit they are outside of. At the same time, both Travellers and claimants have had the same civil and political citizenship rights as other Norwegian citizens. In this respect they have been *inside* society. Although deprived of the economic, social, cultural or symbolic privileges of the better-positioned actors, they may be regarded as part of a larger whole when we focus on the interaction or reciprocation between the disadvantaged and the social and political elites.

### **Perspectives on marginality as deviance**

The self-organisational efforts can be viewed as responses to the welfare-policy measures initiated by the elites. In this regard they can be interpreted as reactive phenomena. Emphasising the voluntary dimension, the reciprocation or interaction can be viewed as strategies and counter-strategies performed by actors pursuing their self-interests as defined by the actors themselves. The actors develop their self-understanding, understanding of the social world and their own opportunities and life chances, including their perception of their potential partners and counterparts ("enemies"), from their respective social positions. In the next instance, the actors seek to pursue their self-interests as they themselves perceive them and influence others. By emphasising the strategic situational dimension we may avoid an overtly deterministic understanding of the relations between the disadvantaged, as well as the relations between the disadvantaged and greater society. Power bias will account for differences

in whether the actors are successful at influencing others or are predominantly influenced by others. The processes of defining and redefining social reality, what is construed as 'social problems' and 'deviance' by the actors and how this influences the actors' subjective perceptions, will be of importance for the interpretation of the actors' objective actions.

Within the Durkheimian tradition, much attention has been attributed to how the cultural and moral ties between individuals and social groups have been constituted through the construction of dualistic schemes that create social and symbolic order. Social integration has been regarded as learning and adapting to the values and norms of society, while marginalisation has been regarded as a weakening or dissolution of the norms and values that tie the individual to society. Marginalisation has been regarded as a risk for the individual as well as a threat to society as a whole if collective values disappear. Exclusion can then be viewed as a breakdown of the ties between the individual and society. This kind of reasoning was apparent in Durkheim's (1981 [1887]) *Le Suicide*. At the same time it was only the early Durkheim who saw 'deviance' as threatening. Later, Durkheim (1992 [1895]) made an ironic turn. 'Deviance' or those perceived as representing a social problem, he argued, served to maintain society by reminding greater society of its own norms and values and confirming these by the institutionalised reactions to 'deviance'.

In *Les regles de la methode sociologique*, Emile Durkheim (1992 [1895]) argued that 'deviance' should be viewed in relative terms. He warned against the *a priori* use of one's own moral judgements to consider what was pathological in society. The reference point for judging such questions should vary with the type of society one was studying. Durkheim argued that a society could not exist without rule breaking perceived as serious violations and rule breakers conceived of as deviants. His example was a highly regulated monastery where the smallest oversights would be regarded as serious offences while outsiders would regard them as insignificant *in relation to* other incidences which, perhaps for good reasons, were *conceived of* as more serious. The qualities and meanings of the actions were not inherent but attributed by the society in question.

Early sociologists in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century tended to view all actions that differed from their own moral norms as pathological. An example of this was Eilert Sundt (1817-75), who was born in Farsund, a small town in southern

Norway. His research on Norwegian Travellers during more than twenty years was seen as part of a broader moral concern about “the lower classes” and the poverty problems of pre-industrial Norway. Their mode of life and culture at that time was strongly condemned. Having presented Travellers as a social problem in earlier publications (Sundt 1974 [1852]), he received financial support from parliament in 1855-69 to settle Travellers and give them a Christian education. Gradually he expressed disappointment over the Travellers’ resistance to being settled, that more use of force was needed and suggested that workhouses (*amt*) should be built in all counties and have this institutionalised in the Poor Law of 1863. His work appears to have reflected a more general spirit of the times. American sociologists at approximately the same time also had a background in theology. They often came from middle-class families in small towns and viewed their own way of life and values as the norm. Behaviour and lifestyles were quite unilaterally labelled as ‘deviant’, as social control was seen as normal reactions to behaviour regarded as problematic (Lemert after Scull 1988).

Later we find remnants of this in functionalist perspectives (Merton 1968). By distinguishing between manifest and latent functions, Robert Merton would provide for a sociology that would uncover the underlying structures and patterns that served as the basis for the order of society. Apparently, negative ‘deviance’ threatening social cohesion was to be uncovered as the secret “glue” that maintained social order. Reinterpreting Durkheim’s view of marginalisation as the outcome of too loose social ties between the individual and society and lack of social control, Merton (1938) argued that social norms tying society together lost their social power due to a gap between the culturally defined values and structural opportunities to achieve this control. On the one hand, all Americans were exposed to the same dominant expectations and values of individual upward mobility and unlimited accumulation of wealth. On the other hand, they had unequal possibilities to achieve this. Hence, some would choose unconventional means to achieve conventional goals; theft, begging, bending the rules to attain social security, and so on. If we are to believe Merton (*ibid.*), the answer is that ‘deviance’ is normal, even though most people choose conforming actions to achieve the same goals.

In Durkheimian sociology, social phenomena have been understood as “hard facts” or objects, independent of a subjective and intersubjective construction of meaning. The subjective dimension has been included by emphasising how individuals

internalise the values and norms of society. However, Durkheim and Merton did not focus on how mental schemata influenced on the construction of official statistics. Durkheim depicted suicide rates as objective phenomena and measures of social integration, and not as influenced by lay theories and the practical classifications of causes to death by officials (Downes and Rock 1992: 53). According to Merton, the official statistics “confirmed” his assumption that those in a disadvantaged position and with fewer opportunities tended to be the most ‘deviant’. He focused on the actors’ social position and the outcome but not the intermediary complexity and the *processes* (Cohen 1965). It has later repeatedly been demonstrated that white-collar crimes and other criminal offences committed by members of the middle and upper classes tend less often to be disclosed, or lead to persecution and conviction (Aubert 1969 [1960]). Merton’s suggestions have, among other things, been criticised for not conceptualising how *social control* influenced which actions, while values and lifestyles were labelled as ‘deviant’. His use of culture was criticised for assuming that (American) society had one value system that everyone conformed to, in other words that society was a unitary system.

Parallel to the functionalist school in the 1940s and 50s, Edwin Lemert, Howard Becker, Erving Goffman and others continued the ethnographic work of the earlier Chicago school that had sought to document and communicate the subjective experience of local actors. Labelling theory emphasised construction and reconstruction of meaning and contributed to the understanding of social order in complex and pluralist societies by focusing on deviance. While functionalists studied how deviance led to social control, labelling theorists studied how social control led to deviance. But functionalists and labelling theorists could agree that the error was in society, not the individual. While functionalists such as Robert Merton referred to the structural limits in available means to achieve cultural goals, labelling theorists referred to the social reactions to certain actions, lifestyles, cultures or viewpoints. The focus changed from the deviance to the reactions of significant others and the self-image they presented to those labelled as deviant and defined out of society.

Edwin Lemert (1951) distinguished between primary and secondary deviance to conceptualise how social reactions and institutionalised expectations push people into the roles as ‘deviants’. Variations among people in speech, outlook and lifestyle only have social consequences when others react to parts of this variation and attribute

particularly negative and pejorative or positive and distinguishing qualities. *Primary deviance* will be perceived as normal variation, and will in different ways be justified or excused, and compatible with accepted and honourable roles and identities. *Secondary deviance*, however, has been furthered by a change in self-perception and assumption of a deviant role or identity whereby one is attributed other qualities and values by others as well as by oneself. The deviant will consider himself or herself to be different. The same rules and standards do not apply to oneself as to others. Secondary deviance comprises actions, viewpoints and modes of life that result from the fact that the individual in question has adopted other people's views of himself.

Labelling theory has emphasised that the labelling process often works as a self-fulfilling prophecy, and if a social identity or role is assumed to be deviant, it is difficult to unlearn this self-image. From this perspective, we can see how physical and material conditions and lifestyles became associated with particular social identities, roles or identities. Bearing this in mind, we could argue that social reactions to impairments turned people into 'disabled people', being out of paid work turned people into 'unemployed', and people with a nomadic life form into 'itinerants' or 'vagrants'.

Labelling theory led to a shift in perspective from the substantialist focus on the characteristics of individual deviants to the social processes that made people appear to be deviants. This perspective has been criticised for assuming an over-socialised view of how the labelled people adopted and reacted to the stigma (Bogdan and Taylor 1993). Labelling theory was criticised for believing that the most important aspect in the construction of deviance was not the official definition of the rule-breaking or the action in question in itself, but how the actors' cognitive and moral relations to the action were *perceived* and *accounted* for. Scott and Lyman (1968) have outlined how actors can de-emphasise rule-breaking and deviance from social expectations by the use of various forms of justifications and excuses. From such a perspective, the outcome of the reciprocity between the disadvantaged and the elites can be construed as the outcome of the dynamic interplay between institutionalised expectations and the extent to which the disadvantaged manage to neutralise or avoid the expectations of conformity from the elites.

A problem with some labelling theory has been that it only to a lesser extent has sought to explain why some people label, exclude or stigmatise others. The interpretations of the motivations for adopting laws and regulations, targeting and

seeking to influence the moral career of the poor, criminal, unemployed, disabled, patients and ethnic minorities, have sometimes ended up in conspiracy theory. Scull (1988) has referred to Howard Becker's work on moral entrepreneurs and crusades as an example of such explanations. Becker did not try to explain the actions of society's elite by referring to the values and power relations that push and pull them, or how social meaning and subjective perceptions of the social world motivate their actions. He rather referred to the professional self-interests of the first-line services: The rules gave the moral entrepreneurs a job and *ration d'être* legitimating their own work. The welfare-policy measures could then be construed as univocal products of the self-interest of the welfare-state professions.

Emil Durkheim had argued that there existed and also should exist common moral rules accepted by everyone in the same society, but not in all societies. In comparison, those focusing on the social reactions and social control questioned whether there were common rules accepted and recognised by everyone in society, or whether different value sets existed side by side and only partly overlapped. In studies of social control and reactions, an important argument has been that values, viewpoints and considerations are not equally distributed and not the same in the entire population, and that it may not be possible to achieve consensus on common values or norms. By focusing on small and local social worlds, everyday face-to-face interaction and constitution of moral careers, symbolic interactionists portrayed society at large as loosely structured.

In the Chicago school, marginalisation was seen as the outcome of social disintegration or weakening of social ties, but the ethnographies presented in this school indicated that these small social worlds, the inner city ghettos or suburban areas, had their own social logic. Even if these social worlds differed from the rest of society, contrary to common belief, they were not characterised by disorganisation. In a study of the social structure of an Italian slum with a reputation as a dangerous area and feared as a threat to society as a whole, William Foote Whyte (1981 [1943]) argued that deviance constituted unusual expressions of normal circumstances. Rather than interpreting the appearance of other moral universes or social worlds as a sign of the break down of social cohesion, one could interpret this as an expression of pluralism within the same societal whole. This led to the possibility of a pluralist society seen as a loosely coupled system, but one which nevertheless, or even because of this, constituted a whole. In

consequence, the research presented by the Chicago school undermined their own theories. It was not that they tried to falsify their own hypothesis, but the contradiction rather grew out of the interpretation of their findings by other researchers (Downes and Rocks 1992 [1988]).

However, in *Stigma*, Erving Goffman (1990 [1963]) depicted a highly conforming society in which the individuals who did not fit in had to find coping strategies to live with and avoid stigmatisation. Small and local societies were implicitly portrayed as static and unchanging. This was to a large extent a sad tale of uneasy and anxious interaction both among the stigmatised and society at large. The stigmatised were too aggressive or shamefaced, or vacillated between these two attitudes in their interaction with greater society. But Goffman also pointed out that the actors could turn the negative stigma to their advantage: “Instead of leaning on their crutch, they get to play golf with it” (ibid. 39). A homeless person could expose his or her amputated leg when begging.

In accordance with the symbolic interactionist tradition, Cato Wadel (1973) analysed the interaction between the long-term unemployed and their social environment. The study focused on the coping strategies of one man on the backdrop of the actual and anticipated reactions from greater society. Later reports have studied the individual coping strategies among the unemployed in Norway; how they seek to get back to work or adopt to the status of being out of work. These authors focused in particular on how employment was substituted by strengthening other roles in the actors’ “role-set” (Kaul and Kvande 1986, 1990; Colbjørnsen 1993, 1995).

### **Perspectives on marginality as disempowerment**

In symbolic interactionism, differences in opportunity structures have been virtually absent from the understanding of the various coping and resistance strategies on the part of the disadvantaged. This was thematised to a greater extent by Michel Foucault. His main analytic theme was *power relations*. Resistance was construed as an expression of a counter-reaction to various attempts at normalisation of the population. In the next instance, the counter-reactions would lead to new normalisation techniques. Both in the case of Travellers and social-security claimants, their relation to the government has largely consisted of client, control and dependency relations. The reciprocation can be

interpreted as strategies and counter-strategies occurring in power relations (Dreyfus and Rainbow 1982). The choices on the part of the disadvantaged can then be viewed as resistance rather than coping strategies.

Foucault's perspective invites a relational perspective on marginality, but differed from Simmel and others as it had a different view of social control. Marginalisation was conceptualised in terms of *sequestration*, and thus as discipline and correction of various categories of people, rather than equivocal exclusion. Production of new professional and popular knowledge, discourses or taxonomies of social problems were seen as inherently connected with power relations ("power-knowledge"). New professions developed human categories that were attributed qualities construed as innate in the person. The 'criminal', 'insane', 'patient', 'homosexual', and so on were sequestered as separate types of people. This contributed to constructing social and symbolic distance between 'them' and 'us'. Modern societies were able to consider themselves as rational, enlightened and normal by defining themselves in opposition to those seen as mildly or radically different; as criminal, irrational or perverse. By acting as objects of other people's concern, from this perspective the target groups and 'clients' of the welfare state may be considered as serving as a mirror for society at large. 'Normal people' and 'good citizens' are defined in relation to their counterpart – the deviant. In our context, constructions of social-democratic citizenship could be interpreted in relation to the attempted exclusion or foreclosure of alternative subjectivities, identities and modes of living.

The taxonomies were construed as an expression of social control. How are we then to interpret the motivations of the elites? According to Foucault, power should not be analysed on an intentional level. Power was not conceptualised as a commodity that can be possessed by any group or individual in society (the ability to get one's opinion across despite disagreement and opposition from others). Foucault would rather focus on the power inherent in knowledge and moral discourses, arguing that power was expressed in the construction and maintenance of grids or symbolic boundaries that make the social world intelligible. A discourse can tentatively be defined as a flow of interconnected ideas or a body of representations that influence our modes of thinking about, classifying and interpreting the social world (Riggins 1997b).

The different *discursive representations* of social categories of people, of 'good' and 'bad' citizens, often appear as common sense and taken-for-granted mental



schemes. In the next instance, the discursive representations have social consequences. The value judgements, social distance and knowledge of a social category of people have tended to be connected. In our cases the elites tended to know much less about the claimants' organisations than the disabled people's organisations. The social distance may lead to stereotypical images being more easily maintained. Positive symbolic classification, low social distance to the elites and in-depth knowledge about the lives of the disadvantaged on the part of the elites appear to have been associated (Todorov after Riggins 1997b), and may appear as self-reinforcing mechanisms.

From a Foucauldian point of view, the motivational processes of the disadvantaged and the social and political elites can be viewed in terms of discourses and counter-discourses. Representations of given social practices are interpreted on the backdrop of other representations, and in that sense construed as intertextual (Riggins 1997b). Alternative and competing representations were conceptualised as part of the same power-knowledge structure. Techniques of resistance were seen as part of a disciplinary relationship, or force relations, and not in opposition to this. Accordingly techniques of resistance should be studied in relation to the techniques of surveillance. "Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal" (Foucault 1982: 225). The focus was on the contextually specific practices, techniques, procedures, forms of knowledge and modes of rationality that were routinely deployed in attempts to shape the conduct of others (Knights and Vurdubakis 1994).

The self-organisational efforts among the disadvantaged can be interpreted as expressions of resistance strategies, as counter-reactions to the sequestration and normalisation efforts from others. In the next instance, the self-organisations lead to new normalisation techniques from the elites. One question will then be to what extent the disadvantaged have the possibility of producing counter-discourses or alternative representations of themselves or whether resistance is expressed from within the very same discourse as the techniques of normalisation. Arguably, the normalisation techniques are more obvious in the case of social-security claimants. However, if we pursue a Foucauldian perspective, we could argue that we only find more euphemistic expressions of sequestration and discipline in the new policy towards Travellers and emphasis on 'multiculturalism' (Riggins 1997b). Power has been understood as being everywhere. The underlying picture of society has been one of a cobweb where power exists in all social relations.

Inspired by a Foucauldian perspective, Bloor and McIntosh (1990) explored a number of individual resistance strategies among clients in therapeutic communities and working-class mothers who were targets of health visits. The therapy and follow-up measures were associated with the experience of paternalism and surveillance and led to anger and frustration among the clients. This contributed to the clients attempting to avoid or obstruct the work by the staff. Strategies included concealment, ridiculing, escape, avoidance and non-co-operation. Collective dissent, open conflict and co-ordinated opposition were reported to be close to absent in these contexts. It is probably reasonable to assume that such individual coping strategies had short-term effects for the individual actors, but were of less importance for other people in the same or an equivalent position. The individual resistance strategies could also have more symbolic than practical significance: The disadvantaged were able to express discontent and misrecognition of the existing authority relations.

Client–staff interaction may in part account for the success or failure of the welfare-policy measures. Often a staff perspective has been implicit in welfare-policy research. The focus has been on the extent to which the policy measures have been effective, whether the stated goals were achieved and whether reasons have been found for why the measures failed to be successful. From this perspective, the clients can be viewed as the bottom tier of the implementation process.

The reciprocation can also be regarded from another perspective: The welfare state can be viewed from below or from the point of view of the individual citizen or citizens' groups. From this perspective the extent to which the individual citizen and social groups manage to draw upon resources in pursuit of their agency will be important as will be the extent to which power relations will be constitutive of their subjectivities. Members of social categories that have been targets of public-welfare policy measures have their own short-term and long-term projects, aims and objectives. These are not necessarily identical with the wants and ideals maintained by the elites. Their attempts to pursue their interests and projects, inside or outside social movements and self-organisations, generate support or resistance from the elites. In the next instance the reactions from the elites lead to new counter-reactions on the part of the disadvantaged.

A possible weakness in Foucault's theorisation was the lack of an explanation for the link between the actors and structures, between the actions of individual actors

and social groups, and reproduction and change of the societal relationships (Wacquant 1992: 25). Others have argued that he represented a relativisation of power that made normative judgements difficult, if not impossible (Fraser 1989). On the other hand, it has been asserted that the aim of Foucault's project was to focus on the social costs and risks allegedly inherent in all social relations and symbolic constructions. According to Foucault (1988), there was no such thing as the ideal society. The argument against Foucault's emphasis on 'strategies without strategists' was that he presented a sociology without actors. I shall return to this critique in a later chapter.

### **Perspectives on social mobilisation: conflict groups**

In *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Ralph Dahrendorf (1959) wanted to examine and explain the social conflicts occurring and not occurring in society, and how this was associated with the development of modern industrial society. The expansion of the state and government bureaucracies, the emergence of the middle class, leisure time, social-citizenship rights, institutionalisation of labour conflicts, labour representation in management, differentiation of ownership and management, state-owned and joint-stock companies had led to the emergence of other types of interest groups than those Karl Marx had predicted a century earlier. In societies ruled by bureaucracies, class conflict could be reformulated in more general terms as power rather than property conflicts, i.e. conflicts between those who give orders and those who take orders (ibid. 55-57, 77).

'Bureaucrats', civil servants and first-line staff, participated in the exercise of authority. Bureaucratic roles are management roles and bureaucrats have been delegated their authority from those with immediate authority, i.e. the government, parliament and the high courts. This authority is a direct result of the social role they enact. It is attributed and institutionalised. There were a number of veto groups whose opinions and interests were incorporated into the official welfare policy in specific situations. Today such veto groups could include trade unions and the state church. Together, the three sets of actors constituted the closest one could get to identifying "a ruling class" in pluralist and differentiated societies. From this perspective exclusion can be construed as denial of participation in the exercise of authority.

We may interpret Dahrendorf's contribution as a Weberian reformulation of Marx: Property relations were regarded as a special case of authority relations. There were many possible lines of power conflicts in society, but when a conflict appeared between two parties, other potential conflicts would be pushed into the background. Conflicts were situational. The included and excluded could change places. The worker is subordinated in the workplace, but can also be a board member in an influential political party. In a similar vein, a person will be in a disadvantaged position when his or her Traveller status is made relevant, but can in other situations be dominant, for instance as a preacher in the Pentecostal movement. His model of society was in part a reaction against the often one-sided focus on equilibrium in social systems and societal cohesion in sociology at that time. Models of society should include accounts of social change, coercion, conflict *and* cohesion and stability (ibid. 159-163, 169-170). The image of society was not only one of coherence by value consensus, but also of constraint and domination. For the purpose of an analysis of the emergence of social conflicts between interest groups, "the ugly face of society" was more relevant to focus on.

The same applies to the present dissertation, as we focus on self-organisational efforts emerging from the shortcomings of the welfare state, as perceived by the disadvantaged, rather than its achievements. The organisation of welfare policy is seen from the point of view of coercion and constraint rather than integration and coherence. The relationships between government bodies and their representatives on the one hand, and the individuals and groups involved in these attempts to increase participation and stimulate activity on the other, may be framed in various ways. They may be seen as a relationship between benevolent bodies and their agents, assistance providers, and the recipient(s) of this benevolent activity. But the relationship may also be interpreted in more adverse terms, where the government is attributed responsibility for the current situation of the individual or group, or as primarily an agency of control, surveillance or discipline.

Dahrendorf suggested that the distribution of authority in associations could be seen as the ultimate reason for the formation of manifest 'conflict groups', and as dyadic aggregates of authority positions as fundamental to all relationships or associations (ibid. 148-149, 168). '*Quasi-group*' was applied by Dahrendorf to develop his theory of group formation among occupants of identical, similar or equivalent social

positions. Quasi-groups were theoretical and analytical constructs of recruiting fields for groups. This was suggested as a tool for an analysis of how interest groups accrue from their origin in the authority structure of “imperatively coordinated associations” and common interests related to the legitimacy of relations of domination. In our cases, the relation between Travellers and the elites and claimants and the elites, can be conceived of as two sets of dyadic authority relations. This provided for a parallel analysis or comparison of two sets of authority relations where the Travellers and claimants are the disadvantaged parties. In this sense, one could argue that there was a structural parallel between the social position of Travellers and claimants.

Authority could be regarded from two perspectives: (1) as a zero-sum conception of authority or (2) a system conception of authority. The first focused on the considerations from the individual citizens’ or citizen groups’ point of view. The second focused on the integration of society as a whole (ibid. 169). For the purpose of our study it has been more relevant to employ the first, as we have sought to account for the conditions under which interest groups among the disadvantaged are likely to emerge. The total welfare policy can then be viewed as the negotiated outcome of different interest groups pursuing their interests over time. The social-democratic citizenship regime can be regarded as the result of a pluralist set of actors who have been successful in pursuing their interests. In other words, a system perspective appeared as less relevant.

(1) From the first perspective, authority relations were viewed as structurally determinant for conflict groups. There was at least latent conflict in all authority relations. The incumbents of defined social positions would latently or manifestly be inclined to have an interest in maintenance or modification of the status quo. Their interests were socially structured and derived from their social positions. The associations were “imperatively coordinated” in the sense that people were subjected to legitimate and sanctioned prescriptions that originated outside themselves but within a social structure. The individual’s social and symbolic situation was forced upon him or her through the position the individual assumed in an association. In our cases, Travellers and claimants did not voluntarily assume a subordinated position, rather it was imposed upon them by institutionalised expectations and cultural codings beyond the control of the individual. From this perspective, the individual adjusted to the association if he or she contributed to the conflict by pursuing his or her role interests

and acted according to expected orientations of behaviour associated with the authority roles. Society was portrayed as divided between 'us' and 'them'. This was the dichotomous image of society.

(2) In a system perspective, authority gave the capacity to mobilise resources for the common good of society. From this perspective the total welfare policy could be viewed as an expression of value commitment, solidarity and a social contract between the citizens. Authority facilitated the resources to realise values and goals shared by everyone in society and ensuring the functional integration of society as a whole. The elites with immediate authority maintained the interests of society as a whole. People were adjusted when they were bound by their social position in society and acted according to role expectations. The role expectations, which were seen as outside the individual but part of the social system, were appropriate for the functioning of the social system and contributed to its integration. Everybody had his or her defined place in a well-organised system of positions and symbols. There were people both above and below you. The process of conflict group formation was blocked by the social definition of the roles of its members. This was the hierarchical image of society.

Dahrendorf distinguished between three sets of conditions for the change from quasi-group to conflict group: (i) *technical conditions*: the presence of an ideology and leader, (ii) *political conditions*: sufficient political freedom in the surrounding environment to allow groups to organise themselves, (iii) *social conditions*: communication between group members, geographical closeness and similarity in culture. Dahrendorf focused more on the structural preconditions than on the considerations and actions of local actors to account for the emergence of interest groups. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx (1978 [1851]) had pointed out how the peasants had failed to organise themselves against the French bourgeoisie. Political organisation did not emerge among the local and independent peasants, although they were many in number and had similar experiences of poverty. The mode of production isolated them from each other; they lacked means of communication and capital. Marx suggested that control of ideology and material means of political mobilisation made it possible for a small minority to maintain control over the masses and prevented overt class conflicts.

### **Perspectives on social mobilisation: resources, opportunities, frames**

Resource-mobilisation theory has focused on the significance of the available resources to mobilise people to collective action and organisational building. Successful resource mobilisation has been constructed as the result of strategic actions by skilful organisational leaders (Olliver and Marwell 1992, McCarthy and Wolfson 1996). Scholars working within the resource-mobilisation perspective have sought to analyse how the presence and absence of resources may explain differences on the mobilisation level, but have been criticised for not explaining structural differences in the access to resources (Piven and Cloward 1992). In an article on the viability of ‘social-movement organisations’ among the homeless, Cress and Snow (1996) sought to map various conjunctions of necessary and sufficient resources for organisation viability. However, they did not explain the reasons why we find differences in external resource mobilisation between different organising attempts based on the same status. Unfortunately, the substantial organisation properties tended to be mistaken for the ‘explanation’. This left us with little understanding of the mechanisms that led to differences in viability.

The political-opportunity-structure perspective has explored how institutional arrangements facilitate and impede collective action. The framework was developed in part as a reaction to the emphasis resource-mobilisation theory had attributed to individual actors in mobilising external resources. The degree of access to and openness of government have been seen as determining the costs for pressing claims (Tilly 1984, 1988; Kriesi *et al.* 1995). Although it is not intrinsically wrong, the theoretical logic attributed to the actors by assuming cost-benefit analyses on their part has provided little understanding of the actors’ interpretations, considerations and motivations for their actions.

Scholars working within the ‘framing perspective’ have focused on successful and unsuccessful mobilisation of symbolic resources in constructing social problems and collective identities within different political cultures. But this was not related to the mobilisation of financial and other substantial resources. Their main focus has been on the attribution of meaning, production and adjustments of local belief systems by small actors (“frame alignment”) rather than the social and cultural opportunity structures. The framing perspective on social movements has been criticised for not providing the answer to why some frames win a constituency and others do not. Scholars working

within this perspective have tried to take cultural domination into account by developing the concept of 'master frames' (Snow and Benford 1992: 138-141). But the ideational account has remained unconnected to the reciprocation between actors holding different social positions and operating within social institutions. There appears to have been a risk of understanding the interpretative 'frames' as decoupled from the social structure in which they have emerged and been mobilised. The focus appears to have remained on the actors' constructions of meaning, with the inherent risk that issues, such as the impact of social structures, how the actors' interpretations and choices are influenced by their social positions and how the actors' pursue their interests, are not properly reflected in the model (Babb 1996).

More recently, Charles Tilly and others have given more attention to the connections between institutions, citizenship, identities and social movements. This has led the way to the development of more relational accounts. Public identities and discursive representations have been construed as emerging in an interaction *between* individuals and groups rather than as given prior to the interaction and located in the mind of self-propelling, rational actors or whole nations (Tilly 1995, 1998; Hanagan and Tilly [Eds.] 1999). Scholars who have been proponents of individualistic interest-based accounts of social movements appear to have moved closer to the constructionist approach to struggles over public identity and signification addressed in the 'new social-movement literature': Collective action has been viewed as a cultural product created through the processes whereby local actors make sense of their lived experience and produce meaning. Alberto Melucci (1996) has suggested that we may analyse the processes of interaction, negotiations, conflicts and compromises among a variety of different actors who either succeed or fail to produce the unity and collective identity of social movements. A social movement was not a given homogenous empirical actor, but constructed through processes of ongoing negotiation of a collective identity, i.e., an interactive and shared definition of 'who we are', produced by a number of individuals (Bartholomew and Mayer 1992; Hjelmar 1996; Melucci 1995, 1996).

As seen from an interest-based perspective, the impact of collective and public identities has been twofold: First, the construction of a collective or group identity will be important for the ability of social categories to give voice to their claims and participate in shaping citizenship. A collective identity enables social actors to act as a unit. Second, claims to and contention about collective identities and public



representations of oneself or others can be viewed as expressions of strategic interaction between actors pursuing their self-interests rather than ‘descriptions’ of ‘who they are’. Admittedly, the self-presentations also have more existential or self-expressive aspects. Identity cannot be reduced to questions of legitimisation (Calhoun 1991). Travellers’ self-presentations were perceived as basically true by themselves. But how they presented themselves was also varied and context-dependent. The alternative framings of their experiences and contributions to society as a whole were not unlimited. The choice of coping and resistance strategies on the part of the disadvantaged can be understood as socially structured improvisations rather than *tabula rasa* choices made one by one and from scratch. The actors have a prehistory, prior experiences and mental maps that are likely to influence their habitual action patterns. However, by emphasising the voluntaristic situational dimension, we may avoid an overly deterministic view of the disadvantaged and their opportunities for agency.

From a structuralist perspective it is possible to explain differences in social mobilisation and organisation viability on the basis of differences in institutionalised expectations and cultural assumptions. Statham (1997) suggested introducing the term ‘discursive opportunity structures’, which refers to which ideas are considered sensible, which constructions of reality are seen as realistic and which claims are held to be legitimate within a certain polity at a given point in time. But similar to the political opportunity structure perspective, the relation between structure and actor was to a large extent conceptualised as external and the mediating mechanisms in need of further elaboration. Hence proponents of structuralist perspectives have resumed individualistic models of actors pursuing their self-interest within a particular cultural context. The cultural properties have remained only as the *context* for action rather than seeing actors, culture and structures as mutually constitutive (Calhoun 1991).

### **Perspectives on social mobilisation: conversion of capital**

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has attempted to build models of the internal relations between culture, social structures and participation by individuals and groups in the exercise of authority. Integration and social order have been viewed in terms of social differentiation, construction and maintenance of symbolic boundaries, and social exclusion as the outcome of dominance. The picture of society as a whole has been one

of a number of only partly overlapping social worlds, but also one of how different ‘capital types’ or resources are traded and converted in struggles for authority and recognition. Bourdieu has sought to overcome the divide between the subjectivist or constructionist and objectivist or structuralist approaches and develop more relational understandings of the plural social worlds that make up society.

To combine the components in the analyses, the researcher should first map the objective social structures constituted by the actors’ resources to appropriate socially scarce goods and values and the space of social positions that structures the actions of individuals and social groups from the *outside*. In our cases, this could include observations about the actors’ choices, construction of a map of the allies, counterparts and competitors, actors and institutions that affected the self-organisational efforts among the disadvantaged, and whether they managed to mobilise resources for the organisational efforts and statistics about their recruiting field. This is the objective data about the organisational efforts and their environments. Second, the researcher should explore the actors’ subjective experiences and perceptions that structure his or her actions from the *inside*. We want to clarify the mental schemes, classification schemes, taxonomies, definitions and perceptions of situations that the actors apply to understand and manoeuvre in the social world. To do so, we need data about the actors’ own considerations, attribution of meaning and accounts of their actions. This is the subjective data about the self-organisational efforts and their environments (Wacquant 1992: 11-14).

From a constructionist point of view, one could have argued that the subjective properties were primordial in constituting social reality (Berger and Luckman 1966, Järvinen 2001). In comparison, Bourdieu has attributed epistemological primacy to the objective structural properties. To understand how the objective world is structured, reproduced and transformed by the subjective representations and dispositions that structure the actions and choices of actors, the researcher wants to ask where the schemes come from and how they relate to social structure. According to Bourdieu, culture has not been created by society through egalitarian processes, but has been coloured by the dominant actors who set their perceptions, value patterns and motivations. Dominance, subordination and exclusion have rarely been the result of the conscious use of power and suppression from the elites, whether it be professors, artists, journalists, bishops, civil servants, supreme court judges or members of parliament. But

the actors have different social distance and closeness to arenas of importance to pursue their interests. Thus they develop different familiarity with the necessary skills, styles and modes of interacting with others to succeed in particular areas of society, be it in education, art, business or politics.

The motivational processes of the elites and the disadvantaged have been understood in terms of their habitual lines of action. Both among the elites and the disadvantaged, domination resides in the orchestrated fit between their dispositions and the space of social positions they operate within. People developed a set of habits, libidinal interests, skills and world-views derived from the experience they accumulate as incumbents of different social positions. Their practices should be understood on the basis of how their dispositions have emerged, become institutionalised as formal and informal requirements, etiquette and standards of behaviour and talking, and internalised by the individual actor as more or less immediate knowledge and practices. There is a connection between how people perceive the social world and their social positions. As the mental schemes structure people's actions from inside, they have a political effect by tending to preserve and reproduce social structures. The dominated tend to contribute to the reproduction of the dominance by their practices, be they homeless, blue-collar workers, women or ethnic minorities. The dominance is probably greatest when the distribution of resources, citizenship rights and obligations, and what is conceived as 'social problems' and authority relations, appear as necessary and natural by the dominated. This could be understood as blaming the victim. But when the dominated contribute to maintaining the relations of domination we must understand why they act the way they do (Wacquant 1992: 23-24).

In our study, we have sought to identify the resources and strategies the disadvantaged actors use to produce effects, the rules for conversion of resources and how the actors' position-taking contribute to reproduction and change in the relations between the elites and the disadvantaged. The total welfare policy of a nation state may be seen as the outcome of concurrent and contradictory practices where different types of capital or resources are assessed, distributed and traded. One capital type can be converted into other types of capital. A number of actors and institutions are involved, each pursuing their interests on the basis of their subjective perceptions and objective resources and skills (Peillon 1996). Efforts at vocalisation of the disadvantaged member categories and efforts to negotiate an active role in the design and implementation of

welfare policy depend on the resources and competence the organisations have available. The disadvantaged may exchange or convert resources to produce effects in the welfare-policy area. Successful resource mobilisation and vocalisation by the organisations are likely to depend on which capital forms and rules of conversion are constitutive for participation in the social space where the welfare policy is formulated.

### **Summary and concluding remarks**

A major problem in relational perspectives has been the disagreement about how we best conceptualise how the actors respond to each other, the motivational processes or mechanisms behind the reciprocation and how they are combined in different social situations; social roles, dispositions or voluntaristic interaction (Hvinden 1994b, 1995; Mouzelis 1995). My pragmatic solution to this has been to explore the usefulness of the different accounts where they appeared relevant for the interpretation of the data. This has given me the opportunity to develop more of an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms that promote and impede social mobilisation among the disadvantaged, in other words, under what conditions they are likely to emerge as social collectives. It may be objected that this implies eclecticism, but in my opinion the time is not ripe for a synthesis of the different views and approaches.

It could possibly be argued that a relational perspective does not provide sufficiently clear-cut answers to whether the disadvantaged are excluded, and that the interpretations of the actors' motives remain too uncertain and equivocal. I would counter this argument by asserting that more would be lost than would be gained in an understanding of the complexities and paradoxes in the reciprocation between the disadvantaged and the elites if we insist on obtaining such clear-cut answers. By emphasising the ambiguities we may avoid more accidental distinctions between latent and manifest functions, intended and unintended consequences, strategic or norm-directed actions, self-interest or solidarity, tolerance or indifference, help or control. It may vary as to the extent to which the actors are aware of the underlying purpose, latent functions or unintended consequences of welfare-policy measures (Hvinden 1995, Levine 1971). We could also have argued that we nevertheless need clear-cut operationalisations of who we define as poor in quantitative measures. But for the study of social reactions and counter-reactions that I focus on here, and as I mainly use so-

called qualitative data, the social definition of the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ has been of greater importance.

A recurrent theme in this and the previous chapter has been our conceptualisation of citizenship for the interpretation of the social position of the disadvantaged. Citizenship should not only be understood in terms of formal obligations and rights associated with a person’s category membership. Admittedly, the enforceable rights and obligations will be a significant dimension. The policy and practices of the state constitute a core in defining citizenship. But this should not lead us to ignore the informal expectations, norms and more or less taken-for-granted assumptions circulating in particular cultures about what constitutes “good” and “bad” citizens, and about what the accepted modes and standards of living are. The discursive representations of the categories of people – who they are and what is characteristic of them, the positive and negative qualities attributed to them – justify maintenance and change in the formal and informal citizenship rights and obligations. Today, the mass media is an important mediator and possible party in the construction of such representations. The way people are portrayed in the media and in public has an impact on the symbolic position of categories of people in the greater society. In the next instance, this affects the opportunities for pressing claims on the part of the pertinent social category.

By ‘social categories’ I refer to external classifications of people with one or more features in common, defined by those who classify rather than those who are classified. In this case, the members appear as serial existence. In comparison, I use ‘social groups’ when referring to actors who relate to each other and are characterised by mutual identification. This means that different social groups can exist both within and between various social categories. When social groups emerge, the differences along other dimensions are overridden. A ‘target group’ in welfare policy is a specific type of social category defined by the social and political elites. Here, social categories will be the broader and analytical term. Similar to other social categories, ‘target groups’ can be recruiting potentials for social groups. Whether they manage to act as interest conflict groups depends on their being successful in giving a *voice* to their claims and to achieve some moral authority.

Often the lack of commodity or exchange value has been referred to in order to account for a low mobilisation level by the socially excluded, especially for people out

of work (eg. Offe 1973). A marginal position in the market for “labour power” has commonly been assumed to weaken the opportunities and prospects for social mobilisation more generally. This argument has, however, ignored the significance of the symbolic use value of different categorical identities. Lack of commodity value cannot account for why disabled people and some ethnic minorities have much more institutionalised and viable organisations to represent their interests than people who are out of work (the ‘unemployed’, ‘jobless’, etc.) and/or recipients of social assistance. In contrast to what is often claimed, I shall argue that vulnerable social groups may have cultural resources to bring into play in order to pursue their interests, assert their views and raise demands to the political elite. Whether the actors’ status was defined as ‘job-seeker’, ‘client’, ‘loser’ or ‘Traveller’ gave different opportunities for and impediments to social mobilisation.

The Norwegian welfare policy can be regarded as the outcome of the co-operation and competition between different sets of actors that hold different types and levels of capital. The relationship between the actors and institutions has developed over an extensive period of time. We may refer to this as a *welfare-policy field*. The actors try with varying degree of success to use the types of capital they have available to influence on their own and other people’s life opportunities, the design and implementation of the welfare policy. The actors participating in the welfare-policy field may vary and depend on which category of policy measures and category of people one is considering. In the following I seek to identify some symbolic and more substantial types of capital that seems to have become important to influence on the official welfare policy in Norway on the part of the disadvantaged (cf. Ch. 5, 10 and 11).

In the welfare-policy field we are likely to find different configurations of participating actors and institutions depending on the national context we are examining. In Norwegian context staff in the state administration clearly have become influential, but “bureaucrats” are not the only actors operating in the field. Other actors and institutions may include the mass media, staff in the health services, employers and trade unions, and sometimes voluntary associations and the Church. People working in these sectors have different professional background, skills and motivations for participating in the welfare-policy field (eg. social workers, doctors and priests). They

hold different social positions and may develop different perspectives on and judgements of the existing welfare policy measures.

There are different elites that will tend to be more influential and have a higher volume of the capital types that has become necessary to succeed in specific fields of society. Bureaucrats, trade unions, journalists, priests and members of parliament possess different types of resources and skills to influence on the policy development. They represent different fields of society that have their own hierarchies, rules and requirements. They are able to act in their respective field insofar as they possess the necessary resources and skills to produce effects within it.

Some types of capital are likely to be more dominating than others. They are not of equal value or usefull in all institutional contexts. However, under given circumstances some types of capital can be converted into other types of capital. For instance, in our cases the organisation participants could use the status as a Traveller or 'loser' to achieve financial support from the central government, members and outside supporters. The symbolic use-value of the status can be regarded as a kind of symbolic capital that could be converted into economic and human capital. In other areas of society it would not be valid to refer to such a status to achieve resources, a higher and more influential social position and/ or access to participation. It has sometimes been argued that the study of resource mobilisation and identity construction are irreconcilable. I would argue that it is possible to see the subjects as connected. The symbolic and other resources can be defined as types of capital that are traded in the welfare-policy field by the actors in efforts to pursue their interests and values.

To evaluate the impact of institutional contexts for the self-organisational efforts among the disadvantaged, we will refer to two types of opportunity structures: *Cultural opportunity structures* refers to the dominant and competing symbols, folk theories and discourses available that structure people's action choices and which people use to justify and excuse their actions. Relationally, cultural properties include the options for claiming a status as an ethnic minority, presenting oneself as a victim of circumstances outside one's own control, and so on. In distributional terms, culture emerges as the values and viewpoints, or modes of understanding the social world, the actors represent and how they express them, and their actual value priorities in the course of situational interaction with others. In comparison *social opportunity structures* refers to the formal and informal institutionalised expectations and requirements that people orient

themselves towards, the social positions and roles they achieve and are attributed, and the rules they produce and reproduce in interaction with others. Distributionally, social structures emerge as the accumulation of individual and organisational resources or types of capital; financial capital, members and outside supporters, competence in interacting with public authorities and the mass media, and so on. The symbolic aspects of the resources, the high charisma and human qualities attributed to those with high scores and vice versa, that is the associated meaning, may be regarded as a cultural property.

We have sought to explore how the efforts at self-organisational were influenced by the institutional contexts they operated within and vice versa. Such contexts are likely to influence on the formation of groups, the configuration of interaction patterns, alliances and conflicts, we are likely to find between individuals and social groups. By applying a process-oriented perspective we have sought to explore how the actions and non-actions of the organisation participants were influenced by the specific contexts they tried to act within and how this influenced on their future opportunities for action. The actors used the cultural resources they have available to present themselves to others, negotiate access to resources and manipulate symbols to achieve a better social position. Through communication of meaning they could seek to improve their own life opportunities. This way we have sought to balance the study of agency and institutions.

We shall argue that mobilisation of external financial, human and moral support to self-organised activities was influenced by the disadvantaged's *own* problem understanding, the possibility of justifying demands and the socially expected duration of his or her status as perceived by the dominant groups, especially the political elites and mass media. The sociological history and legitimacy of the member category and definition of status were likely to influence the response from the elites, external resource mobilisation and the recruitment of members to the organisation. We shall show that the coping and resistance strategies used by the disadvantaged followed subjective path dependencies. Earlier events induced further steps in the same direction: Actors developed loyalties and vested interests, and adopted interpretations of the social world coloured by their experience and the people they interact with. Or they continued to pursue the strategies they had successfully applied earlier. They consolidated their comparative advantage or avoided the risks associated with unexplored coping and resistance strategies.



In a similar vein, we found subjective path dependencies among the social and political elites. The recognition, non-recognition and mis-recognition by the elites appeared to structure access to the skills or capital types necessary to influence the political decision-making processes on the part of the disadvantaged. The differences in terms of categories had become institutionalised (David 1985, Levi 1997: 28-29, North 1990, Pierson 2000, Putnam 1993). There appeared to be durable categorical differences in institutional forces and cultural opportunities for self-organisation and vocalisation of identity and interest claims on the part of the disadvantaged. At the same time, there were options for choice and manoeuvring on the part of the disadvantaged.

All in all, it appeared that we should expect several factors or partial processes to influence the self-organisational efforts. By combining and fluctuating between different theoretical perspectives, we have sought to achieve a broader and more “holistic” understanding rather than pursue a more narrowly defined focus. Each of the perspectives mentioned above could probably, with their epistemological limits, have contributed to an increased understanding of the self-organisational efforts by the disadvantaged. We have rather chosen to focus on the connections. The various theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but emphasise different aspects and dimensions of significance to achieve a better understanding. For instance, explanations will be connected to the construction and reconstruction of ‘social problems’, discourses to resource mobilisation, subjective problem understanding to objective citizenship rights and obligations, stigma and labelling processes to the recruitment of members, official definitions of social problems to exercise of power and dominance. We have not sought to develop a coherent conceptual scheme, but provide an as informed and rich analysis of the self-organisational efforts as possible by fluctuating between different, partly complementary and partly competing accounts and perspectives, and evaluating them against my empirical data. We will justify this further in the next chapter.



## **Design and methods in the data collection**

This chapter gives the reasons for choosing a comparative and case-oriented approach to the study of social mobilisation processes among the disadvantaged. It discusses the rationale, limits and possibilities of our approach. Furthermore, I explain the selection of cases and describe how we collected data.

### **Case-oriented approach**

Prior to our study we only had scarce knowledge of and access to the field. Only limited background information necessary for choosing a random sample of a large number of organisations or a strategic sample of viable and non-viable organisations was available. Neither was it obvious which strands of the literature would be most helpful in highlighting the research questions. We had no firm basis on which to develop a more precise hypothesis prior to the data collection. An open and *explorative* research design was therefore considered to be the most appropriate.

We have sought to attain in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon (self-organisation) in its context (citizenship). We would not have been satisfied with only providing a detailed description of the organisational efforts, how they emerged and their development pattern. The explorative part of the project would not help us to open the black box. Having explored the characteristic features of the cases included in the study, we wanted to examine the mechanisms and generative forces that were likely to promote or impede social mobilisation. Arguably, the open research strategy does not contradict our *explanatory* aspirations. This presupposes, however, a methodological clarification of the limits and possibilities of modelling causality in case-oriented research.

Using the case study for anything besides exploratory forays has been considered risky. The orthodox point of view has been that strong explanations, including causal attribution, can only be derived through quantitative studies, especially

large-scale surveys and controlled experiments. Case-oriented analyses are allegedly “only” good for exploratory forays, for developing conjectures, hypothesis and theories. Thus, a variable-oriented approach is said to have greater explanatory power. I would argue, however, that different conceptualisations of causality have practical implications for empirical research and the manner in which we model the possible multiple causes of a given event, phenomenon or outcome. Accounts or explanations of the organisational viability would be modelled differently, depending on how we conceptualise causation.

Patton (1990: 490) has contended that: “speculations on causal relationships in qualitative analysis are entirely appropriate as long as they are clearly labelled as speculative”. Bearing this in mind, Patton has claimed that case-oriented research should develop (1) context-bound extrapolations rather than generalisations and (2) develop perspectives on a given theoretical construct (sociological phenomenon) rather than search for objective truth. Patton points out differences between scholars in tolerance for ambiguity in analyses. Hence scholars approach the contradictions and paradoxes we may meet in empirical research differently (Levine 1971). Unfortunately, Patton seems to conflate modelling of causation with questions of prediction and inference. Hence, he appears to assume that causation is less important in case-oriented research. This follows from a specific conceptualisation of causation. We may ask, however, if Patton did not too easily surrender terrain to quantitative and variable-oriented analysis. Both the case and variable-oriented approach aim at producing intelligible descriptions of events or outcomes by putting one feature (“fact”) into relation with others, but the conceptualisation and modelling of causality varies significantly.

In contrast to Patton’s position, it has been contended that case studies may provide a good opportunity to analyse causal configurations in terms of processes and mechanisms. Analyses of processes and mechanisms have often been highlighted as major features by researchers who contend that case studies have a different rationale than variable-oriented research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 1994; Miles and Huberman 1994; Ragin 1987, 1994). Even case studies approach or assess different attributes and features in the observation units. Exploration and modelling of these complexities have been suggested to be some of the advantages of case-oriented research. The processes

and mechanisms may be understood in terms of complex causal figurations, even though this vocabulary is often avoided (Abbot 1992, Sayer 1992).

Unfortunately, case studies are often conflated with the use and analysis of qualitative data. Mis-representation of case studies is liable to result in flawed and obscured discussions on methodology. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative data is often referred to, when in fact, the approach and purpose of the analysis would be more pertinent. Selection of data type and the number of units is secondary. Case studies may include both qualitative and quantitative data and seek as much information as possible of a small to medium number of units (Feagin *et al.* 1991, Yin 1989). This may include a wide variety of data types. The more in-depth information we seek, the fewer number of units we are likely to be able to cover. Analyses of a limited number of units may provide more detailed data than large-scale data sets, and they pursue a more intensive focus. Similar to Stoecker (1991), we may argue that a case study is more of a design feature or a methodological approach than a choice of technique for gathering data.

A case should be selected for its typicality rather than its representativeness. As Mitchell (1983) has argued, the cases should have theoretical relevance. Cases should not be selected randomly and be assumed to be statistically representative of a larger population, but should be selected for their particular sociological significance and explanatory power. This may include the study of rare events, historically significant cases, and comparison of cases selected for theoretical reasons. Mitchell (*ibid.* 192) called a case study a “detailed examination of an event (or series of events) which the analyst believes exhibits (or exhibit) the operation of some identified general theoretical principle”. In a similar vein, Emigh (1997) asserted that cases which deviate from the outcome predicted by theory are strategically important in the development of sociological theory. But a single case study may have theoretical relevance without having status as a critical case. As a more modest objective we may account for a given case by applying existing theory to account for the logical relations of the idiosyncratic interconnections and combinations of events. Assuming that cases exhibit the operation of identified general theoretical principles, we may maintain that a single case study could serve well for logical inference. While a single case is likely to display a unique combination of properties, it may nevertheless have theoretical relevance for a broader set of cases of the same type.

Contrary to what Stake (1994) has claimed, a case study is probably more of a methodological approach than a choice of observation units *per se*. What makes case studies distinct is the logic and rationale of the study. Admittedly, the choice of methodological approach will affect the construction of the observation units. Holistic and context-bound analyses of the observation units imply a different approach to and construction of the data. Observation units are considered as “meaningful but complex configurations of events and structures” (Ragin 1994: 300) rather than as a homogenous background for the measurement of co-variation between properties. If we think of causes and effects as arranged in structured networks, case-oriented studies may analyse disembodied but combinatorial properties and context-bound connections over time (Miles and Huberman 1994). Case-oriented research may identify complex and compositional causal configurations or networks of events and processes.

In the variable-oriented approach, causality is commonly conceived as regularity in sequences of events, and cause and effect are seen as logically independent (Wright 1971). Although causation often involves conjunctive plurality of causes, most statistical tests assume only linear, additive effects. Interaction effects are thus considered to be errors. This is in part due to the lack of efficient statistical techniques for identifying interaction effects (Sørensen 1998). Equally important are probably the simplifying assumptions about causation. Features or characteristics in the observation units are isolated and regarded *as if* they were separate substances or realities. Moreover, causal explanations and predictions are commonly considered to be symmetric. Both statistical correlations and causal powers are seen as contingent and unnecessary relationships. Assuming the Humean view of causation as regularity in relations between empirical entities, causal relations cannot be detected in a single case (Marini and Singer 1988).

Advocates of case-oriented research have objected that the variable-oriented analysis may establish positive associations, but does not tell us much about the underlying causal powers or forces that generate the relationships. Explanation and prediction are different issues. The possible statistical correlation is different from the actual forces that generate the associations. Inference from data to a population predicts the probability or relative frequency of an outcome. Explanations seek to connect facts, traits or properties to make a given pattern or phenomenon intelligible. Causal explanations involve reference to what generates or produces an event or outcome and

tell us what makes events take place. What establishes the causation is the representation, not the statistical inference. Bearing this in mind, it could be argued that the validity of the extrapolations depends on the cogency of theorisation and model building.

Andrew Sayer (1992) has maintained that causal powers are internally related to the objects under study and that only statistical correlations are external. This deviates from the more conventional view that cause and effect are logically independent. If we are to believe Sayer, causal powers are inherent in social relations. A relation is internal when the quality of the object is dependent on the existence of other objects. Furthermore, Sayer argues that internal relations are necessary conditions for an outcome. Causality may be conceived as logical relations between abstract properties. But if we talk about logically dependent relations, we may want to abandon the idea of causation. What we then have at hand are *grounds*, not causes, and *consequences*, not effects (Strasser 1985).

Lack of knowledge about the intermediary processes or transactions – the black-box problem – is often associated with the variable-oriented approach. Case-oriented analyses have been accorded privileged status and variable-oriented studies have been considered dependent on case-oriented analyses. We should derive explanatory models going beyond sheer association to explain how differing structures produce the event or outcome we observe. Arguably, the variable-oriented approach offers a good opportunity to explore regularities (the “what” questions), but not generative forces (the “why” and “how” questions). As correlations are symmetric relations, it may be difficult to distinguish causes and effects. There is a difference between modelling processes and exploring the occurrence of significant tendencies in co-variation. But an increase in the number of intermediate variables may improve the modelling of processes and mechanisms within a variable-oriented frame of analysis. Moreover, it has been argued that process data, and especially event-history analyses, provide an opportunity to break up the co-variation by adding a time dimension (Schweder 1986). Even though increased data quality may mitigate the black-box problem, it is open to question whether one would succeed in gathering sufficiently detailed data that would allow an active interplay between theory and evidence.

One may argue that whether the case or variable-oriented approach is the more appropriate for modelling relationships depends on the adequacy and relevance of the

data. Rueschemeyer and Stephens (1997) asserted that the case-study approach might provide more relevant evidence about the forces that generate the relationship between properties and thus explain the co-variations and patterns that we observe in large-scale surveys. In-depth information on a few units may provide the basis for a more detailed interaction of theory and relevant evidence. This may perhaps provide a better basis for developing representations of hidden mechanisms, internally related phenomena and structures of social relations. Evidence should show that each entity or event is an instance of the account. Detailed observation and repeated interviews and informal conversations with interviewees may provide a good opportunity to analyse the idiosyncratic interaction patterns. Intensive analyses may show how the objective sequence of events and actors' choices occur over time and how actors act on intentions based on their subjective interpretations, beliefs, visions and values. Accordingly, it could be argued that case studies might possibly be more likely to incorporate the essential elements of the concrete situation.

### **Bound generalisations in open systems**

Although nomothetism is rarely defended in the social sciences today, some of the assumptions still appear to be hidden in present-day discussions on and modelling of causation. Deductive-nomological theory assumed predictions based on deduction from general "laws", given a number of initial conditions. Models applied to empirical data may be empty abstractions which do not include the fact that actors exist within a particular kind of society wherein some actions are possible and others are not. Social relations and ideologies are treated as if they were universal. In other cases, open systems are tentatively closed by simplifying and deductive assumptions *ceteris paribus*. Given that all other conditions are equal, it is assumed (1) that you may apply a theory of action deductively and (2) that social systems conform to or may be analysed by a preconstructed and theoretical action logic ("games"). On the one hand, the objection may be raised that such theoretical models are insensitive to local context and do not take into account the actors' point of view. Consequently, there may be a danger of misrepresenting the domain under study. On the other hand, it may be argued that data collection and analysis depend on theoretical models and that all representations depend on simplifying assumptions.



A criticism of case-oriented work has been that analytical induction cannot support general theory. Some case-study analysts advocate detailed studies and inductive inference from observed data for deriving generalisations (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1992). But we may argue that the deductive-inductive dichotomy is independent of or irrelevant to the distinction between the variable and case-oriented approaches (Kelle 1995, Stoecker 1991). Conceptualisation of “reality” is only possible through implicit or explicit interpretive frameworks. Hanson (1958) asserted that all data or “facts” are theory-impregnated. In the social sciences, “reality” is always already interpreted by the local actors, something that gives rise to a “double hermeneutics” (Giddens 1976). There is no privileged position from which the researcher can collect data without any ideas of the interrelations, patterns, connections and associations that will be found. Hence we may argue that “theory” or a conceptual framework unavoidably structures the data collection. Bearing this in mind, case-oriented scholars may agree that research depends on theory, thus not subscribing to pure induction. The theory dependence does not necessarily contradict any attempts at depicting social life from the actor’s point of view or to take the actor’s beliefs and intentions into consideration.

Both in case-oriented and variable-oriented analysis, the explanatory power of representations depends on theory – the logical relations between properties – that may explain the outcome. Causation is never observed, but derived from theory. In the same way, theory is not a summary of the data, but explains the data, the forces and powers that are liable to generate a given outcome. Variable-oriented scholars may agree on this, but tend to under-communicate the importance of theory for empirical analysis or draw a sharp distinction between theory and data. Theory has been considered as relationships between variables, and theoretical accounts have been limited to discussions on which variables should be included in the study (Sørensen 1998). Thus it has been asserted that hypothetico-deductive methodology models a rather sharp distinction between theory development and testing (Bernstein 1983).

Deductive method derives from the assumption that theory determines which facts are relevant. According to a deductive logic of reasoning, the conclusions – and hence the prediction of the outcome or expected pattern of co-variation – follow from the initial theoretical assumptions or premises. Advocates of hypothetico-deductive methodology would argue that we should be able to test powerful explanatory theories

against “facts”. But this presupposes well-developed theory and extensive background information and knowledge of the field. In practice, this tends not to be the case in either case or variable-oriented studies. In some cases we may lack sufficient information about the area under study before the data collection. Consequently, it may be less obvious which strand of the existing literature will best serve to illuminate the area under study. In other cases, the *status quo* of relevant theory and models can be vague or imprecise. Thus we may not possess sufficient knowledge to develop precise and testable hypotheses prior to the data collection.

Pierce (1958) suggested a combination of qualitative induction and abductive reasoning as a more flexible and possibly more realistic methodology than both hypothetico-deductive method and pure induction. Qualitative induction was used to refer to applications of already known theoretical propositions to describe and label observations. The observed phenomenon is subsumed under already established categories, and is often mentioned as “casing” in the literature on case-study methodology (Ragin and Becker 1992). Abductive reasoning refers to invention or development of new theoretical propositions and models to account for unexpected events and anomalies, given predictions on the basis of pre-existing knowledge and the *status quo* of theory.

Later, abduction appears to have been used in a slightly broader sense to label flexible but active interaction between theory and evidence including both casing and theoretical refinement (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 1994, Ragin 1994). Indeed, a relatively open research procedure might contradict the Popperian assumption that knowledge accumulation occurs through refutation. Abductive reasoning contradicts falsification of a theory as a whole, but emphasises the step-wise modification of assumptions and concepts (Kelle 1995). Furthermore, if theoretical assumptions and propositions are interrelated and connected in a systematic conceptual network, “testing” of isolated hypothesis may be less likely than modification of a network of logical propositions (Burrawoy 1990).

In open research designs, *evaluation* may be a more proper terminology than testing for how we may confront theory and models against data. Scholars will depend on the active interplay between ideas and evidence to develop more finely tuned conceptualisation and modelling of events and outcomes. In such cases theories cannot be verified, only be made more probable and useful through repeated application in

empirical investigations. Thus we may arrive at more finely tuned disagreement and discussion rather than unequivocal “findings” and universal agreement. Through explicit discussion of alternative accounts and new combinations of theoretical propositions we may achieve corroborated theory and improved understanding of the domain under study.

Advocates of the variable-oriented approach have claimed that theory should focus on invariance and should be causally relevant to as many instances as possible. The findings should be generalizable and it should be possible to test them. Furthermore, powerful explanatory models should have the capacity of deduction and prediction of statements. The variable-oriented approach advocates as parsimonious explanations as possible and often focuses on the main effect variable. From the variable-oriented approach, what falls outside of the explained variance may be considered a residual category (Goldthorpe 1997a, b), or as random events that fall outside the invariant patterns that should be explained (Liebersohn 1997). Thus scholars define causal relations probabilistically.

Advocates of the variable-oriented approach have maintained that it is impossible to reach generalisations on the basis of a small number of cases. From this perspective, our cross-category comparison of a small number of organisational efforts among Travellers and claimants is doubly impossible: Not only is there a shortage of cases, there is also a great surplus of explanatory variables. But scholars who give voice to such allegations usually fail to distinguish between analytical generalisation (logical inference) and numerical generalisation (statistical inference) (Yin 1989). A hypothesis about a possible significant tendency of co-variation between two properties is not the same as the logical relations in systems of theoretical propositions. This is not to say that theory testing should be confined to analyses of quantitative data (large-N surveys). Theory testing demands, however, well developed theory and hypotheses, and hence a narrower focus to apply in single case studies.

In general, interpretationists have attacked the variable-oriented approach for drawing misleadingly unequivocal conclusions and assuming that associations cannot be attributed to alternative or complementary explanations (Abbott 1991). Equivocation makes verification and falsification difficult, but analyses that emphasise the multiple character of the phenomenon under study may provide more realistic representations. This presupposes that the possible equivocation of a phenomenon is accounted for and

made explicit in the analysis. The most parsimonious explanation is not necessarily the better explanation. Given that theory should not be considered as summaries of data – “facts” constructed as factors or variables – explicit discussions of alternative accounts may promote more finely tuned models or interpretations of the area or phenomenon under study. Furthermore, if one assumes that all theoretical propositions can be questioned, fuller accounts may be preferred. Hence case-oriented researchers may promote judgmental interpretation and propositional knowledge (Bernstein 1983).

While an open research design may contradict development of testable hypotheses and precise models prior to the data collection, it has been argued that case-oriented researchers may develop testable hypotheses during the research process. Barth (1966, 1981) argued that theories and models are logically generated patterns that should be questioned, checked and continually modified against empirical observations. Validity, he asserted, should be demonstrated by showing in what way the models represent or depict processes which are empirically verifiable. If the observed outcome or empirical findings differ from the expected outcome deduced from theory, we may want to seek alternative explanations or redesign models in an attempt to discover and depict other relevant generic processes (Barth 1966, 1981; Brox 1995).

In a similar vein, Yin (1989) argued that we should develop theory through systematic testing of hypotheses and selection of cases that are strategically important and critical for theory development. In *multiple-case designs*, cases should be selected stepwise as we develop an improved and more detailed understanding of the issue at stake. Cases should not be selected as a representative sample of a larger population, but for literal or theoretical replication, *i.e.*, cases that we expect for theoretical reasons to produce the same or a contrary outcome. Yin recommended that we make explicit observable implications of hypotheses we develop during the research process. Hence we may derive evidence that supports or contradicts the theoretical propositions. If the findings are contradictory, Yin asserted that we should revise the initial propositions and retest them against new cases.

But intensive research designs provide more subtle and equivocal data and are more difficult to interpret. Even though we may possibly report how the data fit the propositions, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to draw unequivocal conclusions. Moreover, the possibility to strategically select cases will be limited by the *de facto* access we manage to negotiate to the relevant cases. It is also a time-consuming activity

to negotiate access to data. Thus, in practice, one will need to adjust pragmatically to the ideal replication logic and possibly postpone further refinement to later investigations. In conjunction with this line of reasoning, models and theories may be considered as being continually under revision.

Arguably, models that are induced from active interplay between theory and data fall prey to *ad hoc* explanations and are vulnerable to major alterations if new and other cases are included in the study. Hence it could be argued that case studies are too sensitive to local context. But context does not only provide introductory background information for the analysis and is most likely essential in the interpretations or explanations. In case studies, accounts or explanations may be closely related to exploration of the context of the case. First, open research designs need to discuss explicitly what are the relevant features or properties that explain the phenomenon under study. Second, Mitchell (1983) argued that only by accounting for the context is it possible to assess under which conditions the extrapolations are valid, and whether it would be valid to consider other cases as instances of the same sociological phenomenon.

### **Category comparison**

Fredrik Barth (1981, esp. p. 73) has recommended that the ideographic character of case studies and ascription of events and outcomes to the particularities of a social system should be de-emphasised and reduced as much as possible. He maintained that *comparisons* are fundamental for theory development. In conjunction with Barth's argument, it may be advisable to increase the external validity to develop more robust models: We may want to increase the number of cases included in the study or compare instances of the same phenomenon across discursive and structural settings. The logic inferences derived from a single case may be tested and refined through replication.

Our choice of category comparison can be considered a modified version of the recommendations by Yin (1989) on stepwise selection of cases. Initially the project started as a comparative study of claimants' organisations. The original plan was to make a contrast-oriented comparison with self-organisational efforts among 'people with disabilities' or 'disabled people'. After we had started the data collection, a separate research programme was initiated on the situation of Travellers in history and

the present. It was clear that contact with the existing organisational efforts would be sought. Pragmatic circumstances made it possible to include Travellers as a case in our study. From the beginning, we had kept open which categories we wanted to include. We removed disabled people's organisations and replaced them with Travellers organisations. However, we continued to pursue the same research objective and explored the relative significance of the same key dimensions during the entire process. The category comparison has had similarities with a *theoretical replication* logic, i.e., selection of cases that were assumed to produce contrary results for predictable reasons (ibid. 53).

I knew in advance that there was a degree of overlapping in membership between the categories and that there also had been some contact between some of the organisations in the two categories. However, I did not know the nature of the contact between the organisations, especially between the National Association for the Losers of Society and the Romani People's National Association. Neither did I know how recent and fragile the organisational efforts were. Empirically, the organisational efforts in both categories appeared to have some common traits that referred to structural parallels between their social positions. But the commonalities in organisational features – the descriptive and explorative parts – were not necessarily the most interesting ones. Theoretical replication and contrasts are not necessarily associated with substantial differences in outcome on the level of the organisation and recruitment. The approximately same level of organisation viability may be the end result of different generative forces.

One could have argued that categories of people who are more similar to people in economic hardship in context and institutional expectations would have been preferable. But the category comparison gave us opportunities to assess the impact of cultural opportunity structures on the self-organisational efforts. Moreover, the relationship between Travellers and the social and political elites was historically significant for understanding certain transformations in the Norwegian welfare regime and changes in the self-perception of the elites. As the field of Travellers' organisations emerged as less amorphous, it was easier to achieve a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms that promoted and impeded social mobilisation in these cases. In the next instance this helped us to interpret our findings from the claimants' organisations. When using Travellers as a point of departure for the analysis, for historical reasons

welfare claimants were the most reasonable comparison. Moreover, organisations of Travellers and claimants were currently in a more similar phase of their formation, while organisations among the disabled had emerged earlier and many of them had also become much more established with professional staff and so on. Much research had already been conducted on disabled people's organisations in Norway (Drejer 1994, Froestad and Ravneberg 1991, Olsen 1994, Ravneberg 2000, Ravneberg and Solvang 1995, Romøren (Ed.) 2000). The reactions and perceptions of the welfare state among claimants and Travellers were more unexplored and unknown.

In hindsight it appears that it would have been better if we had included one of the existing organisational efforts among single mothers as a case. As we became more familiar with the field, we became more interested in the various institutionalised requirements and expectations placed on welfare claimants and collected statistics about the various categories of claimants. It appeared that single mothers to some extent differed from other claimants in the legitimacy of and the time-perspective on their present status. Similar considerations could have been made about an organisational effort based on the status as claimants of disability benefits and vocational rehabilitation that we came across later in the data collection. Together, this could have given us broader data about the experience of and reactions to welfare policy from below. Admittedly, it will be desirable to evaluate and possibly refine the models and theorisation we have developed here in later research on disabled people's organisations and other disadvantaged categories.

The choice of research strategy depends on how far reaching or limited the phenomenon we want to analyse is. It may be appropriate and useful to compare cases across different settings. But if the comparison becomes too extensive, the research design may be too complicated and it may be cumbersome to keep records of all modifications or we may run the risk of only producing trivial generalisations. There is a limit to how many dimensions we manage to compare within the same research project. Fuller theoretical accounts are needed, especially in case studies. Although this may provide more valid accounts it should nevertheless be balanced against the need to reduce complexity and avoid trying to account for all variations or all aspects of a given phenomenon.

We limited the comparison to three key theoretical dimensions. Using cross-category comparison the aim of the project was to analyse the interplay between three

aspects or dimensions assumed to be of importance to social mobilisation: *identification, legitimacy and time-perspective on the status*. Although prior research did not give reason to develop a clearly defined hypothesis in advance, the existing literature suggested that these dimensions would be of significance. Valid comparisons rest upon theoretical models and not substantial similarities. Theory and models isolate significant features of social reality that have some (logic) unity or autonomous force. There was a risk, however, that the comparison across the categories or settings would over-emphasise the theoretical aspect and discard the idiosyncratic features altogether.

### **Generative models**

Arguably, modelling of causality implicitly assumes *time* to be an important aspect for comprehending the issue at stake. Hence, we may want to preserve a chronological flow to the analysis. In certain cases, however, cause and effect may appear simultaneously and attributes may be considered as causes (Barth 1981, Brox 1995, Marini and Singer 1988). For instance, depression and unemployment may appear at the same time. In the same way, lack of support from the government to the organisation and lack of trust in the government may coexist and be observed simultaneously. In both cases it may be difficult to distinguish the attributes in time sequences or there may be no particular theoretical reason why one of the properties should be considered to occur prior to the other. Hence, it may be more appropriate to consider the logic relationship between the properties as one of *mutually reinforcing effects* rather than as a methodological problem of distinguishing heterogeneity and contagion in data (Abbott 1997, Goldthorpe 1997).

Rather than merely conclude with the possible resource combinations that may lead to organisation viability, the distributions of human, moral and economic resources, we wanted to model the sequences and mechanisms that were liable to generate the outcome. The distribution of properties in the organisational efforts should not be considered as given or taken for granted, but as results of sociological mechanisms, a set of factors which through specified operations generate forms. It would not suffice to explain the existence of a given phenomenon, pattern or structure merely by referring to its internal relations. We may want to account for social phenomena in terms of how they come about, reproduce, change and cease to exist



(Lave and March 1975). This did not prevent us from explaining constancy and reproduction. The point is that we wanted to analyse a given phenomenon as the outcome of a process. But reproduction does not take place without social action.

We have not sought to take organisational features as a point of departure for the analysis, but rather as something that should be studied as the outcome of complex processes. If we compare the most and least viable organisation included in our study, the most striking feature was how resources aggregated over time, in line with the Matthew's effect (Merton 1988). The difference in resource mobilisation may be interpreted as an *accumulation effect*. Those who had many resources were likely to increase their advantages and vice versa. Presence of one resource type appeared to increase the likelihood of other resources being present. We found it unsatisfactory, however, merely to state that there were differences. Rather, we preferred to explain the *reasons* for the differences in the outcome.

We could possibly have constructed a historiographic account of the rise and development of a single organisational effort. Then we could have described the course of events at a fairly low level of abstraction. Admittedly, we should be keenly aware of the course of events over time if we want to depict social and societal processes. One may complain, however, that the generative forces at work are often not made explicit in historiographic accounts. The interpreter may risk reifying the domain under study if he or she does not account for how the aggregate comes about. Thus, we may want to derive simpler models to make more explicit the contribution to logic inferences and theory development. As Barth (1981) has argued, we may profit from more thorough, comprehensive and economical descriptions. We may want to build tighter models of the sociological mechanisms. The representations or models one constructs should refer to the sociological mechanisms that restrict and canalise the course of events. Hence, we may focus on qualitative change or differences, transformations and transactions, and the logic relationships between events and properties in the organisational efforts of the disadvantaged.

In comparative case studies it is critical to construct stories or representations across the cases. Arguably, valid comparisons derive from a comprehensive understanding of the processes whereby forms are generated, not from direct comparison of form or aggregates *per se*. Hence one may argue that cross-category comparisons should not compare the social and cultural regularities the organisational

efforts exhibit as such, but sets of factors that through specified operations are liable to generate forms.

### **Selection of cases**

Our pre-knowledge and first systematic inquiry was especially focused on the claimants' organisations, based on former media coverage of these organisations. This alone would have been unsatisfactory. We did not know in advance which organisations existed. We assumed a certain selective bias in which organisations the mass media covered. Probably not all the organisations strove for media attention either. The media coverage could therefore have been influenced by a degree of self-selection. On the basis of the media coverage and our contact with other researchers who knew part of the field from their own work, we contacted a large number of activists, expert advisers and social workers that might possibly know about claimants' organisations. We achieved an overview of organisations by using the "snow-ball method" until we did not get any new tips about units we had not already heard about from others. We cannot, however, assume that our overview is exhaustive. The organisations covered by the media could in themselves have represented an interesting sample. Our effort to achieve a broader overview, however, offered us the opportunity to obtain a more qualified selection. During the project we obtained information about the organisations that did not appear in the media. In this respect we have gone beyond the media coverage. In the next instance, this helped to throw light on the media constructions of the organisational efforts. We chose a fairly small number of cases:

⌘# *The Job-seekers' Interest Organisation* (established 1992): They did not systematically recruit and register members, but the two main activists estimated about 30 people to be "members" in 1999. I came across approximately the same number of people during interviews and visits, but most of them defined themselves as peripheral and did not want to become too involved. Some of them had contact only for shorter time spells.

⌘# *The Poor House* (established 1994): According to some participants, they had about 70-100 people on their mailing list. But many of the addresses were outdated and newsletters were returned. They have not had a membership fee. People attained informal membership by frequent and persistent use of the centre. I have come across about 30 people at the centre. About 5-10 people appeared to constitute a core. But it was not easy to count this, as it varied how active people were, and some downplayed their own involvement.

€# *The Fredrikstad Client Action* (established 1992): According to the core activists they had had about 100 people on their mailing list. A minority paid the membership fee of NOK 20 (2.50 US dollars). In 1997 there was one remaining activist.

€# *The National Association Justice for the Losers of Society* (“the Losers’ Association”) (established 1993): By the end of 1996 they had about 1000 members or users who paid the membership fee of NOK 150 (20 US dollars). The organisation had at that time changed from a board of ‘losers’ to a board of outside supporters.

€# *The Romani People’s National Association* (established 1995): Officially, the organisation had about 400 members, including family memberships and outside supporters. The fee was NOK 150 for individual members, NOK 250 for families. At the end of the 1990s, the organisation emerged as the most encompassing and successful organisational expression of the demands raised by Norwegian Travellers. The board was mainly recruited from southern and eastern Norway.

The various organisational efforts can be construed as different cases of the same theoretical construct or analytical phenomenon we focus on here; self-organisation or social mobilisation on the part of the disadvantaged in society. A possible disadvantage of using several cases could be that this limited the opportunity to achieve in-depth information about each case. Alternatively, the data collection would have taken proportionately more time. We sought to collect comparable data of a more limited size for each of the organisations than if we had pursued a single case study. A higher number of cases may be useful when you have more developed and elaborate hypotheses in advance. In this case you may more easily defend why you focus on certain properties and not others.

Similar to Yin (1989), one may argue that the selection of claimants’ organisations permitted a variety of *literal replication*. We selected a small number of organisational efforts that covered a certain variation in organisational types by claimants. We emphasised covering organisations that appeared to work in slightly different ways and pursued different working strategies. Our prior knowledge about the field indicated that they tended to be fragile and of short duration. We sought to select cases that had existed for some time and appeared to have at least some size in the number of participants and users. We assumed that this would make them more likely to be sustainable or durable organisational efforts and give us a better opportunity to follow them over time. Nevertheless, one of the organisations crumbled during the

research period. In practice, the final selection of organisations was also to some degree dependent on which organisations we managed to negotiate access to and establish co-operation with.

By including several cases from the same social category, we sought to collect more robust data. We could then more easily disregard the ideographic particularities of each case and focus on the analytical commonalities. At the same time the cases gave access to different partial processes and dimensions of self-organisation. The four organisational efforts by people who lived on public cash benefits were highly dependent on a few persons and had more in common with informal networks than traditional interest organisations. However, the degree to which the cases could be considered the “same” or to be producing the same result was limited. The organisations under study had widely differing access to external human, material and moral support, and the differences had also been accumulating during the period the organisations had existed. All four organisations represented people with an objectively weak labour-market position. But they subjectively defined and legitimated their situation differently, and were also categorised and perceived differently by the social and political elites.

We managed to obtain the most extensive data on and closest contact with key informants in the *Romani People's National Association*. We continued to collect data until we did not manage to gain any new information. At this stage, the additional information we obtained about the further course of events in the organisational efforts appeared largely to confirm the interpretations we had already developed. Ideally I would have liked to have followed the organisation just as closely during the entire period I worked on the analysis. As this was too time-consuming, I had to compromise on this and followed them more at a distance after 1999. Our somewhat more limited information on and contact with the other Travellers' organisations has been useful to differentiate the accounts we would otherwise have been able to develop.

The data collection has primarily provided data about the experience, practices and viewpoints of those who in certain respects have had an identity as belonging to the category and have been open about this identity at least to some others. The organisations have been seen as representations of claimants or Travellers if they claimed that they were representations.

Could we have recruited informants and interviewees differently? On the recruitment level of the organisational efforts we could perhaps have contacted public offices to obtain access to their archives. We could have asked the offices to mail letters to a random selection of potential informants to ask whether they were willing to be interviewed. In the case of claimants, we could have contacted the labour-exchange office, social-insurance offices and social-services offices. In the case of Travellers, we could have contacted the National Archive (*Riksarkivet*), which has stored the former client archive of the Mission. For several reasons, this appeared less relevant.

Many claimants had developed an adversary and unwanted relation to the public offices. The National Archive would easily be associated with the Mission and other controlling agencies, and would recall former coping strategies of concealment and avoidance. In both cases, we would have risked to an even greater extent being associated with the government than we actually were. Prior research indicated that we would have achieved few positive responses. We knew from before that people who have been exposed to traumatic experiences and who have been or still are in a difficult or vulnerable position would rarely relate their experience without hesitation. It could be perceived as an extra burden or as having unforeseeable consequences (Downes and Rock 1992 [1982]: 28-56).

Many Travellers sought to conceal their background and identity as they experienced this as a burden. They feared that it would backfire on them or their children if their identity became publicly known. Some also claimed that they had accumulated experience in interaction with the greater society that gave substantial reasons for their fears. Claimants expressed stories of shame and embarrassment, failure to live up to their own standards, and experience of a critical attitude and moral condemnation from or concealment with respect to their spouse, children and neighbours.

In the case of claimants, it was possible that participation in a research project initiated through the public offices in reality would not have been perceived as voluntary but rather as a condition for continued receipt of social security or goodwill from staff in the first-line services. In the case of Travellers, far from all who were registered in the archives of the Mission knew about their association with Travellers. When we take the burden such an approach to recruitment of informants or respondents

could have represented into consideration, it is questionable whether this would have been ethically justifiable.

### **Core issues in the data collection**

The data collection has focused on the viewpoints and reactions that emerged in connection with the social mobilisation efforts; the reasons to contact, participate in, avoid or support the organisational efforts. I have sought to explore the mental schemes Travellers and claimants related to and positioned themselves in relation to, and the symbolic structures and meaning contexts Travellers and claimants have been positioned within by others and positioned themselves in relation to. Data about this has been collected through informal and conversational interviews with key actors, board members, more regular members and users in the surroundings of the organisational efforts.

The analysis has been organised according to the different relations that we were able to analytically distinguish in the self-organisational efforts. We may regard this as different analytical levels. While holistic analyses explore the whole and not the subunits, *embedded analyses* focus on the logical subunits. Holistic analyses can be appropriate when there are no logical subunits, but may otherwise become too abstract and associated with lacking transparency in the data. In comparison, embedded analyses can provide a better focus in the analysis, but entail the risk that one only focuses on the subunits – the individual or recruitment and organisational level – and not the category level and the social and symbolic positions of the organisational efforts in greater society (Yin 1989: 49-50). If we only had focused on the experience, reactions and perceptions of the individual members or participants, this would have been a membership study and not a study of the social mobilisation efforts and their context. Moreover, if we only had focused on the overall outlook of the organisational field or social mobilisation efforts among the disadvantaged, a societal level, and not the recruitment and organisation level, it would probably have been more difficult to arrive at a sound understanding of the mechanisms that appeared to promote and impede social mobilisation.

The main focus has been on adjustments to experiences and perceptions of the welfare state from below. We have to a lesser extent collected new data on the

considerations and experience of the first-line staff of the welfare state and the social and political elites. This was only carried out to a smaller extent to complement other data about the self-organisational efforts. The available research reports and public documents on this made it less necessary. Moreover, we could have explored the differences between the political parties in their consideration of the claimants' organisations more systematically. Our experience of interviewing politicians in the central government indicated that they tended to reproduce official accounts. Former politicians and public officials appeared to talk off the record more easily, and provide additional information about unofficial aspects of their contact with the organisations and organisational efforts. As the claimants' organisations to a great extent represented "unknown" or "unofficial" dimensions of the welfare state, their knowledge about these efforts tended to be limited.

### **The data collection**

From the autumn of 1996 to the autumn of 1999 I interviewed and had conversations with about 50 people of *Traveller* origin. In relation to the organisation I acquired the most in-depth knowledge of, the Romani People's National Association, I have had access to budgets, minutes, protocols and correspondence with the government ministries and others. Others who have taken initiatives to establish organisations have regularly sent me their news bulletins and I have had some fluctuating telephone contact with activists in the other organisational efforts. To some extent I have participated in events arranged by the various organisational efforts and in meetings between the organisational efforts and the civil service. As I have tried to maintain an open contact with several of the organisational efforts at the same time, I have not only gained knowledge about how representatives from different parts of the community tried to negotiate access to resources from outsiders (non-Travellers), particularly the government ministries, but also how they positioned themselves in relation to each other.

I have not had access to the membership register, but board members in the Romani People's National Association helped me establish contact with Travellers they thought I should talk to, after they had given their consent. This shed light on which issues the organisation representatives considered the most important to address. At the

same time, the sample of informants was probably connected to the fact that it appeared more difficult to get in touch with and recruit people who had been “self-sufficient”, “managed on their own” or did not have particular charges against the state in order to arrange interviews. A few informants also contacted us directly after they had heard about the research initiative from others or the media. Our own efforts to contact people known from the media directly or by snowball sampling sometimes ended up with people not turning up for their appointments, or our efforts made organisation representatives suspicious because they felt we had gone behind their backs, especially in the early and vulnerable phase of the data collection.

The board of the Romani People’s National Association preferred us to interview them collectively rather than separately. The relative advantage of group interviews has been that we achieved better access to the various considerations inside the organisation, and broader and richer verbalisation of experiences, positioning, tensions and divergent interpretations among the participants. This was also an opportunity to come closer to the daily life and ordinary interaction between the board members. In this way we gained insight into the context of the organisational work or the various perceptions and accounts of the context that would have been more difficult to achieve on the basis of interviews with individuals (Brandt 1996, Hoel and Hvinden 1982).

After our initial contact in November 1996, we were invited backstage into the home office of the chairperson in September 1997. This turned out to be an important symbolic act and represented a breakthrough in our efforts to build a relationship of trust. Later informal conversations and discussions with the chairperson about the daily life of the organisation became more important, and I used a logbook to keep a record of all brief telephone conversations, during some periods several times a week. We assisted the organisation in writing minutes from meetings, letters to government officials, budget plans and applications for financial support. In this case I had the status as a kind of associated secretary or assistant. During this contact, we often experienced that our direct questions were not responded to directly but answered some days later as unsolicited accounts.

This part of the data collection assumed some similarities with “action research” in the sense that we became involved in and provided practical support to the social mobilisation efforts. In contrast to what is sometimes associated with this approach, our



interpretations have differed from those of our informants. The assistance and support we provided in the wake of the data collection was not in itself central to the research design, but significant for negotiating access. It would have been flawed to believe that one could be “neutral” and not play a role in or affect the mobilisation processes. Alternatively, we would probably have gained less in-depth data. A more passive attitude was, for good reason, likely to be perceived as non-recognition or even mis-recognition of their work on the part of the organisation representatives.

Moreover, I have collected newspaper clippings on an ongoing basis and made notes from radio and television programs that have mentioned Travellers. I have had access to the newspaper clippings and records through our network of researchers, key informants and my own investigation of the national newspapers. The majority of the clippings are from the period 1995-1999. The 185 clippings – articles, commentaries, editorials and letters to the editor – come from 31 newspapers and magazines. I assume that I have managed to gather most of the articles from the nation-wide newspapers, but the clippings do not qualify as a representative sample of all media coverage concerning Travellers. Many of the articles come from small local newspapers. Tips about these have come from our ongoing contact with key informants. The local media coverage illuminated the organisational efforts, their meaning context, what they sought or managed to communicate, and the reactions this led to from Travellers and others. Finally, I have had access to public documents produced by the civil service, green and white papers, transcripts from negotiations in parliament, and documents from the Church of Norway’s reconsideration of their relationship to Travellers in 1998-2000.

In a similar vein, I have interviewed or talked with about 50-60 *claimants*. The first interviews were carried out in June 1996 after we had had some initial contact with activists in different potential cases since February that year. Initially, many of the claimants were reluctant to talk about their own “private” lives, particularly their personal economy. For instance, several informants at the Poor House stated before we made appointments for interviews that they would not talk about themselves (“individual destinies”). In such cases, we stressed that we were more interested in the organisational work. Nevertheless, when we finally met, several of the same informants chose to tell us about their own ‘client career’ without having been encouraged to do so.

We received copies of and collected about 290 newspaper clippings from approximately 40 newspapers relating to the claimants’ organisational efforts. Together

with copies of the organisational documents, correspondence, bulletins, hand-outs and key speeches, this gave us insight into the issues they have pursued, the internal life of the organisation and its contact with the government. We supplemented this with available white papers and brief interviews with some public authorities the organisation representatives had had contact with or identified as their counterparts; national politicians with direct authority, the 'bureaucracy' and the LO confederation of trade unions. In this way, we obtained data about the reactions to the self-organisational efforts as seen from the elites' point of view.

Moreover, limited passive participant observation at annual meetings, board meetings and more informal gatherings, as well as at meetings with local and central government representatives, gave valuable additional information about who constituted the recruitment level to the organisations, their relations to and interaction with each other and the public authorities. During the data collection, an initiative was started to establish an umbrella organisation of claimants' organisations. This gave us the opportunity to participate in meetings and discussions between different organisation efforts. After we had initiated contact with Travellers in November 1996, we limited the follow-up contact and participation in meetings with the Losers' Association, as this could have affected our contact with Travellers negatively.

Finally, we took part in a quantitative membership survey in the Losers' Association. The organisation started as an attempt to make visible the situation of former pupils in special schools and others who considered themselves to be losers in the school system. Even though this did not present ideal conditions for participating in a postal survey, the organisation was the only claimant organisation with a considerable volume of members. The organisation also received significantly more moral and financial support than the other claimant organisations. In 1997 it had a professional leadership, a board of outside supporters and two employees in one full and one half-time position at their office.

The survey was mailed to 1389 people and we received 521 completed responses in the spring of 1997. Although it does not qualify as a representative survey, it has in itself provided useful background information to underpin our reasoning about the relations that emerge between the individual 'users' or members and the organisation. In connection with the test interviews and the survey, several members sent us personal letters to explain their situation. Some also gave us copies of their

client file and we were given access to some applications for equity compensation (“*billighetserstatning*”) and demands of moral redress from the state, an activity that appeared to be important for this organisation. It might have been preferable for us to have had the possibility to interview people in person after they had given their consent. However, our budget was limited, and possibly fewer would have given their consent if we had planned to visit them. All in all, the postal survey represented one way of gaining access to a large number of claimants while still protecting their anonymity.

As a quality check, we presented our preliminary findings to key informants in the organisations. In the case of the Romani People’s National Association, we had a written agreement with the board that they should be kept informed about our progress and read and have the opportunity to give feedback on our manuscripts before they were published. This has not limited what we were able to report on. The feedback made it possible to check whether they recognised themselves in the descriptive section. We were thus able to safeguard that we had understood the actors’ own viewpoints. At the same time, this gave us new data both as corrections of misunderstandings and their reactions to our interpretations. We also presented our preliminary analyses to other scholars who knew parts of the field from their own research.

It was not possible to follow all the organisations equally. In part, we needed to gain an overview and analyse preliminary findings before we continued the data collection, and in part it varied as to how much contact the informants themselves wanted. Particularly in the Poor House, I had to introduce myself on several occasions. Sometimes when I had called to ask if it was suitable if I visited the day after, it turned out that the others at the centre had not been informed. The participants did not express objections to my presence. Admittedly, this was probably sometimes under-communicated. As nobody emerged as the leader, it was more difficult to negotiate access. This was as much a finding as a problem of access and a sign of the uncommitted relationship to the organisation on the part of the participants. Both in this and the other cases I experienced that I had to plan a flexible time schedule for our appointments. People did not turn up, were delayed, or the appointment had to be rescheduled. However, by emphasising everything we had in common with respect to background and experience, I achieved the closest contact with one of the participants who initially had been most reluctant and evasive. Through this, I received some advice

on when the participants at the centre thought our interaction was too much research or they experienced it as surveillance.

Altogether, the combination of sources has provided extensive and fairly systematic data about different partial processes connected to the social-mobilisation efforts. The process data have given insight into the social mechanisms behind progress, and temporary or lasting setbacks; the circumstances that contributed to different development patterns for the organisational efforts. One example of this is how choices and adjustments made in an early phase of the organisational effort limited the choices and adjustments it was possible to make later. Such choices contributed to “good” and “vicious” circles in the efforts to achieve support from “their own” people and partners and allies among outsiders. The duration of our contact and closeness to the actors has helped to provide information about the non-verbalised knowledge, more or less immediate coping and adjustment strategies. Repeated interviews and conversations with key informants have clarified how objective choices and development patterns were associated with the actors’ subjective interpretations, experiences and relations to others in a similar situation and to outsiders. One example of this is how their perception of the public authorities affected their choices. Finally, the continued contact gave informants the opportunity to modify earlier statements and balance their first impression, and thus elaborate on dimensions in the social mobilisation.

### **Further experiences from interviews and access**

Both in the case of Travellers and claimants, we used a checklist of questions the first time we interviewed key personnel in the organisations. After we had gained an overview of the cases, we dropped this. The purpose of the interviews has been to have as interesting and fruitful conversations as possible and not systematic distributions on standardised questions. How do we use the statements by the informants and interviewees? We have not naively assumed that they reflected ‘objective facts’ about the organisational efforts or the ‘true opinion’ of the informants. Rather we have focused on how their statements and considerations were connected to their social position and the meaning context that emerged. Sometimes the same people expressed different and contradictory viewpoints at different times or during the same interview or conversation. For instance, the same Travellers could express both support and

opposition to public recognition as a national minority. We could have asked what they *really* meant. But our main focus has been on the situational context and the underlying considerations of the disadvantaged. For this purpose, surveys were less suitable. The ambivalence of Travellers to become recognised as an ethnic minority has been interpreted on the backdrop of the situation they appeared within.

Admittedly, the frankness of the accounts is not unproblematic. For example, information about the activity level and number of users or members could quite easily be distorted and adjusted to their ideal self-presentation. Some informants obviously tended to under-communicate their problems or experience of vulnerability. Several factors served to compensate for or prevent this. The number of sources made it possible to check data against each other. In the case of key informants, we built a relationship of trust. To begin with, it was not a given that we would manage to achieve this. It was necessary to stress that the project was not an evaluation carried out on behalf of the government. Travellers especially referred to us as working on behalf of the government and therefore not *really* being independent: after all, the government was paying our salary! Informants tested whether we held back information or had contact with others they were not informed about, or whether we otherwise had a hidden agenda. Problems of trust were reinforced by the social and cultural distance between the informants and myself. A majority of the informants were men in their 50-60s, with lower education and who lived in rural areas. I was younger, had more formal education, talked an Oslo dialect and could easily be associated with urban lifestyles. All these were signs of status differences and initially obstacles to unstrained communication.

As many of them were sensitive to criticism we emphasised that the work they did was valuable and important. However, several of the informants appeared not to be entirely convinced about this themselves. It appeared that not all participants felt that their demands and efforts were justified. In several cases, we wrote statements of support to the organisations. As we followed them over time we met repeatedly in informal and more relaxed settings. We had a number of lunches and dinners and travelled together by car and train with the organisation participants to meetings and seminars. This gave opportunities for “off-the-record” conversations.

Whether the interviews were recorded depended to a great extent on whether we knew the informant in advance. We mailed copies of the transcripts from the recorded

interviews to the informants when they requested this. Sometimes this gave us reason to conduct follow-up interviews or they were commented and reflected upon the next time we met. In most cases we preferred to write down notes immediately after the interviews to better achieve a relaxed atmosphere. Tape recording and taking notes could easily raise a suspicious attitude and be associated with surveillance, “inspection” and control. Several informants stressed that they were cautious not to say anything that could be used against them or they repeatedly reassured themselves of our duty of confidentiality. Social distance to written communication among many of the informants contributed in the same direction. Often it appeared that the role as researcher was not perceived as legitimate or something in itself. My relation to the informants assumed similarities with that of a visiting guest, advocate, supporter or secretary. Sometimes the individual informants had clear expectations of receiving something in return for the interview and negotiated a mutual exchange relation: Occasionally I assisted in writing applications for financial compensation from the state in the wake of the data collection.

This gave us less access to the verbatim accounts and limited our possibility to reproduce the colour of their accounts. For our purpose, it was not always significant exactly how the informants formulated themselves. Nevertheless, we were able to write down phrases and expressions used by the informants, in addition to more condensed versions of their accounts together with our immediate interpretations in brackets. In some cases telephone calls to make an appointment about interviews developed into interviews in themselves and were more productive and detailed than when we later met face to face. It appeared that telephone conversations sometimes served as a more relaxed, less tense situation, and it was easier for some people to talk without face-to-face interaction.

### **Presentation of the data**

Development of theoretical concepts, models and ideal types have been considered as major contributions from case studies. A problem has, however, been the lack of codification of how you go about developing these models and ideal types systematically (Leiulfstrud and Hvinden 1996). Analyses of qualitative data especially often emerge as less systematic. This is in part due to the particularities of the data;

qualitative data tend to have been collected in a way that makes them less systematic and not comparable. But another reason for this “insufficiency” and unsatisfying condition has been the lack of appropriate tools and techniques. Researchers have developed their personal but less standardised techniques to gain an overview of their data and find their way in the data set. Furthermore, the presentation of the analyses and conclusions has often been less transparent.

We wanted to summarise and condense information about the selected cases across the different data types according to the presumed theoretically important dimensions. It may be tempting to give most attention to the units one knows best and has most in-depth knowledge of. When systematising the data, an evaluation will have to be made of whether the suggestions, models and interpretations are heavily context-dependent or more robust and generally valid.

In an early effort to make the analysis more transparent, I explored the degree to which Boolean algebra as advocated by Charles Ragin (1987, 2000) could be used to develop more robust models and interpretations. This presupposed that the information could be codified as absent (0) or present (1), or with a decimal between the two. If the same factor was present or absent in cases with different outcomes we could rule out this factor as part of the “explanation”. Thus we could reduce the data and arrive at more parsimonious models. We checked whether we had similar and comparable data for the different cases. We especially tried to codify whether possible resources for the organisational efforts were absent or present in each case. Furthermore, this presupposed that we were able to codify the different cases as either viable or non-viable. Process data were not easily coded in a cross-table. One could have coded the distribution of properties at different times in separate tables. This would have demanded a higher degree of standardisation of the data collection than was possible to achieve in this project.

We found the approach less useful for achieving greater transparency in the research report. We managed to systematise and explore the properties of the organisations systematically in a cross table. However, we did not achieve any data reduction in the sense of ruling out factors, as the number of organisational features exceeded the number of cases included in the study. This might have been more useful if the design had included a somewhat larger number of cases and there was a better background from which to develop testable hypotheses. More importantly, the

procedure involved too many operationalisations that made accidental and categorical categorisations necessary. Many of the advantages and purposes of case-oriented research appeared to be lost in the effort to adjust a variable-oriented approach to case studies. There was always the risk that the method would become more important than the accounts and findings.

In practice, I have used the more conventional techniques of organising data according to analytical themes during the data collection, highlighting key findings and writing comments in brackets and in the margins. Writing conference papers and publishing preliminary findings should not be underestimated in the efforts to develop and hone the analyses.

Our close relation and access to the backstage of some of the organisational efforts has exposed us to the problem of “guilty knowledge” (Hughes 1971: 288-289). To the degree that it is relevant for the analysis, the researcher must develop a way of talking about the order of events without discrediting informants and their organisations. I have sought to reproduce quotes and refer to the experience of individuals in such a way that they should not be possible to trace back to single individuals. The longer quotes will be from interviews we were able to record or take notes from during the interviews. In other cases I refer in brackets to shorter phrases and sayings that appeared to be typical or pertinent. Some contextualisation has been necessary for interpreting the statements. Admittedly, people who have first-hand knowledge of parts of the field may recognise some of the people I have identified by their position in the organisational efforts. Nevertheless, I have tried to protect their more personal experience.

### **Summary and concluding remarks**

A relative advantage and strength of the case-study approach has been the flexibility in the available methods to achieve as in-depth data as possible on the organisational efforts. We have combined different strategies and techniques to obtain as detailed information about each unit as possible. Problems we faced in the data collection reflected the vulnerable position of claimants and Travellers and the consequences of welfare policy. In this sense it was as much a finding as a problem of design and method in the data collection.



Our emphasis on the construction of models of mechanisms and processes may be considered as a middle-road between nomothetic and idiographic research. Models should be sensitive to particular conjunctures and are not likely to be revelatory of some timeless, context-independent regularities. Through active interplay between theory and evidence, I have sought to derive logically consistent models. Case-oriented studies and especially analyses of qualitative data often appear as less systematic. But to confine oneself to analysing data that are available only by rigorous data-collection techniques would not help us to derive more systematic knowledge and comprehensive understanding of processes and events. Even if the available data are less systematic, we should seek to provide coherent and reflective accounts. In open research we need to provide fuller versions and explicit discussion of alternative, competing or complementary accounts. This should not obstruct us from developing more formalised analyses and tighter models. However, it may be necessary to shift from analysis by means of formal models to narratives in order to capture the openness, contingency, changing circumstances and novelty that may characterise social systems. To avoid *ad hoc* accounts and biased interpretations, I have supplemented building models of processes and mechanisms with contextualisation of the cases.

We might look upon processes and mechanisms as type-constructing in nature. Simplified pictures or representations may serve to improve the analytical accentuation of certain traits or features of reality (Lave and March 1975, Weber 1982: 159-220). Ideal types and models may be considered as stylised but heuristic tools for comparing evidence and theoretical constructs. An empirical question would be whether the models and suggestions we arrive at apply to other cases and circumstances or whether other configurations would be found. Sayer (1992: 237-238) argued that ideal types are of little use to the social sciences, as you should not achieve any new knowledge by comparing them with empirical reality. Allegedly, you may only conclude that empirical reality differs to some degree from the ideal types. Sayer appears, however, to conflate development of ideal types with empirical statements. Construction of analytical and logically consistent abstractions should not be confused with descriptions or inferences about empirical reality.



**Part II**  
**Between the organisational efforts**



## **Framing of claims: The relationship between the organisational efforts**

This chapter analyses the relationships between the different organisational efforts, both within and between the two categories of outsiders or dominated. I discuss these relationships on the basis of how the social categories had been constructed through the care, control and concern for them by others (“top-down”). I ask to what extent the claimants and Travellers had cultural resources available to frame their identity and interest claims (“bottom-up”), and possibilities for advocating independent and alternative representations of the member category different from images maintained by society’s elites or public authorities. Was there a possibility for an independent and autonomous set of symbols by which they could communicate, understand and redefine their experience? Or were the symbol systems constituted by or reflecting the pictures produced and maintained by society’s elites? Could category members define themselves independently of the assistance and control measures? This concerned whether they were passively constructed by others or had cultural resources to act as a self-defined *social group* rather than acting as a *target group*, as a category constructed by public measures or legal-administrative classification.

### **Popular images and voices from “below”**

Michel Foucault explored how social relations take shape through macroscopic ‘discourses’ or schemes for dividing and classifying the social world; how the issues of social and cultural structures would connect to the emergence of new knowledge. He paid particular attention to written and verbal discourses whereby society’s elites penetrate into the personal realm under the guise of improving the life quality of the individual and population as a whole. Assistance services – and hence the welfare-state machinery – were to a large extent unmasked as social control. Foucault suggested seeing the divisions and inspections not only as constraining and limiting, but also as creating and constitutive of subjectivities. The subject was considered an effect of

power relations. Processes of sequestration, construction of special target groups, surveillance and social control, he suggested, serve to shape new subjects (“outside in”). Invention of new categories of clients could be interpreted as providing for sequestration and attribution of qualities that are naturalised and seen as innate in the individual category members (Kritzman 1988; Dreyfus and Rainbow 1982; Rainbow 1991 [1984]).

Foucault has been criticised for presenting a sociology without actors and for objectifying the individual. However, it appears that he focused more on how individuals shape their own lives and not only follow other people’s norms, in his later two books; *L’usage des plaisirs* and *Le souci de soi*. The later Foucault (1982) identified three modes of objectification through which individuals are constituted as subjects: development of a knowledge field and conceptual tools, dividing practices and sequestration, and the individual’s relationship to him- or herself. In his last interview Foucault claimed: “I tried to locate three major problems: the problem of truth, the problem of power, and the problem of individual conduct. These three domains of experience can only be understood in relation to each other, not independently” (Kritzman 1988: 243). The subject was also objectified through individuals’ self-performances or ‘techniques of the self’ (“inside out”) (Patton 1998).

Various forms of self-performance were seen as products of discipline and resistance. Judgements, categorisations and surveillance have been seen as expressions of efforts at disciplining resistance to normalisation, while resistance has been interpreted as a counter-reaction to different efforts at normalisation of the population. Resistance was seen as part of the disciplinary relationship and not breaking with it. Following the later Foucault, we could expect to find that different forms of self-performance were responses to the accounts and representations developed and maintained by society’s elites. Alternative and competing representations of the category could be construed as discourses and counter-discourses, as acts of discipline and resistance in a field of power relations. Hence, we could expect to find limited options for the disadvantaged for advocating alternative views, self-interpretations and ideologies that would break with and not be part of the ‘power-knowledge’ apparatus of the welfare professions.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) argued that construction of target populations of welfare-policy measures is of importance for understanding the design and development

of the policy agenda, hence biased subscriptions of benefits and burdens. How different categories of people are portrayed in the media and the public more generally is likely to affect the eventual policy design. Public officials would risk large electoral costs if they distributed benefits and burdens regardless of the symbolic hierarchy or differentiation of worthiness among categories of people. They assumed that a negative view tended to further passivity and withdrawal on the part of the target populations, but differentiated this according to the symbolic position of the target population in question; *advantaged* (powerful and respected), *contenders* (powerful but suspected), *dependents* (helpless and needy), and *deviants* (bad people). It varies to what extent target populations are asked to give their own solutions to problems, attributed qualities as responsible and capable of making good choices for the individual and society at large. Thus, the target populations have different degrees of resources and capacity to shape their own constructions. When their symbolic position is weak, the public and popular images will be more influenced by constructions from “above”.

The possibility of justifying or defending assistance programmes has been linked to who deserves to be awarded subject status. Freedom and responsibility have been allocated on the basis of what kind of person one is considered to be. Different categories of service recipients and target groups have been ascribed varying degrees of responsibility, sincerity and worthiness to participate in the policy-decision processes and to voice justified demands. Conversely, persons considered unworthy of participation have been written off as irresponsible, insincere and erratic, possibly unreliable (Alexander 1998, Tilly 1998).

Claimants of social-security benefits and Travellers have in common that they have been construed as different and outside society by others, seen as not making a contribution to society (“passive”) or undermining and damaging to society. The members of the categories have been considered unwanted (lazy, scroungers, immoral), uncomfortable to be exposed to (creepy) and something that public authorities should try to get rid of, reduce in number and get out of public sight. Members of the categories have been seen as not being a regular part of society, but as standing outside society or being undesirable in society. In this respect horizontal distinctions and status boundaries (inside/outside) have sometimes been more important than vertical distinctions (inferior/superior) in the welfare-policy field.

Travellers as a target group have moved in the Schneider-and-Ingram scheme from deviants who should be punished during the traditional regime from the 15th to – 19th centuries to also being considered a category in need of help during the modern social policy against them in the 20th century (Sandmo 1999, Seip 1994a, Sundt 1974 [1852]). Punishment and control were supplemented but not replaced by measures that were to be more benevolent and provide positive help and assistance. As we stepped into the 21st century, Travellers aspired to an improved symbolic and social position in the greater society and to act as a self-defined social group. These were attempts at reframing their public image. Travellers had received and achieved increasing sympathy in the greater society after the assimilation policy was abolished in the 1980s (Halvorsen 2000). Their positive contributions in pre-industrial society were also more easily recognised in afterthought and as society’s elites distanced themselves from the former policy against Travellers. According to Schneider and Ingram (ibid.), there were reasons to expect that Travellers’ identity and interest claims would be more vocal, and public silence more typical of lower ranking clients and claimants.

### **Self-presentation of claimants**

We found several claimants’ organisations that claimed to represent recipients of services and benefits from the social-services, labour-exchange and social-insurance offices. Through snowball sampling we managed to identify twenty-five organisations or organisational efforts to be found in Norway in the 1990s:

- ⌘ Action Group Against Social Destitution
- ⌘ Active Against Unemployment
- ⌘ Alliance of Victims of Debt
- ⌘ Association of Job-seekers
- ⌘ Association of Single Mothers
- ⌘ Association of Social Insurance Recipients in Drammen (small town in eastern Norway)
- ⌘ Association of the Unemployed at Kongsvinger (small town in eastern Norway)
- ⌘ Campaign for User Office
- ⌘ Co-association of Job-seekers
- ⌘ Enough is Enough
- ⌘ Eve – organisation for single mothers
- ⌘ Fredrikstad Client Action (small town in eastern Norway)
- ⌘ Grenland Client Action (area in eastern Norway)
- ⌘ Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation in Nord-Trøndelag (rural county in mid-Norway)
- ⌘ Justice for All
- ⌘ National Association Justice for the Losers of Society
- ⌘ National Association of the Unemployed
- ⌘ Norwegian Association for Re-education



- ⌘ Poor House
- ⌘ Revita
- ⌘ Right to work
- ⌘ Solidarity
- ⌘ Tromsø Poor House (city in northern Norway)
- ⌘ We who are living on rehabilitation and disability benefit, and
- ⌘ Welfare Group, the Association of Residents of Gamlebyen (Oslo east-end area)

The overview we managed to obtain was witness to a great deal of diversity in self-presentation and the account of their social position, wants and claims. The field was marked by shifting and fluctuating self-organising efforts. Several of the organising efforts had limited duration and recruitment. Several of them seemed to be highly influenced by a limited number of people and were very local, even though the names often could give the impression of nation-wide activity. Few of the organisational efforts were active any longer at the time of the analysis. Moreover, some organising efforts had been closed down before we started the data collection and managed to get in touch with them; Oslo Client Action, Rælingen Client Action, Trondheim Client Action, Forum for Work at Hadeland, Forum for the Poor (1990's), Association of the Unemployed in Fredrikstad, and Association of the Unemployed in Trondheim (1980s). My knowledge about these self-organisation efforts is limited and the data sources often secondary and indirect. But interviews with a few of the former activists in the 1980s suggested great similarities with the cases I have gathered more in-depth data about.

The organisations appeared to have a different direction and *ration d'être*, compared to the self-organisation of the unemployed during a period of high official unemployment in the 1920s. Assessment of the historical sources available for 1920-30 suggests that activists in the organisations of and by people out of work at that time did not conceive of themselves as unemployed who needed help and/or were controlled by the assistance services, but rather as workers who were denied their right to employment (Halvorsen and Hvinden 1998). Arguably, this reflects a change in the framing of claims. According to Swaan (1990), collectivisation of care and help has been followed by increased valuation of professional experts and expectations of what they could contribute to. The member categories have often absorbed and applied the notions developed by society's elites to articulate their experience, manage their interactions with the professional experts and justify claims to welfare officers and civil servants.

In line with Hvinden's (1995) suggestions, few of the organisational efforts of the 1980s and 1990s presented themselves as poor or people with scarce financial

resources as such, but rather as objects of specific measures or as services recipients, and as such that they acted as subjects. There appeared to have been relatively few claimants' organisations with a self-presentation that claimed rights or compensation.<sup>2</sup> Many people rather organised on the basis of medical diagnosis or ethnic identity.

Other research has suggested that there had been a proliferation of organisations based on more or less narrow medical diagnoses ("people with disability X") in the same period. Many of these organisational efforts were small, had a more limited recruitment basis and were founded on more narrow categories than previous organisations among the 'disabled' (Olsen 1994; Selle 1996: 54-55, 1998; Selle and Øymyr 1995; Selleberg 1999). To a considerable extent, 'people with disabilities' did not organise themselves on the basis of what was common to them all, such as disabling social environments. They pursued more particularistic interests and identities.

In accordance with Swaan's (1990: 233) argument, it appeared that many of the organisations in Norway were actively involved in pursuing the development of professional expertise and more specialised services responding to their specific diagnosis. Issues about social protection and assistance services have to a considerable extent been coded as issues about diagnosis. This has come to be known as the "medicalisation" of social problems and conflicts. Whether they like it or not, physicians have become highly involved in deciding who should receive social-security benefits and assistance. This appeared also to be reflected in the direction of much of the activity of disabled people's organisations (Drejer 1994, Froestad and Ravneberg 1991, Olsen 1994, Ravneberg 2000, Ravneberg and Solvang 1995, Romøren (Ed.) 2000).

In Norway, social policy has to a large extent been formulated in terms of compensation, rehabilitation and redistribution; eg. social provision and assistance

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<sup>2</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s Great Britain used to have a welfare-rights movement (Mann 1995 [1992]: 91-93, Rose 1973). Hvinden (1994: 251-57, 265-68) found a large number of welfare-advice agencies and welfare-right groups just in a local area of Scotland during 1986-87. There was a significant contrast in the field of benefits, advice and advocacy compared to Norway. For a long time, and different from their Norwegian colleagues, social workers in the local social-work departments did not control the access to financial benefits. The greater role of means-tested social assistance in Britain combined with the stronger emphasis on legal entitlement and more clear-cut eligibility criteria appeared to be associated with a more adversary relation to government, and obtrusive resistance on the part of welfare claimants. The British system tended to define the tasks of the offices more narrowly, and this meant that welfare officers more readily referred claimants to other offices and declined responsibility. This appeared to open up more space for voluntary associations and welfare-rights groups to provide advocacy and advice. Social workers in Scotland also organised take-up campaigns. The local social-work departments gave financial support and provided information to the voluntary advice and interest groups. However, a 1988 reform of the social-security system in Britain probably contributed to lowering the likelihood of take-up campaigns, Claimant Unions and welfare-rights groups (Hvinden *ibid.*).

services aiming at a reduction of inequalities. Benefits have been relatively generous, but the rights weaker and less clear-cut and based on agency discretion. In part this may account for why 'disabled people' or 'people with disabilities' often have organised on the basis of medical diagnosis. A clear and well-recognised medical diagnosis gives legitimacy and access to permanent and predictable income-maintenance benefits.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, by connecting to officially recognised legitimacy grounds for claiming social protection or by demonstrating their willingness to get a job (active 'job-seeker'), the poor may claim their worthiness of social protection (Midré 1995). They have then organised on the basis of statuses that legitimate compensation and assistance services for the individual. The claimants and clients have been dependent on staff in first-line services and public provisions. This may possibly have led to more tacit and non-obtrusive resistance among many claimants of social protection and assistance services. All in all, there appeared to be some parallels between claimant's and disabled people's organisations in their tendency to define themselves in relation to the welfare state's services and provisions.

### **Self-presentation as an ethnic minority**

Another major alternative has been to organise on the basis of ethnicity. Similar to 'client groups', this category has also been relationally defined, through contrastive status and dichotomies, but more often positively than negatively defined. In this respect, it has represented more symmetrical counter-concepts, or the asymmetry is less obvious. This has represented new ways of constructing and framing welfare policies in Western Europe, both on a national and a European level (Law 1999). This could possibly be interpreted as a new mode of constructing otherness in 'information society' or 'reflexive modernity'. Structuration of self-presentation and self-understanding around demands to represent a social unit or group *different* from others can both serve as forms of identification with limited parts of the population and serve to legitimate demands on the greater society. In this respect, the new recognition of Travellers could

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<sup>3</sup> As opposed to this, during the 1990s the United Kingdom and the European Union have to a considerable extent formulated social-policy initiatives in terms of regulating actors such as employers and entrepreneurs through standardised requirements for wheelchair access to new buildings, non-smoking environments, anti-discrimination legislation and so on. Organisations led by disabled people have worked to provide legislation to protect them against negative discrimination and ensure positive rights. In line with a 'Social Model' of disability, one has emphasised regulating the social environment rather than the disabled person. In other words, the alliances appeared to take different forms dependent on the dominant 'discourse' or framing of welfare policy within the nation state.

possibly highlight more general features in identity management and social boundary-drawing in Norway after 1970.

The emerging self-organisation among Travellers during the 1990s was to a large extent based on claims of representing an oppressed ethnic minority. We identified thirteen names of organising efforts among Travellers. Some of these had the same core of activists and the renaming was part of an attempt to revitalise, regroup or redefine an earlier organisational effort. Most of them based their self-presentation and advocacy as representatives of ‘Romani people’ (1995-99):

- ☞ The History and Culture Commission of Norwegian Intinerant Families
- ☞ National Association of Romani people
- ☞ Roma Foundation
- ☞ Roma People’s Commission Council in Norway
- ☞ Romani and Romanès People’s National Association
- ☞ Romani Culture Movement
- ☞ Romani Group of SOS Racism
- ☞ Romani Interest Organisation
- ☞ Romani People’s Christian Community
- ☞ Romani People’s Legal Security and Interest Committee
- ☞ Romani People’s National Federation
- ☞ Romani People’s National Association, and
- ☞ Romani People’s Tent Committee

Given the relatively limited number of Travellers in Norway, this should be considered a fairly large number of organisational efforts. Travellers’ organisations claimed to represent a separate people or group, and claimed distinct cultural attributes. By focusing on their particularities, the activists tried to build particularistic forms of solidarity and identification. The organisations ascribed different values and qualities to their “own people” than to other citizens. Ethnic mobilisation or revitalisation among Travellers could be seen as attempts at withdrawal from the dominant schemata, pressure to assimilate and avoidance of subsumption to general welfare services and programs (“we have different problems than the sedentary population”).

The attempts among many organised Travellers to present themselves and to be recognised as an ethnic or national minority can be interpreted as efforts to establish a new basis for citizenship, identity, social and societal integration. Separate and distinct cultural identities were invoked in the formulation of demands or charges against

greater society. Structural similarities with other disadvantaged categories of people were seen as a threat and rejected when this was perceived as a potential downgrading or a questioning of their uniqueness.

Travellers wanted to define on their own who they were, not least as a counter-reaction to the representations that had earlier been provided by social and political elites. They made claims to a collective history, a particular way of life and customs, values and traditions and a separate language (Romani). A crucial element in the emerging social movement among Travellers was one of ethno-political mobilisation focusing on cultural meaning. For instance, a dictionary to preserve Romani as a spoken language was published, as were several books and leaflets on Travellers' history, the life story and testimonies of individual Travellers. Travellers increasingly expressed their views and complained in public about how *others* presented them. They opposed what was written about them in newspapers and magazines, definitions and synonyms in dictionaries, and representations of them in plays and movies. Travellers also began to express more about their views on which ethnonym they preferred. Still, we may ask whether the Travellers were in danger of reproducing existing images and associated names by stating their opposition to them and thus "reminding" non-Traveller audiences about their existence.

### **Quests for particularity – being “special”**

Development of particularistic forms of solidarity and identification, founded on more narrow categories and more limited recruitment bases, may be considered responses to demands for identity construction and management in a welfare-state context. Claimants have organised themselves into more limited groups, distancing and differentiating themselves from other actors with similar or competing demands on the welfare state, supporting specialisation and demanding specialised welfare benefits and services; the establishment of more specialised ombudsman programmes, special administrative agencies and so on.

*The Losers' Association* represented in part an exception to the particularistic identities otherwise promoted. They advocated an expansionist framework. All people could in some circumstances become exposed to or objects of maltreatment, negligence and abuse from public or private actors. Conversely, all 'losers' could become 'winners'

by pursuing redress and compensation. This was associated with vague boundaries and stood in opposition to the emphasis on drawing strong and clear-cut boundaries to other categories of claimants. The organisation sought to include a large number of issues. This was associated with significant resistance and scepticism from other organisational efforts.

But similar to other claimants organisations, the Losers' Association's leaders had their own agenda and *raison d'être*, based on their experience and fate being unique and incomparable to other organisations ("we are different"). They claimed to meet needs otherwise uncovered in the population and public administration. The organisation stated that *they* represented the deserving in need and would avoid being associated with other claimant organisations. The Losers' Association protested against their applications for financial support being considered together with other organisations and wanted a special budget line in the government budget (*Document 8: 72 1996-97*). This would not only secure their finances but would not least lend importance to their official status and be a symbol of official recognition ("money talks"). Money tended to be seen as signifying that they belonged to the selected. The financial grants from the government were clearly associated with recognition of the organisation and their work to represent disadvantaged sections of the population.

A different emphasis in self-presentation and the account of their present social position led to the development of different and in part competing organisations. They pursued different self-presentations and to a varying degree they sought recognition of this from society's elites. Several organisations prioritised the establishment of their own office. This was associated with public visibility and recognition as something in itself. Informal networks and the lack of offices and home offices were associated with a lack of recognition and invisibility.

### **Overlap in the recruitment basis**

Given the alternatives for framing claims I have identified here, we could have assumed that there would be a fairly clear-cut division in the recruitment basis. However, in practice, there was more overlap in the recruitment basis for the organisational efforts than we would have first assumed. A larger number of the organisations recruited members and users who were *de facto* dependent on or received social-security benefits

or otherwise relied on provisions from the public authorities. But their claims were sometimes framed in modes not directly related to this. As one person during a relatively short period of time and in part simultaneously may receive benefits and/or services from various government bodies or departments, there was hardly a clear-cut divide between the recruitment basis for the different claimants' organisations. However, there was a pattern where the Losers' Association recruited more people on disability benefits from the National Insurance Scheme. The Poor House was more oriented towards people dependent on social assistance administered by the local authorities. In the Losers' Association, a large proportion of the members received social-security benefits. Nearly fifty per cent had a disability benefit as their main income. In a similar vein, several of those we managed to come in touch with in the organisational efforts among Travellers were living on social-security benefits. The overlap in recruitment basis suggested that there was some space for agency and for choosing between alternative and in part contradictory self-presentations, although people could not choose freely between categorical statuses.

Some participants in and members of the Fredrikstad Client Action, the Poor House and Romani People's National Association were also users of the Losers' Association. The Fredrikstad Client Action was also registered as a collective member of the Losers' Association.

### **Shifting alliances and constellations**

*Among Travellers*, new organisational efforts either started independently or in spite of already existing organisational efforts, or after leaving earlier organisational efforts. Both paths tended to lead to more geographically limited organisations, at least as regards more active participants. Despite the claims of being national organisations, many of them appeared to be run by a small number of people and close relatives (brothers, cousins and so on).

As an ideographic account, one could have argued that the split-up of Travellers was anchored in the traditional economy; peddling meant that one had little contact with other Travellers except for one's own kin (Barth 1955). It has been suggested that Travellers were divided according to geographical regions and followed travel routes on the basis of kin attachment, and that this constituted a basis for geographic

segmentation. Furthermore, marriage with cousins had been a prevalent form of endogamy. It is difficult to judge whether this had become a social myth or not. It appeared at least to have had some consequences. A mutual scepticism between Travellers in Western and Eastern Norway was (still) expressed, as was a claimed difference of cultural features. As an alternative or supplementary account, it could be that lack of proximity and regular contact bred mutual distrust. Comparison with organisations based on claims of social security benefits suggested that there was less of a reason for ideographic accounts, and suggested that other factors were more important to the constitution of the organisational efforts and fluctuating alliances.

*The Romani People's National Association* spent much time and energy on positioning itself in relation to the other organisational attempts, and sought inclusion of all Travellers ("one drop of blood is sufficient"). It was important to demonstrate that one did not accept less from the government than the other organisational efforts, but served the best interests of all Travellers and were representative of Travellers in general, and rejected claims and rumours to the contrary often expressed by other organisations. The organisation was initiated by two Travellers who had lived in the same orphanage and had pulled out of an earlier self-organisation effort. Key activists in the already existing organisation efforts were considered difficult to co-operate with, as they had demanded absolute agreement, submission, compliance and demonstrative loyalty, similar to the following logic: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad" (St. Matthew 12:30). Later, similar issues of self-expression and lack of space for internal negotiations or bargaining led people to leave the Romani People's National Association and attempt to establish new organisations. One key person left twice to start a new organisation. It varied who were friends, allies and enemies.

One striking division line was between those who adhered to Christian communities and those who did not. This was associated with detachment and rejection of co-operation among Travellers. A few of the self-organisational efforts stemmed from Born Again Christians among Travellers. As seen from the perspective of Travellers who did not belong to the Pentecostal movement, this was conceived as attachment to strangers. By some it was even seen as part of the same body as the former Norwegian Mission among the Homeless and thus associated with "the enemy".



As seen from the perspective of those inside the Pentecostal movement, other Travellers were apostates, “ungodly” or not living up to the same moral standards.

It could be argued that the Pentecostal movement offered an alternative career opportunity for some Travellers. At the same time, this represented a challenge to the organisations that tried to advocate self-presentation as an oppressed minority. The Pentecostal movement tended to over-communicate the (most often previous) drinking problems and criminal records of some Travellers. This was connected to a presentation of Travellers as apostates and (potentially) born-again Christians. They combined charity and preaching. You had to convert to become “one of us” and receive extensive help. There was a fairly sharp division between those inside and those outside the Pentecostal movement, but there were also positioning and status conflicts between Travellers inside the Pentecostal movement. This included concern for and envy of those who were most successful and charismatic. Travellers in the Pentecostal movement who earlier had collaborated on revivalist tent meetings later kept a distance and ran separate missionary organisations.

*Claimants:* A striking trait was the lack of both positive and negative contacts between organisations, despite the fact that they to a large extent claimed to represent the same social category. To some extent, they were not aware of each other, did not consider themselves to have anything in common, or to have common interests. Often, organisational efforts had started locally, in part ignorant and in part independent of other initiatives.

During the data collection period, there was one attempt to overcome the tendency to fragmentation and unite forces. The Welfare Alliance, a loosely coupled network of claimants’ organisations, was initiated by the core activists in the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation in 1996 after several attempts. The others who were most involved included the Fredrikstad Client Action, Alliance of Victims of Debt and the Poor House. Except for participants in the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation, the organisation representatives all lived in Oslo. However, the network was loosely connected. The decisions were not binding on the part of the participants and not followed up.

After encouragement from the then government Minister of Social Affairs, the partners decided to apply for financial means to develop a counter report and participate in discussions about a white paper on the state of welfare in Norway (*St.meld.* 50 1998-

99). Given the new prospects of financial support, the organisations disagreed on whether they should apply together or separately. It turned out that the Poor House and others applied for means for themselves from the same budget line as the Welfare Alliance. The relationship between the organisations was to a large extent one of competition. Other ties and individual projects appeared to be given priority. On other occasions, participants broke out and sought other alliances or pursued their interests individually only to return later.

Bauman (1990) argued that mutual help, commitment and protection are the ideal rules of the “we” group. When there is disagreement one hopes or expects people in the in-group to come to an agreement. But when there is absence of physical proximity or face-to-face interaction, the in-group will be more like *imaginary communities* (cf. Anderson 1991). When the community lacks the cement of face-to-face control, unity demands considerable work on the part of members of the in-group and preaching of unity. One needs a body of activists or a spokesperson to maintain the boundaries and we-image through appeals to shared beliefs and emotions. This appeared to make the boundaries fragile and alliances vulnerable to change and fluctuations. This was especially the case for Travellers. There was a wide gap between ideals and reality in the degree of community between Travellers. In both categories, the inter-group boundaries were porous, and partners could soon change to competitors and vice versa. The alliances were fluctuating and similar to *functional relations*. The participants appeared in certain respects to have a pragmatic and uncommitted relation to the organisations and other organisation representatives. When the participants did not consider their involvement consonant with the individual goals, interests and life projects, they quit, created a new organisation, turned to another organisation or pursued their interests outside the organisations.

All in all, the relations between Travellers’ organisations were more ones of open conflict and less relations of ignorance and unawareness about other organising attempts, compared to the claimants’ organisations. The field of Travellers’ organisations was in this respect more tightly bound, and less amorphous and disintegrated. But similar to the claimants’ organisations, there was competition for recognition from the government and antagonistic relations between the organising attempts.

## **Histories of Pride vs. Histories of Misery**

The Losers' Association and the Romani People's National Association competed in the same market. There appeared to be symmetry between claimants and Travellers and competing frameworks for presenting and pursuing claims. The Losers' Association tried to act as representatives and provide advocacy of economic compensation for "itinerants". The Secretary General contacted Members of Parliament to advocate the possibility for Travellers to be granted economic compensation for maltreatment and neglect, and also assisted Travellers in applying for such financial compensation. But their efforts to represent Travellers were strongly opposed by the board members in the Romani People's National Association; they were *not* losers.

During a group interview with the board, one board member mentioned that many Travellers depended on disability benefits, and referred to the consequences of former encroachment, harassment and discrimination. Other board members swiftly opposed this; it was unfitting to present Travellers as dependent on welfare. With certain reservations, the Romani People's National Association assisted people of Traveller origin in presenting claims for economic compensation and in their negotiations with the public authorities. As an organisation, they worked for moral redress and recognition as one people. At the same time, the organisation's representatives experienced pressure from individuals among Travellers who wanted help or needed the economic contribution from the state. The board emphasised that such applications were not crucial in their policy and did not promote the provision of assistance in public ("we cannot boast of helping people the way the Losers' Association does").

From an outsider's point of view, the question of concepts and terminology was surrounded by a surprisingly great deal of emotional involvement. Similar to what I observed among claimants, the concepts were in no respect conceived as neutral in relation to Travellers' identity and legitimacy. The terminology comprised forceful symbols and was tightly linked to different but crucial conceptualisations and representations of Travellers.

€# 'Itinerant' (*omstreifer*) was for a long time the official designation applied by the government. The concept was anchored in the 1900 Vagrancy Act (*Løsgjengerloven*), which is a crucial part of the legislative body regulating the extensive control measures against Travellers. This was strongly associated with the notion that the group was living under miserable conditions, on the outskirts

of society, work-shy and associated with illegal activity, violence, sexual offences, drinking, dirty tricks and mischief. The Act actively denied that they were a cultural minority. To the degree that they were perceived as a minority, this was considered unwanted (Hartmann 1934).

- €# ‘*Traveller*’ or ‘travelling people’ were terms applied by people belonging to the group in self-presentations to outsiders in the 20th century. This was perceived as more neutral and had less derogatory connotations. Other everyday terms were often conceived as negatively loaded and pejorative, at least when applied by outsiders.
- €# ‘*Tater*’ used to be one of these terms. Nevertheless, the social group was referred to as ‘*Tater*’ in the private law proposal from a Member of Parliament (*Document 8*: 62 1995-96) and the following negotiations in the Parliament. Some MPs also ridiculed the vagueness of the term ‘*Travellers*’ (*St.forh.* no. 13, 6 December 1996, pp. 1564-97). This contributed to the Romani People’s National Association demands that they be called and present themselves as ‘*Tater*.’ The organisational representatives wanted to take the notion back and give it positive connotations; one should be proud of being a Traveller. There were, however, differing opinions about the term within the category, even between members of the organisation.
- €# ‘*Romani people*’ has to a greater extent been associated with the self-perception as a people with their origin in India or surrounding areas, and has been associated with assumptions about cultural similarity and common roots with ‘*Roma*’ (formerly labelled as ‘*Gypsies*’) as expressed in language, craft and way of life. By presenting themselves as ‘*Romani people*’, the organisation representatives and others emphasised the cultural differences and distinctions that make them different from other Norwegian citizens. Other Travellers expressed that the terminology was too remote and exaggerated their degree of difference from other Norwegian citizens. ‘*Romani people*’ was in that respect less inclusive, but made it easier to present oneself as a separate group in society.

Their vulnerable position, the uncertainties and apprehension connected to their origin and the constant surveillance or policing of Travellers since the late 19th century had contributed to the labelling of them as a dependent *client category*. This meant a denial of their status as an autonomous *ethnic minority* with a separate tradition and culture. They had been accused of resisting regular paid work and decried as beggars and ‘scroungers’ of the poor-relief system. Even in the second half of the 20th century, Travellers had been defined as “socially handicapped” and in need of help to become re-socialised and settled. Official knowledge about the Travellers had largely been based on reports and statistics from the local police, the penal system, parishes, childcare homes, mental hospitals and the social services. These accounts focused on criminality, mental health, intellectual level, poverty and welfare-benefit dependency of Travellers. The biased sources of information from different government representatives and the

lack of self-presentation from Travellers themselves in the public sphere had undoubtedly reinforced the dominant picture of Travellers as a societal problem.

To a varying degree, Travellers were constructed as idle, irresponsible, unstable, unreliable and “criminal” (convicted), by representatives of official Norway (Haave 2000a and b). The dominating pictures of Travellers as a societal problem, a parasitic group, immoral individuals threatening the order of greater society, a disturbing element, socially handicapped and in need of help, contributed to justifying the former harsh assimilation policy against Travellers. These images were actively propagandised by those who had a self-interested benefit from such accounts, eg., the Norwegian Mission for the Homeless. The dominant accounts make it understandable why informants among Travellers were particularly concerned not to be associated with beneficiaries of social assistance and social insurance. Self-identified Travellers emphasised that they lived up to and supported central cultural values about being “self-sufficient” and avoided being dependent on the government, not only vis-à-vis outsiders but also in relation to other Travellers. Representations of Travellers as ‘clients’ were anticipated and argued against even if we had not mentioned such views beforehand (unsolicited accounts) (Borge 1998, Larsen 1991). Travellers appeared to contribute to reproducing negative representations that many non-Travellers appeared to have been unaware of or forgotten.

There was a certain meaningful relationship between the view of the Travellers’ origin and the resources they were attributed (Weber 1968 [1918-19]: 3-26):

- ⚡ Those who emphasised that Travellers by and large had emerged as a result of economic depression among Norwegian peasants and ended up on the road, tended to draw a picture of Travellers as belonging to a vulnerable group, weak, in need of help and objects of other people’s concern and measures. The possible particularities in life-style, language and craft were considered secondary and largely as a subculture of delinquency (Flekstad 1949).
- ⚡ In contrast to this, those who expressed that Travellers originally were a foreign people and emphasised their roots back to early immigration (“the First Diaspora”) and a distinct culture, emphasised Travellers’ ability to be self-sufficient and survive despite the sanctions enforced by representatives of the larger society. This was a history of persecution of Travellers as an oppressed minority, but also one of dignity and pride (cf. Rydberg 1994, Borge 1998).

As the histories were associated with actors with competing or contradictory interests, these two accounts were not politically neutral and uncontroversial, even after the

assimilation policy came to an end. Much of the social mobilisation since the early 1990s therefore focused on reconstructing or establishing other and alternative narratives about their origin and identity. Many Travellers were concerned about their history, not least their own family background and table of descent. Informants expressed that they wanted more focus on their positive contributions to society and thought there had been too much focus on the negative experience. In this sense Travellers wanted a positive redefinition of their distinction from others. Informants referred to the language, traditional clothing, craft, peddling, ballads and music and family values. In short, they made efforts to present and have accepted *a history of dignity and pride*. To define and organise oneself on the basis of claimed ethnicity provided a cultural opportunity to more positive and highly valued self-presentations and self-esteem.

In comparison, the Losers' Association maintained a quite different construction of what it implied to be a Traveller. The general script they advocated and offered was to assist people to apply for compensation for wrongful treatment, maltreatment, neglect and atrocities by the public authorities during childhood (innocence) and its consequences in adulthood (the status as "loser"). The organisation sought to reinterpret Travellers from "somebody one needs to do something with" to victims of circumstances outside the individual's control. Responsibility for their misery was attributed to government policy and not their traditional lifestyle. Nevertheless, this tied Travellers to an account of a dependent-client category and in relation to public assistance and control measures. This was a *history of misery*. Through analogous reasoning, many Travellers associated this with the representations of Travellers formerly maintained and advocated by public authorities, the Vagrancy Act and Norwegian Mission for the Homeless.

### **Acting as Survivors of the Mission**

At the beginning of the 21st century, the dominating and prevalent picture of Travellers was that they used to be an exotic, fascinating but also frightening phenomenon in pre-industrial Norway. It was assumed that Travellers had vanished as they were not visible in public anymore ("you never see Travellers on the road anymore"). This invisibility

was clearly the result of a proactive and persistent policy to assimilate Travellers into Norwegian society.

One could argue that the particularities of Travellers' culture would have disappeared regardless of government policy, as societal changes made it difficult to sustain traditional business (roofing, produce tin ware, small scale peddling with different goods) (Barth 1955, Moe 1975). But the United Kingdom and Ireland did not have the same assimilation policy, and Travellers have adapted to the new conditions of industrialised society and developed new types of business industry and found new 'niches'; among other things gathering and re-circulating garbage (Pavee Point 1993, 1998). Travellers in these countries also continued to be more visible in the everyday and public sphere compared to Norway.

The relation to the Mission over the last 80-90 years had to a great extent influenced Travellers' subjectivity and what it meant to be a Traveller. The modern assimilation policy as it was formulated in the late 19th century invented 'itinerants' as an administrative-legal category and placed Travellers into this category. If they did not have the attributes associated with 'itinerants' in advance, many of them became 'victimised', 'dependent', 'outsiders' and 'marginalised' as consequence of the policy. Even people of Traveller origin who had neither been directly affected nor in contact with the Mission had clearly been traumatised by the former policy: For instance, both our interviewees and Travellers interviewed in the media reported that they had felt powerless and debased in interaction with the greater society, and how this had reinforced their inclination to avoid public services. Some were concerned about how they had managed to avoid and escape from the Mission. These were stories about how they almost had been caught by the Mission, the local police or the childcare authorities. Others had avoided visiting hospitals as they had assumed they risked being sterilised. Several interviewees had avoided seeking contact with physicians, did not trust staff in pharmacies, or did not apply for loans or other forms of assistance to find a residence, as they feared undesirable commitments and unforeseeable consequences. Others had experienced that the Traveller status had been made relevant and used against them when they contacted public services to claim social-security benefits or other forms of assistance, or had been in contact with the police or judicial system. They had been denied access to or experienced harassment at caravan sites, and had problems with educational authorities if they wanted to travel outside the summer holidays. In addition

to the experience of absent or weak legal protection, several suspected that the Traveller status was the underlying and “real” reason for insufficient help and rejection of applications by the public authorities.

People of Traveller origin were not always convinced themselves that they belonged to a cultural minority. The cultural differences in values and lifestyle between Travellers and non-Travellers appeared to have become less clear-cut than they used to be. The empirical credibility of a self-presentation as an ethnic minority had been negatively affected by the former assimilation policy. Interviewees complained that they had never learned their “mother tongue”, were unfamiliar with Travellers’ culture or grew up as settled. Some had little or no contact with others of Traveller origin and low familiarity with Travellers’ culture. This made mobilisation on the basis of cultural differences more difficult.

At the end of the 20th century, the former pressure towards assimilation appeared to be the most obvious common denominator and what most clearly constituted Travellers as different from others. It had been a complicated process to distance oneself from this and revitalise Traveller’s culture. There was a notable tension between the preferred self-presentation as an ethnic or cultural minority and the fact that many Travellers were in a similar situation to many claimants organised as ‘clients’. In some cases, the assimilation policy appeared to have led to some people of Traveller origin more easily adopting a self-understanding and self-presentation or being written into a narrative script by others as ‘losers’ or ‘clients’, rather than as members of an oppressed and persecuted minority. Thus some individuals of Traveller origin had chosen to seek assistance from the Losers’ Association or to organise both as ‘loser’ *and* ‘Romani people’.

In some cases, Travellers used copies of the files from the Mission to document or verify, or even “prove”, their claim to a Traveller status. This had the character of seeking support from the enemy. The Norwegian Mission for the Homeless sought for a long period in the 20th century to keep track of all known ‘itinerant’ families, including registration of births, marriages and deaths. In a certain respect, the Mission was in a position to define who were to be considered to be of Traveller descent and was even considered to have a special competence in this by the central government. People of Traveller descent rediscovered their ancestry and others judged whether people were “true” Travellers on the basis of the genealogical charts from the files of the Norwegian



Mission for the Homeless. If their name occurred in the files, this was considered as clear evidence of belonging (“if we are in doubt we check the papers”). As Travellers had not had a written culture themselves, documentation of the past was more accessible through the documentation by “the enemy”. Travellers’ former concealment and change of names to avoid control and surveillance also contributed to this.

It had become a problem of defining what it meant to be a ‘Traveller’ in the present, except for the traditional clothing one could wear to signify one’s origin. The former lifestyles and cultural features did not distinguish them to the same degree, or they had taken on new meanings and different consequences in ‘information society’ (high technology, de-industrialisation, global services, economy and so on). Lack of education combined with credentialism in modern society made many of them worse off and excluded them from the regular labour market. More people had become mobile than before and travelling did not distinguish Travellers from other citizens anymore. It had become a challenge and unsolved issue to give a positive and distinct content to the Traveller status in the present.

Despite the emphasis given to self-presentation as an ethnic minority, much of the social movement mobilisation among Travellers focused on distancing oneself from the former government-sanctioned measures against Travellers. Many Travellers were focused on attributing responsibility for the consequences of the former policy. The social movement participants often focused more on demands for moral redress for past atrocities than on work to improve their life chances and revitalise their culture in the present. In many respects, the organisation representatives came to act as “Survivors” of the Mission. In other words, it was very much as objects of other people’s concern and control in the past that they acted as subjects today. Consequently, there was a risk that the social movement organisations would mainly recruit Travellers with claims against the state. The older generations were tied up with the past, while the younger generations identified to a lesser extent with this project. Many of the younger generation also appeared to be alien to the traditional culture and disinterested in its revitalisation.

Both newspaper clippings and our own ongoing contact with informants suggested that many people of Traveller origin initially did not want to talk about their negative experience or present themselves as victims if they could avoid this. Obviously, presenting yourself as a victim could limit your dignity and desire to present

yourself as responsible, equal in worth, able to take control over and enjoy a subject position in your own life. Ambivalence about presenting yourself as a victim was mirrored in the fact that some would rather not talk about their negative experiences, tended to under-communicate problems and perhaps exaggerated the degree to which they were accepted and interacted with others in the local community in an unconstrained manner. Nevertheless, many people of Traveller origin ended up focusing on the negative experience. One journalist observed (*Nationen*, 25 May 1999): “But even if Sofie would rather talk about something else, all she really talked about was this one thing, the pain.” In a similar vein, board members in the Romani People’s National Association told me before group interviews that this time there should not be so much talk about individual “fates” and histories “dripping in blood”, as on a previous occasion (group interviews in 1997). Nevertheless, their experience with and demand for moral redress from the assimilation policy were recurrent subjects. The old and negative representations were to a large extent sustained as many Travellers were entrenched in a victim position and occupied with pursuing moral redress after the former assimilation policy.

### **Victim status as resource and cost**

To present oneself or be defined by others as a victim can clearly be associated with social costs for the individual. In part, it becomes more difficult to define oneself in more positive terms, while it also makes it more problematic to interact with others on equal terms. One might believe that the disadvantaged would try to avoid and refuse to accept the victim status if at all possible. But a self-presentation as victim serves as a source of moral, human and economic support. The victim status can be seen as a symbolic resource or capital type – victim capital – that can be converted into more substantial resources or capital types (Bourdieu 1990, 2000: 164-205; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). We may see *victim capital* as a sub-category of symbolic capital that has validity in the welfare-policy field. Victim capital is a type of symbolic resource and depends on how much the underprivileged situation is attributed to others rather than oneself, or due to circumstances outside one’s own control. Such a self-presentation can be a resource in attempts at self-organisation as well as in pursuit of individual economic compensation and access to assistance services.

An actor may accept an inferior categorical status or that she or he has a “problem”, while denying full responsibility for his or her circumstances, as in the case of many claimants of social-security benefits. Especially in cases of a weak rights status, the disadvantaged may choose to identify as innocent victims of circumstances outside their control. If the reasons for their disadvantaged position are outside their control, the organisation representatives may more easily claim a moral right to compensation, redistribution and recognition. In this respect, the possibility of presenting oneself as a victim is an important form of capital for resource mobilisation, both on an individual and an organisational level.

Categorical statuses have been associated with different possibilities to present oneself as *a victim of circumstances*. With various degrees of success both ‘disabled people’ and ethnic minorities have presented themselves as victims of discrimination, mistreatment, abuse and/or neglect, especially from public authorities and welfare agencies. But if a particular status or identity is stigmatised, seen as self-inflicted or has a long history of being labelled as undesired (outcasts, enemies of society) by the greater society, or associated with something dirty, disgusting and unpleasant, this may in practice over-shadow claims to a victim status, and impede social mobilisation and campaigns to promote participatory rights and recognition of this status. To some extent this appeared to be the case for people organised as ‘claimants’.

Other research suggests that even for ‘disabled people’, a history of pride was not easily developed. Historically, their status has often been defined in the negative (lack of bodily features, qualities and skills) rather than attributing special qualities or emphasising contributions to society as a whole (Barnes 1994 [1991]). When there is a low level of victim capital, it is probably more important to emphasise that one is useful and not a burden to society. In conjunction with this, organisational efforts among the ‘poor’, ‘clients’ and ‘job-seekers’ strove to stress that they did not lack resources and could give positive contributions to greater society, but were prevented from this by public authorities, employers or the society at large (“worked against”, “misunderstood”): They did not only represent a mentality for demand something from others, but wanted to contribute with something; developing job-opportunities, self-help groups and so on.

All in all, there was a striking *symbolic poverty* among these categories of claimants. They did not have access to a history of pride and had a low degree of victim

capital to draw on. They did not qualify for a medical diagnosis or had not come to perceive of themselves or be recognised by others as ‘disabled’ or belonging to an ethnic minority. This set limits to their possibilities for *framing* their claims (Snow and Benford 1992).

### **Counter-discourse or independent symbol systems?**

The member categories appeared to be faced with and act within *a field of opportunities*. Their self-presentation was not entirely determined by others. There were several ways of presenting oneself and justifying claims for recognition and compensation. There was some space for choice as regards framing and the possibility of reframing the identity and interest claims on the part of the disadvantaged. However, the capacity and cultural tools available for choosing self-presentation were limited and differed between the member categories. There was considerable variation in the possibilities to choose between self-presentations and justifications, and construct or maintain alternative and more positive representations.

The possibility of presenting themselves as victims of a former assimilation policy – combined with their self-presentation as an ethnic minority – gave Travellers better opportunities for social mobilisation compared to most of the claimants’ organisations. After the abolition of the assimilation policy in the 1980s, Travellers had achieved and been attributed a large degree of victim capital. The status as victims, combined with the claim of belonging to an ethnic minority, constituted a forceful symbol system during a period of contention and reconsideration of the former assimilation policy (‘unsettled period’, Swidler 1986). It appeared that Travellers could more easily maintain an independent symbol system and act as a self-defined social group, while this was less of an opportunity for the claimants.

According to a Foucauldian perspective, one could have assumed that Travellers did not exist before or independent of the policy and legislation targeted against them (Svensson 1993, Svanberg and Tyden 1999). A Foucauldian perspective appears to leave little space for autonomous and independent symbol systems. Self-presentation among Travellers as an ethnic minority would first and foremost be construed as a counter-discourse or resistance strategy. Hence, self-presentation as an ethnic minority could be considered as justification and a counter-reaction to a representation as clients

or a problem group (“romanticism”). This omits the counterfactual possibility that Travellers could have had better opportunities to present themselves as an ethnic minority had they not been made objects of special measures of social control. Possibly, one could have argued that a self-presentation as an ethnic minority would have been positioned in a power-field of signification. But this would not have given a satisfactory answer to questions of correspondence criteria and the empirical credibility of the narratives presented.

One cannot rule out the possibility that early immigration has been an important aspect of Norwegian Travellers’ origin. For instance, a category labelled “*tatere*” (Norway) and “*tattare*” (Sweden) appeared in Norwegian and Swedish legislation respectively since the 16th century (Etzler 1944, Sandmo 1999, Troels-Lund 1968 [1914-15]: 148-158). Admittedly, it is difficult to follow families back in time beyond the 16th century. Traveller families could invent new, false and twisted names and dates of birth to avoid control from the public authorities. This makes it more difficult to explore their origin. The possible tendency that economic poverty, welfare dependency and particular cultural features statistically correlate can make it difficult to distinguish the features from each other. However, it seems unlikely that the cultural features are only the outcome of economic and social conditions or an unintended derivative of the modern assimilation policy and earlier targeted measures. To the extent that they live in less favourable economic, socio-medical conditions and have poorer life chances, this can be interpreted as an outcome of sanctioning their cultural particularities.

The Romani language was described by Eilert Sundt (1974 [1852]). He and others have interpreted this as one of the strongest indicators of Travellers having their origin in early immigration to Norway 500-600 years ago (cf. Theil Endresen in *Adresseavisen* 25 April 2001). Sundt (1974 [1852]: 23) distinguished between nomadic people with an origin in early immigration, distinct cultural traditions and a separate language (connected to ‘romani’ and ‘tater’) (“*stovandringene*”) and those with an origin in rural Scandinavia (“*småvandringene*”). The emergence of “tater” as a legal-administrative category in Scandinavia could be interpreted as a reaction to early immigration. It is not unlikely that Travellers have a common origin with groups who in other Western European countries have come to be known as ‘Rome’ or ‘Gypsies’, while later having developed different cultural features and traditions. Later discussions have been strongly influenced by the lack of a written culture and tradition among

Travellers and the consequent absence of historical documents. The existing documentation of the history has been written by representatives of the majority society, and Sundt's (ibid.) distinction appears to have had few consequences for how public officials perceived Travellers and the public images constructed from "above".

### **Concluding remarks**

We have seen that the relationship between the organisations was one of competition for recognition and financial support from the government. A common strategy has been to pursue particularistic self-presentations and distance oneself from other member categories. I have argued that there were categorical differences in victim capital and available symbolic resources to provide a more positive self-definition. Lack of or insufficient access to a history of dignity and pride contributed to the participants mainly acting as target groups or victims of policy measures. Claimants of social-security benefits appeared to have used the same mental schemata as public officials, but for somewhat different reasons. This represented opportunities for pursuing their interests and a basis for collective claims and self-organisation. In line with Foucault, this could be interpreted as turning power-knowledge into resistance strategies; a cultural point of departure and a discursive strategy for opposition. Alternatively, one could have interpreted this as self-discipline, acceptance of one's social position and other people's definition of oneself, and duplication of the justification and legal-administrative categorisation applied by public officials and professional experts.

The efforts at sequestration and development of targeted measures on the part of the government appeared to have led to different accounts of who the members were and the different perceptions of their problems and needs. Organisational specialisation appeared to correspond to the differentiation performed by social and political elites, but advocated for various reasons. But the activists also sought to develop alternative interpretations of their welfare dependency promote what they perceived as more positively valued self-presentations and attribute the responsibility for their disadvantage elsewhere. Thus, one could argue that Foucault and later work inspired by him have tended to overlook the autonomy on the part of the member categories. Travellers appeared to represent the clearest instance of this.

**Part III**  
**Inside the organisational efforts**





## **Conflict and distrust as signs of vulnerability: The relations between the activists within the organisational efforts**

This chapter seeks to identify the mechanisms that promoted or impeded a collaborative system among the more active organisation participants. Co-operation among the cadres, including both defining a common issue and co-ordinating the commitments, remained a constant challenge in several of the organisational efforts. This was a core issue in all the organisational efforts in the study. Intra-group conflicts represented a threat of breakdown and meant that the organisational efforts were fragile. The relations between the activists were far from affectually neutral. This might have been expected if the member status were perceived as only a peripheral part of their identity or total life situation (Parsons 1956, Coser 1956: 68-69). However, the member status was of central concern to the participants and appeared to be perceived as crucial to their social standing in society. In other words, much was at risk in the eyes of the organisation participants.<sup>4</sup>

### **Self-respect, stigmatisation and internal cohesion**

In an analysis of a small working-class community, Elias and Scotson (1994 [1965]) found that the neighbours who had lived in the community for several generations maintained and strengthened their communal control and self-identity by distancing themselves from neighbours who had moved in more recently. The only significant difference between the two groups was the time of residence in the neighbourhood. However, the established residents felt exposed to infringement on their power

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<sup>4</sup> There have been few studies that have aimed to analyse obstacles to internal co-operation among the disadvantaged, although the organisation representatives themselves, journalists and public authorities occasionally have reported on such difficulties. Some scholars have avoided bringing such issues up in prior reports of their findings, as they have been concerned that it would place an extra burden on the disadvantaged or be used against them; that it would be to blame the victims or weaker party in a relationship. However, this has prevented an understanding of the problem conditions. In our cases, the internal co-operation difficulties among the disadvantaged were known to the general public from the mass media, and well known among the parties involved. When it is obvious that all parties are aware of the circumstances, I would argue that it is preferable to endeavour to account for the mechanisms at work to better understand what can be done to improve the conditions rather than making this unspeakable, a taboo.

resources, group charisma and norms by the outsiders. Exclusion (avoidance) and stigmatisation (gossip) were powerful tools to assert superiority among those who had lived there for several generations. Group disgrace was modelled on the “lowest” section among the newcomers, group charisma on the basis of the “highest” section among the established. Collective praise- and blame-fantasies played a vital part in constituting in-group cohesion among the established residents. In the next instance, cohesion differentials were a source of power differentials.

The established residents expressed belonging, responsibility and dedication to their home community (ibid. 65). It was a relative advantage that they knew each other in advance and were connected in interlocking circles formed by kinship networks (netness). This constituted a basis for mobilising and electing people in local politics and voluntary associations. A high power ratio led to an increase in their group charisma. In comparison, the initial lack of netness among the newcomers made it more difficult for them to close ranks and mobilise in a similar vein. This was worsened by the established exclusion and stigmatisation of them. While insiders expressed a positive interest and pride in other insiders, outsiders were negative or indifferent to other outsiders. This led to a low level of organisation among the newcomers. As a result, withdrawal was a prevalent form of self-protection.

In a theoretical essay later developed from the empirical study, Elias (1977, in Elias and Scotson 1994) argued that group charisma and group disgrace are complementary: While the exclusion of outsiders from their “we-image” has a positive effect on the insiders, it has a negative effect on the outsiders. Stigmatisation affects a person’s image of his or her group’s standing in society, and consequently of his or her own individual standing in society. Stigmatisation, therefore, may have a paralysing effect upon the groups with a lower power ratio and turn into apathy or resignation. In the next instance, power inferiority is likely to be interpreted as a sign of the human inferiority of the disadvantaged, both by the established residents and the outsiders. In contrast, power superiority is likely to be interpreted as sign of better human value or excellence.

Advocating a “figurational approach” to stigmatisation, Elias and Scotson (ibid.) implicitly model a relationship between political power, in-group cohesion and group charisma. I suggest reinterpreting this as a self-reinforcing mechanism. I shall argue that the experience of human inferiority can be observed as *excessive self-criticism* among

the disadvantaged. Disparagement from public authorities and the larger society may under certain circumstances turn inward and corrode the self-assessment of the target groups.

Stigmatisation is probably more effective when the dependence is almost entirely one-sided and the disadvantaged are unable to mobilise against the stigmatisation. In our own cases, there was a substantial one-sided dependence on the part of both claimants and Travellers. The greater society would not depend on them, as in the case of women or employees. Arguably, the immediate dependence on society at large was greater among claimants. But even among Travellers, the dependency was one-sided in contexts where the Traveller status was made relevant by society's elites ('the established'). Given that there was less stigmatisation associated with the Traveller status in the present, I would suggest that there may have been better opportunities for in-group cohesion and co-operation among Travellers than for claimants.

Stolk and Wouters (1987) compared in brief processes of power change and self-respect in the women's and the lesbian and gay movements. The two categories of people were in the process of increasing their influence and self-respect. Thus, they addressed the dynamic dimension of established-outsider relations more explicitly. The unequal power relations were reflected in the low self-esteem among people in the two categories. The self-esteem of the dominated actors depended to a significant extent on what the dominant actors thought. In comparison, the self-esteem of the dominant actors relied more on what others among the dominant actors thought of them; success in the internal ranking or pecking order among insiders. But as power relations had changed during the last century, the authors suggest that people in the two categories of outsiders turned less towards the established order and more towards each other.

Following this train of thought, I would assume that the dominated are more concerned about addressing and seeking alliances with the dominant actors than with each other when there is *low symbolic capital*, or more specifically *low victim capital*. A common external enemy does not necessarily promote internal cohesion. When their mutual symbolic power balance changes, one can gain more social respect from others in a similar position and be unaffected by the respect or disrespect shown by the other party. In other words, emergence of collective coping strategies and co-operation among the dominated should be more likely when their legitimacy is increasing (positively defined) or stigmatisation is decreasing (negatively defined), as in the case of

Travellers. The relations between the group members appeared to be connected to or even mirror its problem situation outside the group, as perceived by the group members. To a large extent their *internal* relations between the activists appeared to reflect their *external* relations to representatives of the greater society:

Only after the official assimilation policy against Travellers was abolished did we see the emergence of social-movement mobilisation among Travellers. Since the beginning of the 1990s, this social movement became increasingly evident. There was some change from individual and family-based coping strategies based on personal trust to more collective coping strategies dependent on trust in institutions. From being perceived as representing a societal problem and an object of moral concern, control and help, Travellers achieved growing respect and acceptance from society's elites. Travellers came to be redefined as victims of a former assimilation policy.

Self-organisation and social mobilisation have represented new coping strategies and in certain respects a break with earlier coping and resistance strategies. Travellers had earlier expressed that they should speak up for their rights, as the Sami people had done before them (Møller 1974, Marvik 1983). Yet, resistance against the measures implemented by politicians, the civil service, the Norwegian Mission for the Homeless and first-line services, was only to a little extent expressed in more collective forms, and was more often characterised by individual coping and resistance strategies. A male Traveller placed at the Svanviken settlement centre regretted this situation (*Klassekampen*, 18 November 1978): "There has always been too little agreement among us Travellers. Travellers have for good reasons been divided. It would have been nice if Travellers could unite. But the Mission has never wanted that."

As an ideographic account, one could have argued that the division between Travellers was anchored in the traditional economy; combined with geographical division of potential markets. Working as a peddler precluded contact with other Travellers except for one's own kin (Barth 1955). My cross-category comparison will demonstrate, however, that other mechanisms appeared to be more important. As the exclusion and stigmatisation of Travellers decreased, conditions for self-organisation improved. Yet there were still major co-operation difficulties among the active participants.

## **Distrust turned inward**

Initially, the extent to which distrust affected the relation between the participants came as a surprise to me. Distrust of the government and perceptions of hostile social environments had turned inward. We found such features both among claimants and Travellers. Stolk and Wouters (1987) reported similar features of distrust between their two categories of outsiders, but did not really try to account for this other than implicitly referring to a lack of self-respect and disrespect from others. How this was connected to internal low-trust relations between peers was not elaborated any further. I would argue that there is a connection between low self-respect and being bereft of trust from others and more or less implicitly being labelled as unreliable or untrustworthy. This could be expressed in denials of the same rights or subject status as other citizens. Disparagement from the government may in such cases turn inward and corrode the self-assessment of the target groups. Analytically, however, trust should be distinguished from issues of self-respect (shame/pride), even if they are interrelated or connected.<sup>5</sup>

There were slightly different reasons why members of the two categories experienced distrust of the government and assumptions of hostile social environments: *Travellers* had a collective memory of extreme distrust. This affected their perceptions tight up to the present. To a considerable extent, Travellers expected that others would despise them if they knew about their status. Social distance to the government contributed to the perception that the official policy in the present was vague and unpredictable, and the stated intentions of governments were unreliable. *Claimants* of social protection, on the other hand, experienced being approached as potential violators of the entitlement criteria. Thus they were deprived of trust from others. Experience of repeated controls, checks, inspections and paternalism on the part of the providers furthered the perception of hostile environments. In short, this concerned the normative certainty and the policy style of the central government and the first-line services, but also more generally their perceived social standing in the larger society. The actions of the dominating social groups frustrated the goals of the dominated ones.

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<sup>5</sup> Following Stompka (1998: 20), we may define trust as "a bet on the future contingent action of others". One cannot have full knowledge about the future actions of others. In this respect there will always be insufficient knowledge or information. This assumes accountability, predictability and perceived stability of the future actions of other actors. Trust in institutions differs from trust in persons. In the former case, the object of trust is abstract. It is harder to estimate their trustworthiness. The relation will be more open ('weak ties', cf. Granovetter 1973) compared to personal ties, including family relations. This could contribute to the tendency that one keeps to one's family or kin rather than organisations in cases of low trust relationships. This appeared to a large extent to be the case in relation to Travellers and Travellers' organisations.

When the weaker party cannot express his or her interests in modifying the course of events to a more advantaged situation, antagonism is likely to develop. Experiencing a lack of control of events that are of central interest to you may create hostility (Coleman 1971 [1961]). Sometimes only the weaker party experiences it this way. The stronger party may be content with the situation and unaware of the discontent, non-cooperation or antagonism of the weaker party. In such cases, the hostility is asymmetric. The hostility may obtain its outlet through conflict, but when there are power differentials, the social costs involved may be perceived as too large, impossible to handle, involving high risks and unforeseeable consequences. Hence, the disadvantaged may avoid confronting their adversary.

External low-trust relationships, and a perception of the standing of one's social group and consequently one's own individual social standing as vulnerable made the participants watch their backs ("have to be careful not to say anything that can later be used against me", "look at their hands"). Hostility, fear of exploitation, betrayal or being exposed to extra burdens from public authorities, the mass media or greater society led to scepticism about people's motives and future actions, including peers. Some participants had a secret phone number and emphasised that they did not hand out their phone number to other claimants, did not talk about their individual case or initiatives to other claimants, checked the display on the phone before they answered the phone, made secret recordings of conversations with former employers and social workers, and were careful not to give out information about other claimants they knew of to others. Membership registers were kept secret both to the government and other members (the Romani People's National Association, the Poor House). This was associated with much speculation on the part of others about who were actually members. Sometimes visitors and peripheral participants did not introduce themselves, and the more active participants did not ask and waited for people themselves to take the initiative as a code of courtesy. Others found it suspicious when journalists had managed to find their secret phone number and asked for an interview.

*The Poor House:* Contrary to what one could expect, the meetings I attended were not dominated by discussions of new initiatives, the budget, upcoming events or external representation. Rather, the participants went through the incoming mail, discussed the internal regulations and formal meeting procedures for the agenda and whether the minutes from the last meeting were accurate or mis-represented the views

of the participants or only referred to the arguments given by the keeper of the minutes. Activists also complained that they were not given the opportunity to state their opinion or interrupted before they had finished. It appeared that internal regulations often were of more immediate importance than the co-ordination of their efforts vis-à-vis political elites and representatives of the greater society. This led to the meetings between members and activists becoming more formal (cf. similar observations by Seim 1997: 114 ff.). As a consequence, there was no time left to discuss subjects or issues that from my perspective as an outsider appeared to be more important. In other cases, several participants were exhausted and left before they managed to discuss the more substantial issues.

*Romani People's National Association:* Board meetings appeared to be dominated by discussions of internal regulations and this made it difficult to discuss issues of importance to their relations with government. They rarely managed to get through the entire agenda. Board meetings served largely to discuss internal affairs, distrust and rumours that appeared about other board members since the last meeting. Similar features appeared to occur in the annual meetings.

Among the board members, *rumours* about embezzlement or bribery nourished suspicion and in some cases led to exclusion of board members for a limited period of time. Lack of trust in the other board members sometimes resulted in secret and hidden recording of board meetings. On other occasions, board members recorded phone calls and kept written records of phone calls with other Travellers and outsiders. The participants were suspicious of other board members and felt that they possibly had a hidden agenda, contacted government representatives behind their back or co-operated with other competing organisations. As an expression of the communication problems, board members sometimes ended up writing letters to each other rather than using the phone. The written communication between board members was recorded and filed for later reference.

The co-ordination problems and internal tensions can be illustrated by the internal “rules” the board developed in co-operation with an external organisation consultant:

**“Statement of rules for the board of the Romani People’s National Association**

1. The board shall work according to the regulations in force, adopted by the members, that is the annual meeting. All board members are obliged to have thorough knowledge of these.
2. The board shall be democratically and legally elected, which among other things means that everyone shall have full mutual confidence in each other.
3. All board members shall have a humble and down-to-earth attitude to each other and the members. We are all committed to listening to and respecting other people’s views and statements. Let us never forget that it is the members who hold the power, and that we are elected to take care of their interests.
4. All board members have the duty to inform the board. That is to keep the board informed about what they undertake *ex officio*. If a board member or the leader has been instructed to carry out a task, the person concerned shall carry this out in practice. No other board members are authorised to interfere in this person’s work without consent from the person in question. This is to avoid misunderstandings.
5. The way the situation is at the moment only the treasurer and the chairperson should have access to the bank account. These are the only two that are authorised to transfer and withdraw cash.
6. Disagreements of a personal kind that may occur between board members or with the chairperson should be solved between themselves, to avoid that the entire board becomes involved. Everything that happens within the board is of course strictly confidential.
7. Smear campaigns and innuendo, written or verbal, must be avoided between the board members. Let us rather encourage each other in the common fight we fight. Mutual respect shall be given priority.
8. Everyone has a duty to be prepared for the board meetings and to keep up to date about what happens in the association and with Travellers in Norway. Board members shall bring with them the documents prepared and distributed in advance to the meetings.
9. In cases of absence from meetings, the board members should contact the deputy representatives themselves. If the deputy member cannot meet, absence should be reported to the board by its leader. If possible, this should be in writing and preferably a week in advance.
10. Breaking any of these rules will be brought up at the board meeting, and in the worst case result in immediate exclusion from the board.

The rules have been approved and signed by all board members (December 1998)” (published in the newsletter “Free as a Bird” in 1999 and distributed in meetings with the government).

It follows from feelings of distrust that they needed elaborate rules for interaction and sometimes preferred written to oral communication.

When not in face-to-face contact with one another, the possibilities for immediate control with the other team members was smaller. Geographic distance and lack of communication nourished distrust of other activists in the organisation. We observed how rumours started over again just after the meetings ended and after attempts were made to solve the mutually suspicious attitude. Thus they changed from a geographically scattered board including Travellers from Western, Southern and Eastern Norway in their efforts to be representative of all Travellers (1996), to a more narrow recruitment or selection of board members mainly from Eastern Norway, especially in the local area of the chairperson (1999).

The chairperson was close to exhaustion and appeared undecided as to whether he would continue to work with the organisation, accept to be re-elected or apply for



financial support from the government for next year. He complained that he got little feedback from other board members and that most of the work fell on him. Board members did not carry out the tasks they had taken on. But during board meetings he rapidly took on new tasks rather than delegating responsibility to others as he did not have sufficient confidence in other board members (“there is a rotten apple in the basket”, “must be on the alert against infiltrators”). As a result, he ended up doing more himself.

Tactics of concealment and hiding turned inward and affected even the relationship among the disadvantaged. Information was not distributed openly. The low-trust relationship with the greater society was reflected in distrust among peers. Under circumstances of mutual distrust, under-communication of information and pretending to know less than one does are understandable practices or techniques to deploy in order to cope with a vulnerable position. But this nourished scepticism and intensified the feelings of distrust among the participants. The participants became even more careful not to make themselves dependent on the cooperation of other team-members (*a vicious circle*).

### **Denial of authority**

Distrust in and social distance to political elites lead the organisations among claimants and Travellers to take on traits of sects. The development of sects among the disadvantaged can be interpreted as constituting an alternative to, or protective system or compensation against, the government’s intervention and surveillance and the feeling of disgrace from greater society (Lysgaard 1985 [1961]).

Ideal-typically, *sects* are collectives consisting of independent and autonomous individuals. A sect can only mobilise agreement about its own inner, egalitarian structure in relation to outsiders. Whereas sects are based on horizontal bonding of the members, hierarchical organisations are based on vertical bonding. The only possibility for sanctioning is threat of or actual expulsion from the community. There are few options for penalising members and still keeping them as members: “Any group that is beyond the pale of the law, or that perceives itself as unable to use the law to retain its members has to settle for a voluntary membership and will tend to make a virtue of it. Thus voluntarism creates problems for the leadership (...). The leadership constantly

fears that its following is about to melt away. With weak leadership there is little authority and rival factions make the group highly fissile” (Douglas 1992 [1989]: 180-181).

The open organisation system had no mechanisms for keeping the renegades or ‘heretics’, people who belonged to the group but advocated other viewpoints or acted independently of the group, in the fold. There was no or little space for bringing up issues and developing consensus. The decisions were not binding on the part of the participants. There were also few possibilities for sanctioning the decisions. This situation in part followed from the reasons for the emergence of the formal organisation. The participants wanted to counteract the dominance of others. Thus the leadership ought to avoid the paternalism they were otherwise working against. In conjunction with this, the participant appeared not infrequently to argue that the leadership or other participants acted in an authoritarian way.

Spokespersons for the *Romani People’s National Association* were often criticised or corrected by other Travellers. It was claimed that they were not authorised or did not have the right to speak or negotiate agreements on behalf of the organisation, not to say of all people of Traveller origin.

The efforts to disqualify organisation representatives often took on the form of attempts at levelling. It was claimed that they were not “true” Travellers (but ‘farmers’ [*buroer*]), they had not travelled with their parents during childhood, did not know the culture or the Romani language, that they had not grown up with their biological parents (“neither fish or bird”), or only one of their parents were of Traveller origin (“mixed product”). In other words, it was claimed that the organisation representatives were not entitled to hold opinions or qualified to state their opinion or act on behalf of Travellers. Sometimes the organisational efforts were rejected as attempts to push oneself forward at the expense of other Travellers; a possibility to achieve private and illegitimate economic gains.

Some female Travellers sometimes referred to the chairperson as “father”. Yet, his authority was fragile and he was even despised by people who earlier had supported him (“acts like a king”). But despite repeated complaints, he was re-elected with acclamation at the annual meetings. The chairperson could hardly take initiatives without risking severe criticism from the others. If one board member managed to achieve something on behalf of all Travellers, that single person would be praised and

credited and thus be distinguished from or stand above other Travellers. On the other hand, he was also criticised if they felt he did too little or became too servile or accommodating.

Other activists were met with similar sanctions. The deputy chairperson responded, took initiatives and relieved the chairperson of obligations and also for a limited time period managed to establish a local chapter of the organisation in western Norway (1996-97). But this ended up in entrenched and repeated conflicts with the chairperson and other board members because he was said to be promoting himself and valued himself too highly (“too big ego”), and there was uncertainty about the motives of the work he performed. As suggested by the external organisational consultant, the chairperson and deputy used to meet before the board meetings, but the other board members wanted to stop this practice (1999). The practice helped decrease the mutual distrust, but constituted a distinction between the two and the other board members. It could also lead to suspicion from the other team members who could experience that they were being kept outside the real decisions.

The chairperson argued that he did not have a mandate from the other board members to give the deputy any special treatment. Hence, the chairperson was careful not to give the deputy too much credit. The deputy maintained that what may be seen as servility on the part of the chairperson was a lack of recognition of his work and distrust. This appeared to be connected to concerns for self-expression and recognition. Following this, he called other Travellers to complain.

I observed similar features among claimants. It would be said that something was “wrong” with the persons in charge of the organisation or other organisation participants. They were not considered representative of “us” or worthy of representing other claimants (had been to prison, did not live in the local community, had mental health problems and so on). In short, the participants used all available arguments to discredit and deny other claimants authority.

*The Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation:* Organisation participants repeatedly complained about the formal leader. But the accounts of what was wrong with the leader differed: He did too little, was unpractical and academic, inaccessible during periods of employment, inflexible and unable to adopt to other people, interested in or flirted with “religious questions”. In contrast to the other activists, the formal leader had higher education and had moved there from the city. In other words, he was an

“immigrant” and in that respect also an outsider. He acted as a consultant to other unemployed and job-seekers, ran courses for other claimants and wanted to consider himself as an expert or consultant to other unemployed people. To me, he presented his present activities as a form of action research, so as to emphasise equality in status with me. He also emphasised that he attended lectures at a university college. But his own efforts at maintaining his dignity and standing above the others were not recognised by the other activists (“not one of us”, “not representative of who we are”).

This was reminiscent of Bales’ (1951: 70 ff.) distinction between instrumental and expressive leaders in small groups of people in face-to-face interaction. There was a difference in backward and forward reference of action. Expressive leaders were judged according to their prior record (who we are), instrumental leaders according to their ability to accomplish issues in the future (what needs to be done). Bales (ibid.) argued that there was a tendency to develop differential kinds of participation. People tended to assume different roles and positions in the problem-solving process.

In our cases, and different from Bales’ observations, there was no clear-cut division of labour with regard to the task of problem solving. Denial of compliance with the identity-political requirements was not associated with differentiation of expressive and instrumental problem-solution functions. Rather, the instrumental skills appeared to be considered less significant than questions of proper self-expression and identity as a source of issues between the participants. This was connected to concerns about the discrepancy between the ideal self-representation and their self-criticism, and denial of authority.

It appeared that the *Poor House* came closest to the ideal-typical sect. The participants had chosen a “flat structure”. This went together with their emphasis on freedom from interference and autonomy both internally and externally, much in line with Douglas’ (1992 [1989]) theorisation. Freedom and independence vis-à-vis better-positioned actors was emphasised in contrast to the perceived surveillance, paternalism and social control experienced in interaction with welfare officers. These values were also reflected in the actors’ internal organisation; the emphasis on co-decision and a flat organisation structure.

The Poor House did not have a formal hierarchy and all members could join in and take part in the decisions. According to the organisation regulations, responsibility should rotate between the members. Formally, one should be a member for three

months before having a right to vote. In practice, they did not register members systematically. Moreover, they had a group of about four to six people who met weekly to take care of the ingoing and outgoing mail. In practice, several of the activists and users turned up at and participated in the weekly meetings. Despite the flat structure, they applied a number of titles to divide responsibility between the active members; “manager of the centre”, “manager of environment and administration”, “project manager”, “manager of activities”, “manager of production and sales” and so on. The titles fluctuated as the number of participants and their interests changed. The division of labour was introduced to get things done, but latently also served to regulate the relations between the activists and avoid interference and control from others. Direct and close collaboration appeared to be perceived as a threat to their individual integrity. In other words, one ensured space for self-expression and individual actions and initiatives and was able to involve more people without having to co-ordinate the activities.

Activists were criticised for promoting themselves if they had opinions about and interfered with the activities of the other people in the Poor House. The sanctions were especially directed at participants who tried to act as consultant and project co-ordinator for the organisation rather than regular members, or allegedly tried to act as self-appointed leaders and aspired to become the manager or managing director (“he was a small Napoleon”, “should mind his own business”). One informant complained that he had to be careful not to do too much or be too assertive, otherwise he would easily be excluded from the organisation. At the same time, and fluctuating with this, it was important not to do too little. In such cases the participants were criticised for not doing anything or for “feathering their own nest”.

All in all, the organisation systems were characterised by the fact that line authority was not easily maintained and exercised. A “flat” structure was also maintained to be the ideal by the main activist in the *Fredrikstad Client Action*. Line authority appeared to be easier to maintain in the *Losers’ Association* after they appointed a board of outside supporters.

Douglas (1992 [1989]) emphasised how ideology impeded line authority between peers. But in our cases this was not only due to cultural dissent. It was in part also conditioned by social structures. Claimants have been defined by their relationship to the social services and have not had an overview of who else is claiming benefits.

Only the welfare functionaries have had this knowledge. This has in part been the result of tacit agreement among the insiders to pretend they do not know each other, especially in the presence of outsiders. Even if they knew about other claimants, the information was not disclosed in all contexts. In a similar vein, Travellers exercised a certain precaution. They sometimes pretended not to know each other, especially in front of an audience.

The members of the category were more likely to know the identity of the leader than vice versa, as the organisation leader tended to appear in public more often, especially in the mass media. Especially among Travellers, much time appeared to be spent on rumours about people who allegedly were of Traveller origin. In particular, there were lively information exchanges about famous people who were claimed to be one of their own. The individual members did not necessarily have less of an overview of and a smaller informal network among the members of the disadvantaged category than the leadership of the formal organisation system. This gave scarce opportunities for information control on the part of the leaders of the organisation systems.

In the case of the *Romani People's National Association*, this was modified by the fact that only the organisation leader had access to the membership register. The leader kept secret who the members were, also from other members. They did not know who these others were and this was the source of a great deal of speculation and rumours among the participants. Nevertheless, the leadership depended on the voluntary disclosure of membership on the part of the disadvantaged. The secrecy appeared also in itself to have contributed to a subjectivity and one-sided perspective of the members. This made the members of the social categories more inclined to act as lone individuals (cf. Aubert 1985 [1965]: 172). Furthermore, the leadership had few opportunities to withhold scarce goods or exercise negative sanctions in the open system. These were structural conditions that impeded internal stratification. There appeared to be few opportunities for sanctioning those who broke out and acted individually rather than as a team-member. The organisation system had to build on agreement rather than use of force.

### **Lack of team presentation of self**

Goffman (1971 [1959]: 83-108) discusses in *The Presentation of Self* how people in certain situations seek to act as “teams” towards an audience of others. The co-operation

that makes the team performance possible will tend to be kept secret. Thus a team is similar to a secret society. The team is held together by a bond that members of the audience do not share. They do not spontaneously fit together or interact, but emerge as individuals who are strategically co-ordinated. A teammate is someone whose dramaturgical co-operation is depended upon by others in fostering a given definition of the situation. If the person insists on giving the show away and disclosing the secrets of the team, he or she is nevertheless a part of the team. It is only because one is considered part of the team that one can give the performance away.

The team members co-operate in maintaining a definition of the situation towards those above and below themselves, to defend themselves against people of a higher or lower rank. Definition of the situation is sustained by intimate co-operation of more than one party. Any member of the team may spoil the performance by inappropriate conduct. Each team member has to rely on the good conduct and behaviour of the other members. There is, then, a strategic bond of reciprocal dependency between the fellows. In case of social sabotage or involuntary disclosure of secrets by one's own people, the other team members must resist the temptation to immediately sanction the offender. Otherwise the performance would be further disturbed.

Our cases emerged as clear contrasts to this. It is striking that the organisation representatives did not manage or emphasise such team performances towards greater society. The participants voluntarily or involuntarily played out internal conflicts and disagreements to their audience.

Co-ordination among the activists vis-à-vis political authorities was low. Lack of internal authority in relation to external agencies made it more difficult to negotiate decisions, take a lead in meetings and close the discussion. Voting became difficult or unthinkable, or the members did not subordinate themselves to common rules and compromises. Decisions were often not followed up in practice as the level of mutual commitment was low. Internal relations among the disadvantaged as equals in terms of status were associated with demands for direct democracy and use of referenda among members of the target groups.

The low degree of co-ordination had consequences for how they approached representation to the government. For instance, in 1998, the *Poor House* was going to have a meeting with the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

(A) told me in advance that he was interested in participating and assumed that (B) would also like to participate. (A) suggested they ought to discuss this at the upcoming monthly meeting. But issues such as who should participate and the points of view and claims they should present were never discussed. Although they had a written agenda, this was not mentioned as one of the important issues to be discussed. In consequence, the activists were not co-ordinated beforehand. On other occasions, activists complained that they never managed to make decisions during the meetings.

*The Job-seekers' Interest Organisation:* The annual meeting and countywide board meeting I attended were both dominated by general discussions on factors behind welfare dependency, which label they should apply to themselves, histories about other unemployed, and general complaints about welfare agencies without explicit reference to their own individual case. Thus, the meetings served as an arena for a form of collective self-reflection. The few decisions and future plans made during the meetings were not followed up later. For instance, the 1996 annual meeting decided to introduce a membership fee, but this was later found to not be important enough to follow up.

*The Romani People's National Association:* It appeared that the board was rarely co-ordinated before external meetings with the representatives of the Research Council of Norway, the Norwegian State Church and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and other external agencies. Suggestions from the chairperson were presented to the other board members with the counterpart and external collaborators present. Board members had not met before the meetings with external bodies and did not use the opportunities to meet after meetings with external agencies. In the meetings where we participated, it was striking how fast board members broke up after the meetings even though they had had intense discussions about family relations and relatives during the coffee breaks.

Different from the problem conditions of the open organisation, participants in the informal community system or kinship-based network of Travellers could present threats of negative sanctions, disclosure of allegedly discrediting information, isolation/shunning or even violence, to keep the frontiers against society at large. The informal community system among Travellers can be interpreted as having certain similarities with a secret society. This emerged as an alternative to isolated existence as individual members of a social category, something that appeared to a greater extent to be the case for claimants.



As seen from the perspective of the members of a secret society, the strategies of the open organisation may be regarded as “betrayal” or sabotage of the protective system. Ideal-typically, the secret society allows for trust, confidence and intimacy as well as secrecy and dissimulation (Aubert 1985 [1965]: 172-191). Moral condemnation of the outside world and fear of infiltration may serve to close ranks against others. Situated in perceived hostile environments, the danger of disclosure of status membership and information about the social category in question emerge as crucial issues for the team-members.

Following Goffman (1971 [1959]: 141-142), we may divide between three types of secrets: First, the disadvantaged will tend to protect or under-communicate their *dark secrets*. This is information that is perceived as mis-representations and contradictions of their ideal self-presentation. The information is assumed to be discrediting and to be a disadvantage for the members of the category. If one member causes a scandal, then everyone risks losing some public reputation. The members may keep each other in check in a hostile environment: “If you don’t tell on me, I won’t tell on you.” Their relationship is one of balance rather than power differentials. Consequently, their bonding may emerge as one of intimacy without warmth. The members might find that they are in an enforced familiarity.

Second, there are the *strategic secrets* of the team. The members hold back information about actions the team plans to bring about. Disclosure of such information could give members of the audience a possibility to adapt to and counter the forthcoming moves of the team. Situated in hostile environments, it is difficult to allow yourself to assume a moral right to exploit your adversary. You are not that disappointed if you assume that everybody seeks to maximise his or her self-interests. This can thus justify a strategic relationship to others.

Third, there are the *inside secrets* of the members. This is not discrediting information, but helps the group feel different and separate from those people not “in the know”. They give content to a perceived social distance. The members may feel exclusive. The outsiders become the insiders and they may appear as a group of wise persons. The secrecy sustains or reinforces a feeling of standing outside the rest of society, but in a positive sense. It emphasises their uniqueness. The members may in such cases become more loyal to the secret system.

Several Travellers expressed that they wanted to keep their culture to themselves. For instance, they wanted to keep the Romani language secret. Thus, they disapproved of the publication of a Romani dictionary, and spread the rumour that it contained deliberate errors to fool outsiders. They enjoyed the game of undercover identification and interaction among the chosen ones. In such cases, secrecy can become a ritual. It becomes a goal in itself. Secrecy may confirm your exclusive membership and you can allow yourself some contempt for the outsiders (cf. Becker 1973 [1963]: 85-91).

By disclosing information, the vulnerable person may to a larger extent feel like the master of the situation. In some cases, information about members may be given to other insiders to demonstrate that you are not only inside but centrally positioned to the access to information. Gossip emerges as a sign of confidence and mutual trust. But the pact can be fragile. It can be tempting to break out of it to the advantage of an alliance with your adversary, “the enemy”. “Enemies” have more resources at their disposal, and more influence in society at large. The insider can be tempted to disclose information about other insiders to outsiders to gain the favour of the latter. The disclosure of an entrusted secret can be associated with larger benefits than costs on the part of the member. It can be perceived as more beneficial to seek alliances with the dominant team than to rely on the prospects of future benefits from continued or one-sided alliances with members of the disadvantaged team. The insider emerges as a “deserter” or saboteur. He or she turns out to be somebody else than initially assumed by the members of the disadvantaged team.

There appeared to be a great deal of awareness about this temptation, especially among Travellers. This appeared in itself to lead to a suspicious attitude to one’s peers and an inclination to consider them as unreliable. The participants may break out of the team and seek information about other insiders from outsiders to check if other insiders have a “hidden agenda” or act behind their backs and so on. When the *Romani People’s National Association* at one point was criticised about its accounting procedures or administrative routines by the government ministry, other participants immediately distanced themselves from the leader and some even reported him to the police to safeguard their own interests. On other occasions they sought information about finances, banking accounts and accounting procedures via the bank or the government

ministry rather than requesting this information directly from the organisation's leadership.

### **Individual initiatives and avoidance of conflict**

Many of the participants preferred not to delegate their presentation of self to others. It often emerged as preferable to maintain control over this alone. Team performance of self may be perceived as a risky project when there is much to lose. In such cases, they would have to rely on others playing their cards right. It is less flexible as seen from the point of view of the individual. The individual performer acting more or less on his or her own behalf can more easily adjust to his or her particular situation and modify his or her strategy in the course of events.

A number of individuals had contacted politicians *in persona* to influence decision making rather than communicating through interest aggregates. As members of a subordinated category, they often appeared to be more concerned about seeking contact and recognition from outsiders or superiors than contacting and communicating with each other. It turned out to be more important to achieve recognition from the government, the media and the greater society than others in the same category. Recognition and legitimacy were achieved through attention and co-operation with actors who administrated the dominant view of the social world.

*Travellers:* Some organisation participants expressed that better-positioned actors (non-Travellers) had to tell other Travellers the truth, explain facts and deny rumours. Interviewees argued that it did not count if they spoke up against other Travellers. It did not matter what they told other Travellers themselves. Their opinions were not more valid than those held by others of Traveller origin. Their viewpoints and opinions were not given weight. People in the same disadvantaged situation could not endow moral redress and recognition, and Travellers were dependent on better-positioned actors (superiors). As dominated actors, some Travellers were more concerned with seeking contact, attention and recognition from the dominant actors (non-Travellers), than contacting and communicating among each other. Recognition and legitimacy were to be achieved through attention from and co-operation with actors who administrated the dominant view of the social world.

Much of the renewed public attention during the 1990s about the prior public policy against Travellers and its consequences appeared after politicians, journalists and actors in the civil service had been contacted by several individual Travellers. The social and cultural dominance led to the Travellers being defined by their relationship to non-Travellers and they still to a large extent turned to these rather than each other.

Inside the *Romani People's National Association*, this could be observed in how board members took their own initiatives without discussing the issues beforehand with the other board members: For instance, one board member appointed a relative as spokesperson for the organisation in western Norway. Another board member contacted Swedish Travellers to establish a Nordic co-operation among Travellers and presented Travellers' culture and craft during a local market. But when appearing in the media and seeking to avoid criticism for trying to act on behalf of all Travellers, he stressed that he only spoke on behalf of himself. Other board members took similar initiatives and positions.

As a supplementary account, the tendency to take individual initiatives can be interpreted as adjustments after experiencing that it was too difficult to co-operate with others. For instance, one board member told me he was going to participate in a public discussion with a representative of the former Norwegian Mission for the Homeless. When I asked whether he was going to represent the Romani People's National Association, he said that it was easier not to represent the organisation. He would rather participate as a private person. Involving the organisation was considered to be too complicated and likely to create conflicts.

Sometimes interviewees were aware of these patterns of individualistic behaviour, but maintained that this was legitimate. According to the main activist in the *Fredrikstad Client Action*: "There are many individualists who pursue their own path. I am no exception to that." They justified themselves as qualified to speak on behalf of other claimants without co-ordinating their views and actions with other claimants. It was considered unnecessary to ask others about their opinions or views before acting or representing the category.

The main activist in the *Job-seekers' Interest Organisation* sarcastically commented on his general impression of individualism among claimants' self-organising efforts: "It's my mayday", implicitly as a contrast to the organising strategy

they pursued themselves. Nevertheless, the main activist wrote letters to the editors in different local newspapers as a private person rather than on behalf of the organisation.

Similarly, interviewees in the *Poor House* were eager to tell me about their own personal merits and initiatives. Sometime they appeared to approach me as a representative of the greater society, but concealed their activities from or did not care about telling this to the other users of the Poor House. The activists were more occupied with their individual projects and plans than with co-ordinated activities, and appeared in media and contacted politicians on their own.

Lack of space for internal discussions and negotiations led to the tendency of activists avoiding canalising their initiatives through the formal organisational apparatus. It was easier to avoid discussions and operate on one's own. Activists considered it unimportant or too much bother to involve the other activists. They avoided bringing up issues at board meetings and monthly open general meetings to make attempts at reaching a joint agreement with the other activists. At the same time, it could be advisable to avoid conflicts with the organisation and other organisation participants.

When intra-group conflicts appeared as competition for attention and recognition from better-positioned actors, this could be in line with Simmel's (1964a [1908]: 50ff.) view that this could be explained as sociological jealousy inasmuch as participants thought they deserved recognition just as much as any other group members. You should not promote yourself. Although it could be argued that this was reminiscent of more common features in Norwegian culture, cf. the "Law of Jante", this was probably connected to mechanisms that could be observed in other cultural contexts as well. It appeared that many felt that the collective protection system could break down. Too much contact with representatives of society's elites and work to establish collaboration with the dominant actors appeared to be considered as a threat. The individual participant could, however, achieve some status and recognition by being associated with and gaining attention from the elites.

The individual demand or need for public attention and recognition from greater society contradicted the efforts among the participants to keep each other in check. The efforts to seek self-confirmation and increased symbolic capital – *a search for recognition* from the dominant actors the participants were symbolically dependent on (Bourdieu 2000 [1997]: 166) was followed by attempts at corrections or levelling from

other participants. The contradictory needs of shelter and recognition were a source of tension between the participants and nourished a suspicious attitude among the participants.

### **Lasting and unsubstantial issues between the participants**

Internal conflicts among insiders appeared to have been a prevalent concern in all cases included in the study. There was considerable mutual scepticism and more or less tacit hostility. We gained most in-depth and first-hand knowledge of the internal conflicts in the Poor House and the Romani People's National Association. In these two cases, we were able to observe and follow the internal conflicts ourselves as they proceeded.

*Travellers:* Board members often presented conflicts as disagreement on substantial issues to outside supporters and collaborators. Although the substantial disagreements were mentioned initially in complaints to outside supporters, questions of the authority and legitimacy of the organisational leader and complaints about lack of democracy would soon arise as an underlying concern. The substantial disagreement on the choice of organisation strategy appeared often to be secondary.

For instance, during the 1999 annual meeting, the large majority of those present agreed that the organisation should sign a symbolic contract on co-operation and dialogue with the Norwegian State Church. After some initial discussion and agreement that they could not forgive the church on behalf of all Travellers, the draft contract was approved by acclamation and no vote was held. A board member who supported the draft contract during the meeting later complained to outside supporters and the representative of the Church that the contract had been signed against her will, criticised the decisions for being undemocratic and argued that she had not received the minutes from the annual meeting. Later that week, however, other concerns came more to the forefront; complaints that the organisation was undemocratic, doubts about the official number of members in the secret membership register and who was a member, and rumours that many people had quit.

More or less outspoken hostility was also expressed in doubts about other Travellers' motives for participating. The substantial disagreements appeared to be minor. In such cases, there are reasons to argue that the alleged substantial disagreement was applied as a substitute argument.

*The Poor House:* More often the lasting conflicts were over minor issues, as seen from the perspective of an outsider. But seen from the insiders' point of view, these were of major importance. There was much at risk and scarce access to authority and recognition as symbolic benefits, as well as financial resources. The activists were more concerned about keeping each other down; stopping others from pulling themselves forward and succeeding in achieving benefits that would distinguish them from the others as a form of internal social control to keep each other in check. It was sometimes suspected that others withheld information and tried to fool them, had a hidden agenda or kept information about possible financial resources to themselves.

For instance, during one of the monthly meetings I attended, one of the participants (A) demanded several changes in the agenda for the meeting, the formal procedures for accomplishing the meeting and complained about alleged errors in the summons for the meeting. After two hours, they had finished the discussion about formalities, and the meeting could proceed. The participants were kept in check as long as the social worker involved in the project was present and kept people apart. When she left, (A) nearly resorted to physical violence and (B) threatened to call the police. (A) claimed that (C) exploited the Poor House by having a fridge and freezer in the house. (C) argued that the Poor House used the items (shelves, closet, fridge, freezer) and benefited from this. (C) admitted there were a few smaller wooden boards for the bookshelves standing in the corner, but regarded this to be a contribution. (A) demanded that everything should be thrown out by 1 pm the next the day, or else! (C) referred to the rules which allowed for exclusion of those who pestered others. (A) was later excluded from the Poor House after this incident.

When two parties feel inferior, insecure and weak in relation to a powerful third party, this may result in the two becoming divided against each other, and rifts and quarrels occur. It can be easier and have lower social costs to confront each other than to confront a stronger third party. Internal tensions appeared to emerge as displacement of conflict with the central government, their local representatives and the greater society. It seemed to be perceived as preferable to avoid conflicts with the elites. Such conflicts were likely to be perceived as impossible to handle, involving high risks and unforeseeable consequences. It appeared to be perceived as involving lower social costs to confront others in a similar situation than to confront the society at large. The third element becomes invisible between them, so that the clash between the two is not

against government but against each other (Simmel 1964b [1950]: 167, Möllering 2001). Alternatively, or additionally, it could be that the organisations attracted people who easily ended up in conflict with others, either because of a locked victim position or their personality structure.

### **Concluding remarks**

The disadvantaged were to a great extent defined by their equal low status vis-à-vis public authorities and other representatives of greater society. The dominated were in this respect on an equal footing with representatives of official Norway, especially government representatives. It is analogous to the Christian dictum that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. But in our secular cases, the members of the social category were subordinated under a plurality. The superordinates did not necessarily emerge as a monad. When the organisation and government reciprocated, two teams faced each other. The interaction between the organisation and the government can be regarded as interaction between two teams. The winning team is the one which manages to present itself as united against the other party.

On the one hand, the preference for individual to team performance of self possibly incapacitated them from having united action. When members of the subordinated categories acted individually rather than in a concerted way, this gives the team of superordinates the possibility to settle the conflicts individually. The individual performances could also provide the possibilities of *divide et impera* on the part of people of a higher status, especially the political elites and the mass media. The superordinated could summarise that there were “mixed reactions” to their policy proposals. They could disregard the viewpoints or demands, or seek support from those who gave their own opinions legitimacy.

On the other hand, the organisation leadership could possibly also achieve trust from representatives of the greater society by uncovering all internal difficulties and not making any efforts to conceal the discrediting information about the organisation. This later scenario appeared to have been the case in the *Romani People's National Association*. Government representatives commented that the leader was exceptionally frank in conversations with them.



Simmel (1964a [1908]: 43-50) argued that the more intense conflicts tend to occur in closer relationships. He argued that when an individual does not want to leave the unit, or feels that he or she cannot leave, even if the wish is to do so, then hatred will intensify. Conversely, when people confront each other on only a few issues, the conflicts will be limited to these points only.

As asserted by Freud (1948), one may have both the strongest negative and positive feelings for the same person. This simultaneity can be traced in the larger number of occasions in which conflicts can occur in intimate relations. There can be unity without concord between the interacting persons. Conflicts between the participants are not necessarily expressions of lateral disintegration. Open conflicts bear stronger witness to interconnectedness than ignorance or indifference (Hvinden 1994a: 6-7, Simmel 1964a [1908]). Open conflicts do not necessarily imply disintegration. They may rather serve to maintain or strengthen in-group cohesion, release tensions and avoid withdrawal. Given that more intensified conflicts can be connected to a feeling of belonging, occurrence of conflicts could be interpreted as a sign of in-group integration. However, when conflicts become repetitive and entrenched, tacit or unsubstantiated, this may be considered an expression of disintegration (Cosser 1956).

In our cases, internal conflicts clearly hampered the ability to act collectively and achieve increased organisational power on the part of the disadvantaged. The disappointments and vulnerability experienced in interaction with greater society had major consequences for the relations between the organisation participants. The assessments of others contributed to conflicts and problems of co-operation among the participants. In such cases, the unsubstantial, tacit and entrenched conflicts can be interpreted as a sign of vulnerability. Hostile feeling and frustration in encounters with society at large may be deflected upon the organisational efforts and other category members as substitute objects when conflict behaviour against the original object is obstructed or avoided, as perceived by the disadvantaged.

When the assumption and experience of hostile environments decline or disappear, the mutual bonding by threats of negative sanctions is likely to have a correspondingly smaller effect. The structural conditions for secret social systems disappear. The social costs or risks associated with presenting demands to and confronting representatives of larger society declines. At the same time, the opportunities for more open organisations may emerge. The members may more easily

delegate authority to organisation representatives when situated in more friendly environments. The formal organisation system is allowed to represent the professional interests of the members of the category. It is easier to delegate authority to an impersonal system when one holds a stronger social position, there is less risk involved or only a smaller part of one's interests is involved.

In such cases, line authority may more easily develop inside the organisation systems. Larger and more well-organised organisation systems may also afford more inner splits and even reap advantages from inner antagonism, either by keeping the conflicting parties apart or balancing the parties in internal negotiations (Simmel 1964a [1908]: 66-67, 93-94). It may discipline members who threaten to discredit the definition of the situation and the accepted mode of behaviour fostered by the other members vis-à-vis an audience. But when the political climate is changing, even relatively open organisations may choose to temporarily close the doors, especially to the press, and reconcile before their next team performance.

## **Acting on ‘Otherness’: The relationship between the activists and other category members**

In this chapter I examine how the relationship between the activists and other category members developed and turned out in practice. I ask whether there were possibilities for manoeuvring on the part of the disadvantaged. Did the stigma associated with the status overshadow other qualities in the persons or was it possible to avoid this? Thus I seek to identify the different and in part contradictory coping strategies we found among the disadvantaged in our cases.

It was a prevalent assumption among the activists in both categories that it was useful to meet socially with others in a similar position. Several of the activists expressed that they wanted to build and strengthen the community among the category members and provide arenas for self-reflection and identity development. But often, people did not turn up at social events and meetings, hesitated to take on responsibilities, or did not want to be too strongly associated with others in a similar position. It appeared sometimes to be easier to involve and mobilise non-members than others belonging to the category. This was particularly striking in the case of Travellers’ organisations and the Losers’ Association, the two cases of the largest victim capital. The current chapter seeks to account for this paradox.

### **Shame by association**

We may ask whether it was perceived as shameful and harmful for your presentation of self to be associated with others in the same category.

Shame should be understood as being different from guilt. Guilt is the sense of having done something wrong. *Shame*, on the other hand, is the lack or loss of self-esteem (Giddens 1991: 65-66), and erodes an individual’s integrity or autonomy (Touraine 1998), an underpinning for experiencing basic security on an individual level and for having confidence in others. Shame will therefore in many ways contrast or act

as a barrier to individuation and the attainment of subject status on an individual level; to become an autonomous subject and author of one's own experiences.

“Guilt by association” is a familiar everyday term. By contrast, *‘shame by association’* could be considered as a form of pollution from the impurity associated with people who are seen to break with the given moral order or to cross moral boundaries. Category members may avoid contact with other category members in order to avoid being associated with the negative characteristics and inferior qualities ascribed to the category. You become more unemployed if you have contact with other unemployed people and so on. Douglas (1980 [1966]) argued that dirt was a relative idea and should be approached through order. Dirt, she suggested, was matter out of place. It was not the qualities of the object itself which made it polluted, but its wrong placement. Dirt is what breaks with the given symbolic order. The dominant classifications both have a cognitive and a moral dimension.

Bearing this in mind, I would assume that social-assistance claimants and recipients would especially be conceived as impure to the degree that they are conceived as people who defy their place. Lower-ranking claimants are not only people out of order, but are also *supposed to* try to avoid being so. Public help or assistance has been forthcoming at the price of symbolic degradation. One has to forfeit one's privacy and surrender symbols of maturity. The claimants of working age must account for their spending of money, job-applications and job-qualifying activity and so on, in return for the temporary social-security benefits. Although by definition the claimant is conceived as a non-contributor, he or she does not receive “something for nothing” (Cosser 1965, Gouldner 1973: 260-299, Mazza 1971 [1961]: 641-644, Solheim 1996).

Role has been defined as the normative demands of behaviour and social action, and is assumed to be observed in the typical response of individuals in a given position. In part, the role concept has served as a metaphor to conceptualise social forces as something external to the agent (“acting”), in part a concept of the actor as a puppet on a string, as if the actor was the sum of other people's expectations. In role analyses, the unit of analysis has often been the individual enacting his bundle of obligatory activity and locked into a position. As many role analyses have focused on abstract categories of people, one has run the risk of missing a view of the individual; how people cope with and face other people's expectations, and move between and combine different interaction contexts.

In *Encounters*, Goffman (1961) argued that as opposed to what would be assumed from many prior role analyses, actors do not remain passive when faced with potential meanings that are generated by the way they are regarded, but actively seek to sustain or introduce a definition of the situation that is consistent with their “self-image”. A great deal of role analyses had assumed that some main role would dominate the activity. Allowing for some degree of manoeuvring, Goffman distinguished between the normative framework of a role and actual role performance. He did not focus on actors as carriers of different roles within given systems or institutional settings. His focus was more on face-to-face interaction between individuals in ‘situated activity systems’; activities visibly performed before a set of others, and only to a lesser degree a study of social organisation as such. He thus tried to maintain a view of the acting individual and the body as an anchor of many situated selves. The person was seen as neither synonymous to the roles he or she performs, nor was the role performance external to the agent (Giddens 1987, 1988; Srinivasan 1990).

Our actual performance of roles inevitably expresses something about us, something out of which we and others fashion an image of ourselves. If activities are to become identity providing, they need to be built up socially. Others need to be convinced that the performer and the performance are the same. The performer must express *attachment* to the performance if the activities are to provide for an identity; express that he considers it as part and parcel of himself and takes it seriously. The performer must be prepared to defend incumbency of the position to others; expressing the viewpoints as seen from the perspective of the in-group, being loyal to other status holders, defending the interests of the in-group and so on.

Whether an individual takes a role to his heart will depend on his interpretation of the situation and his self-perception. Whether a person because of economic incentives or other positive or negative sanctions becomes committed to the activities expected of him or her is different from whether the activities are performed with attachment. Goffman argued that many roles are performed with detachment, shame or resentment. Hence, people will try to avoid having social dirt rub off on them and avoid contamination if they run the risk of being associated with a disregarded status and attributed negative qualities. Goffman (ibid.) coined the concept *role distance* to refer to actions where the actor seeks to deny, avoid or neutralise the self that is implied in a role. This allows for some degree of agency on the part of the incumbent, given that the

actor succeeds in combining statuses or making other statuses relevant in situated activity systems. Thus, the actor can manage to achieve some flexibility in his or her action repertoire and self-presentation.

Despite the alleged many ‘selves’ of the actors and his suggestion that actors administrate different ‘selves’ in different contexts, Goffman (*Stigma*, 1990 [1963]) later argued that the negative stigma tended to overshadow other qualities and skills in the person. “The discredited” was seen as to a large extent sharing the norms and values of the dominant actor and thus also sharing other people’s perceptions and evaluation of him or her. Here the disadvantaged tended to be construed as passive objects who are accommodated to structures. Hence we could have expected to find little space for manoeuvring on part of the disadvantaged other than concealment to avoid the stigma to become too apparent. I shall argue that there are reasons for differentiating Goffman’s assertions.

### **Stated goals of community**

There was a significant gap between what the activists wanted the organisation to be, and what their actual main focus was. Practice differed from the stated ideals and goals. On repeated occasions, many of the core activists, both among claimants’ and Travellers’ organisations, claimed that it was useful to meet with ‘equals’ or ‘peers’. Social gatherings were in part considered as possibilities for withdrawing from or constituting alternatives to the dominance and marginality experienced in interaction with non-category members. The disadvantaged could then become the normal or the marginality bracketed for a limited time or constituting a separate and self-controlled social space (“to be oneself”). The arenas were partly seen as a possibility to break with social isolation. *In practice*, the activists often ended up developing assistance services, providing assistance and counselling to the less active, and advocacy and affirmative policy on behalf of the disadvantaged category.

When I asked activists in the *Poor House* whether they tried to get back into the ‘labour market’, they repeatedly referred to the cultural activities at the centre. At the organisational level, activists in the Poor House appeared to be more concerned about cultural activities than employment or paid work. They were especially interested in establishing a cafe where people could meet. They earlier tried to run a cafe on Saturdays in the east end of the city, but the activists thought it was too much work,

complained that it was difficult to get there without spending money on the bus or metro, and few visitors came (1996). One woman who held a minimum old-age pension cooked home-made soup in their premises in the city centre once a week after asking for free groceries and leftovers in the nearby shops (begging). The informants expressed the desire to expand the activities, but this was not followed up (1996-99). Activists had taken initiatives for several social gatherings and cultural activities: Christmas party, New Year party, camping, walks in the forest, street theatre. But when they invited people to free courses, social gatherings and activities, people often did not turn up.

Activists at the Poor House arranged a few training courses to teach claimants about their welfare rights, especially about the social-benefit legislation regulating access to means-tested social assistance, to attract more claimants to the house. Thus, they appealed to the self-interest of claimants to attend. Informants expressed that the services they offered were less stigmatising, more accessible (longer opening hours), and involved less bureaucratic bickering (“you don’t have to turn your soul inside out”) than those offered by charities and the public authorities.

The activists tried to develop an alternative first-line service to compensate for what they conceived as deficits in existing social services and shelters. Some of the activists occasionally offered welfare rights advice and advocacy. But individual assistance provision, counselling and advocacy were considered a burden, disturbing and depressive. Activists referred to the fact that they already had experienced enough misery or became aggressive in meetings with welfare officers. They had negative experiences from the social-services office themselves and therefore avoided contact with the public assistance services if possible. Other core activists had experienced that claimants in the periphery assumed that the Poor House was run by the government and therefore avoided contact.

In a similar vein, activists in the *Fredrikstad Client Action* tried to arrange open meetings for claimants during its initial period. But few people attended, and stated that aims to develop self-help groups and social gatherings had not been realised. Nevertheless, the main activist wanted financial support for developing cultural activities and arenas for self-expression and development:

“We could have managed to get people to go on holiday trips. Perhaps they could have had it all covered by the social-services office. It could be that somebody started a firm of movers. It could be cheaper than other firms of movers. We could have started a cafe, organized events, a forum,

a person who could play the guitar. Maybe we could manage to make a Christmas magazine, a paper that could be a forum people could write for” (from interview with the main activist in the Fredrikstad Client Action, male, born 1950’s, June 1996).

The main activist expressed that he would rather be associated with cultural activities than alternative social services. Nevertheless, they had ended up developing a shadow provision to the local social-services offices. The two main activists offered help and advice to claimants of social assistance and daily allowances, and others who contacted the organisation in order to improve the living conditions of individual clients. At the same time providing help was seen as exhaustive work. They had to recapitulate the entire client trajectory or problem situation of help-seekers, and this was seen as depressing work and a burden.

Core activists in the *Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation* sometimes expressed that it was important for the unemployed and job-seekers to meet. The activists emphasised that job-seekers should co-operate and not work against each other or compete for the same job opportunities and rather create *new* job opportunities. The participants managed to set up two centres where the ‘unemployed’ or ‘job-seekers’ could meet, develop new ideas and support each other (“activity centre”, “centre for voluntary work”). They also sought to arrange social gatherings together with the local labour-exchange office that had been more positive to activities that could enhance people’s self-esteem. Board members complained that they could not afford to drive long distances to meet with others. But often claimants on the periphery of the organisation did not turn up at meetings and centres that were within walking distance either.

*The Romani People’s National Association*: The cadres and board members sought to constitute opportunities or social spaces to meet with other Travellers, arenas for self-reflection and identity development; “centres of culture”, youth camps, social gatherings, and courses in traditional craft techniques and music tradition. Such initiatives were conceived as possibilities to meet on their own conditions, avoid surveillance and compensate for the consequences of the previous assimilation policy, and break social isolation and concealment. This was presented as important to compensate for experiences of surveillance, cultural domination and vulnerability in interaction with non-Travellers and to restore and strengthen their cultural differences and particularities. But so far it had been difficult to mobilise people to attend, and there



were conflicts and problems in finding cadres who would take the responsibility for arranging social gatherings and courses. Informants also referred to the large geographic distances and limited personal finances as conditions that hampered participation in get-togethers. *In practice*, it turned out to be easier to mobilise financial and human resources and moral support to establish an office to provide information and advocate Travellers' points of view to non-Travellers and to assist individual Travellers who contacted the organisation.

*The Losers' Association* represented an exception. At the time we got to know them, the board did not want to develop local branches, nor did they want the members to meet, but preferred to assist individual claimants who contacted their office. The organisational work was presented as more similar to voluntary work and provision of help to *others* in need ("help to self-help"). This coincided with the preconditions from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs that the financial support from the central government should be used to strengthen their central office.

All in all, it appeared that many people often did not turn up at social events and gatherings even if their personal financial situation and geographic distance did not hamper them from attending. I will examine this in more detail below.

### **Detachment among claimants**

In *Stigma*, Goffman (1990 [1963]: 33) argued that the focusing on atrocity tales and the superiority of the disadvantaged to account for their position and status to others – in short, to be occupied with or entrenched in the alleged 'problems' – in itself can be experienced as one of the greatest penalties of being disadvantaged. It could be an unwanted reminder of one's inferiority or difference from others. Furthermore, Goffman (ibid. 50-51) argued, ambivalence is built into the individuals' attachment to his or her disadvantage. The status holder may feel normal among his or her equals and thus prefer interaction with others in a similar position. At the same time "one's own people" are assumed to be inferior to or different from 'normal people' and contact with other disadvantaged actors contradicts one's perception of oneself as a normal person.

In accordance with Goffman, the activists appeared to be ambivalent about and became associated with others in need of help. When I asked the informants about their

involvement in the organisation, several of them sought to downplay their association with it (cf. Mathiesen 1972 [1965]: 141-142, Rønning *et al.* 1988: 89).

*The Poor House:* On several occasions one of the cadres (A) told me she was rarely at the Poor House. However, on one occasion she visited the Poor House while I was talking to (B). She then repeated she was rarely at the Poor House. (B) objected, saying she had been there almost every day the last few weeks. (A) commented:

“Before this I had not dropped for a month. It was only when the course (on social rights) started that I began to turn up again. I’m not visiting just to pass the time of day. The air is so bad here. In that case I could rather sit at a café. One day when I came at 11-12 it was pitch black here. © was padding around. He’s not so concerned with the smell here and how he smells himself. I had brought someone with me who was interested. She never came back. I wanted to run out the very moment I entered. Like when (D) started to criticise (E). The one criticises the other. It’s not so pleasant” (May 1997).

(B) agreed that there had been a lot of conflicts, but said that mostly people who stayed overnight and lived at the Poor House for longer periods were responsible for the “intrigues” and said that (A) and (F) had been able to work there 15-16 hours a day without any conflicts. (A) replied that the difference between her and the people she despised and distanced herself from was that she went home to sleep. Other activists also said that they never or only rarely visited. Statements from other informants and my observations contradicted their claims, but it was not always easy to control for this as I did not go there often either.

Some informants claimed that the Poor House was unpleasant (“filthy”, “miserable”, “not cosy”), some even saying that the entire place was polluted, including the air, the people and the artefacts. Admittedly, the office was in fairly poor condition; there was no access to warm water, and everyone avoided taking on the responsibility to clean up. The real dirt, grime, dust and pollution from the cars outside only added to the symbolic dirt. In other cases, informants said that they had felt uncomfortable and found it difficult to interact in a relaxed or unconstrained manner when they had managed to arrange social gatherings. It was difficult to interact effortlessly and with ease, and people were dissatisfied with the social gatherings they had participated in.

In the mass media, activists in the Poor House sometimes insisted that they were poor. They claimed they had nothing to be ashamed of and would not allow people to humiliate them anymore. Terms such as “low-income group” were looked upon as mere euphemisms and an effort to explain away their situation. To label oneself by one’s

“proper” name – poor or client – was seen as the opposite of concealment and pretending (“keeping up appearances”), or being ashamed and feeling inferior, as it were. Such statements tended to be somewhat idealised. Sometimes the same people presented themselves in the media as working *with* the poor rather than as belonging to the category.

One activist even started “Friends of the Poor House”, intended as a supportive foundation, on his own initiative, as he did not want to be considered poor himself. Thus, he could be involved without being too closely associated with the main organisation. This did not prevent him from presenting himself as a representative of the Poor House if this could be of any help and give access to participation and financial resources. Prior to a conference he wanted to attend, he had managed to get financial support from a university college to pay the conference fee because of his student status. He would prefer to obtain access to the conference by presenting himself as a student, but maintained that he would be prepared to present himself as a representative of the Poor House if necessary. He then reassured himself that I was bound by professional secrecy, as he did not want to mention the Poor House if that was not necessary.

A lecturer in social work who had been involved in setting up the organisation expressed a larger degree of ownership to it than many of the claimants. One could have assumed that as an outside supporter she would have had fewer vested interests in the organisation, and to be less interested in contact. Her position was reminiscent of a ‘wise person’ in Goffman’s (1990 [1963]) sense of the term; an outsider with knowledge about and sympathy for the insiders’ perspective. This was in accordance with her profession and contact with the organisation compatible with her other activities and statuses.

*The Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation:* People who according to the protocols had participated in a large number of meetings did not consider themselves qualified to give their opinions, referred to the organising effort as *other* people’s activities or downplayed their own involvement in the organisation and defined themselves as peripheral. For instance, the formal leader of one of the two local sections once commented on the difficult financial situation in the organisation as a concern for the two main activists and not for himself. In a similar vein, one of the participants at the 1996 annual meeting and former beneficiary of help from the main activists to improve his financial situation, said that it was the two main activists who worked in the

organisation. Although I had recently met him at the activity centre run by the organisation, he distanced himself from that and claimed the centre was intended for “those with psychological problems”. He stressed his own employment activities last year, but did not mention that he had been employed as part of his vocational rehabilitation. At the same time he maintained that it had been fun to follow the two main activists and get the opportunity to meet people.

In other cases, informants among the cadres claimed they were not *really* unemployed, as they had some work. They went along with the prevailing definition of the situation of receiving help, but not without hesitation or reservation, as efforts to deny the self were implied in the act of claiming and receiving benefits. This may be called *status denial* and sometimes led to discussion among the activists, who held an expansionist attitude, and the more peripheral participants, who had reservations with regard to whether you were ‘unemployed’ if you had a part-time job but wanted full-time employment.

More extreme, but probably quite common, some informants and other claimants who appeared in the media said that they avoided seeking help from the social-assistance office, as they blamed themselves for their disadvantaged position and would rather manage with less money, acting as *pauvres honteux*. In contrast, others insisted they were entitled to other more rule-based and less stigmatising income-maintenance schemes (“something else”) and would avoid seeking out the social-services office as long as possible. These were efforts to avoid the status or more accurately the self one risked having imposed on oneself. We may call this type of coping or adaptation strategies for *status avoidance*. This refers to situations in which the individual makes efforts to avoid the status entirely in order to not risk being associated with the self, as implied when seeking help. Status avoidance is different from what Goffman called role distance. Role distance refers to situations where the individual combines different statuses or makes other statuses relevant, and thus allows for some flexibility and manoeuvring. In both cases, the individual seeks to avoid the self, as implied in some activity.

All in all, information control or “impression management” was of great concern to most of our informants. The status as recipient of help was largely perceived as incompatible with other statuses (“there is nothing positive about being unemployed”); as father, husband, neighbour or citizen. It appeared that many claimants only or mainly

presented themselves as ‘unemployed’, ‘poor’ or ‘dependent’ to professional experts, help providers and other gate-keepers of scarce benefits and not others in a similar position. In such cases, they have become invisible to each other. In conjunction with this, the activists in the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation regretted that only the public offices knew who the ‘unemployed’ were. But when they were not passively divided, they tended to actively avoid each other:

In one case I observed the mutual scepticism between the unemployed in an effort to set up an organisation in Trondheim. Three outside supporters and two unemployed turned up at the meeting; the leader of a centre for voluntary work who had been involved in an organisation for the unemployed in the 1980s, a student who wrote about unemployment in her master’s thesis, two men in their forties and fifties, and me. One of the men I knew from the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation. The two men swiftly used the dominant moral view of the unemployed against each other: “One should do everything to get into employment and not demand too much from others.” “Too many were idle and lacked initiative!” In other regards, they both addressed the outside supporters and not each other. Needless to say, there was never a second meeting.

As previous insiders, the two current outsiders appeared to be able to look at the ‘unemployed’ and welfare beneficiaries, probably including themselves, with the eyes of the insiders, but also with bitterness and resentment as “one who does not belong to the house” anymore (Merton 1972: 128-129). In other cases, self-criticism was expressed as if from an analytical distance. Data indicated that some had developed a double perspective, both shared and distanced themselves from the dominant judgements (“if you are going to be lazy, you can be lazy full-time”).

### **Recognition or ‘Othering’ of Travellers**

As previously mentioned, most organisational efforts among Travellers had organised on the basis of a claimed cultural difference from the larger population (cf. Chapter 5). Nevertheless, there was ambivalence about being recognised as different by the political elites, even among board members in the organisational efforts.

The proposal to recognise Travellers as an “ethnic minority” had been formulated by a network of supportive intellectuals (*Document 8*: 62 1995-96). The outside supporters appeared, however, not to have foreseen the in part strong protests

that were raised by a fairly large number of people of Traveller origin. Our conversations with outside supporters who had played a vital role in formulating the private law proposal revealed that they were less understanding of Travellers' ambivalence to being regarded as different.

Informants and other Travellers who expressed in the media that they were against official recognition as a national minority and the on-going self-organising efforts emphasised the degree to which they managed on their own, were successful in private business and accepted in their local community. Thus, they claimed there was no need for an organisation, and no need for targeted measures, assistance services or support to strengthen and reconstruct Travellers' culture. During interviews and conversations it nevertheless became evident that they were concerned about and attentive to what others (non-Travellers) thought of them. Travellers said that they assumed neighbours watched their movements. They were careful to dress appropriately, avoided traditional Travellers' clothing that could remind people of their status, and made sure that they did not stand out or become too visible in public, allegedly because this could turn back on their children ("bullying"). They wanted to avoid being regarded as too demanding, as they were afraid that this should backfire on them.

"There's too much about this Travellers' stuff. We should be left in peace now and not mess more with Travellers' lives. We're better off now than ever before. If anything more is written now there's no guarantee that it will do any good, the way things are now. They kill people for less. Look at the foreigners. They're treated all alike" (from interview with female Traveller, born in the 1930s, applied for and was granted individual financial compensation from the state for lack of primary-school education, involved in the Pentecostal movement, May 1997).

Perceived and experienced vulnerability made some informants assume they were objects of surveillance, that one still kept separate registers over Travellers, as part of a hidden agenda for the public authorities. Others expressed concern about insecurity and an exposed position, and that others (local police, neighbours) knew about their prehistory and status ("everybody knows who we are here"). The experience of vulnerability made them even more cautious about socialising with other Travellers, except for their own kin. Travellers nodded in recognition to other Travellers, but kept a distance and downplayed their status, especially in their own local community.

In conjunction with this, some people with a Traveller background de-emphasised their attachment to other Travellers. But adopting this strategy was

sometimes context dependent and their relationship to the status not always univocal. For instance, one female I assisted in applying for financial compensation for a lack of education during her childhood talked disparagingly about the former peddling and travelling (“nonsense”), emphasised that she had been settled her entire adulthood, and downplayed her association with other Travellers. Others who had known the same person for several years and who initially had asked me to assist her later said that they had eagerly discussed travelling with a caravan during the summer. The reluctance to identify with other Travellers and the dismissal of Traveller lifestyle during her childhood could be said to have strategic aspects as she applied for compensation. But this could also be seen as an effort to avoid producing a difference or distance between us. In later conversations, she continued to be reluctant to label herself a Traveller. Thus, mentioning her Traveller background in the application to the government could be seen as an unwanted but required statement; a forced self-identification and sequestration.

In other cases, Travellers said that they did not have to be so careful and could more openly play out or make relevant their Traveller status when visiting other and geographically distant places. Efforts to present different selves or play out different, partly inconsistent or even contradictory self-presentations in selected arenas and to selected others were more easily made if other members in the role-set were in *places physically distant from their present residence*. Thus, one could manage to administrate a differentiated or limited visibility; avoid mentioning or playing out other role performances or actively seek to withdraw such information. This could work as long as actors from other arenas did not appear in arenas where you had given a different self-presentation. But sometimes such efforts collapsed, as when other Travellers appeared in their own neighbourhood where they were not known as a Traveller themselves, or their neighbours appeared at the same camping site where they had played out their Traveller status to others present. Obviously, such efforts to maintain information control could lead to hesitation to participate in large social gatherings open to non-Travellers, as one would then have less control over who else would appear.

“I feel the pressure. Since high school [*realskolen*] I have felt like I’m alone against the rest of the world. A woman once commented that you help so many but never tell anything about yourself. I have never participated in the Romani gatherings, but I am working on it. As there are so many non-Travellers who are curious there, I don’t want to go there. I don’t think I have any obligation to report. I feel it’s none of other people’s business. I have lived two lives” (from

interview with female Traveller, born in the 1940s, active in a non-state church, married to non-Traveller. The husband did not know about her former life experience and identification with others with a Traveller background, March 1997).

Several informants told me that they would have liked to participate in social gatherings together with other people of Traveller origin, but had so far been reluctant and awaited further developments. Participation in public areas and publication of status may be conceived as forms of confession or discipline, much in line with Michel Foucault's (1972 [1969], 1980) account of social taxonomies and construction of grids as mainly being about social control. By telling outsiders, that is people conceived as non-category members, about yourself and making that status relevant, you create a social distance and a difference that can contradict your perception of yourself as part of greater society and similar to other Norwegian citizens.

Two Travellers contacted us directly to ensure we obtained an accurate picture of Travellers. Initially, they denied that there was a difference in culture between Travellers and non-Travellers, and claimed it was of no importance to themselves. They doubted that they had a particular culture. They knew the language (Romani) and had taught it to their children "just for fun", as it were. But the craft had vanished, and the songs were the same as those used by "settled people". Later, they maintained they would never become entirely the same as settled people. The cultural centres the Romani People's National Association tried to establish were first ridiculed. But this was moderated later in the interview and changed to complaints that nobody would like to have such a centre in their neighbourhood: "It would probably be located in an old and tumbledown industrial area." Furthermore, they complained that it was no use establishing a cultural centre if they did not have the financial means and could not afford to visit it.

In other cases, informants presented other Travellers as peculiar or less distinguished, claimed themselves to have managed better than other Travellers, or expressed that they felt uncomfortable when meeting other Travellers. Even a peripheral member of the Romani People's National Association expressed that he felt uncomfortable meeting other Travellers and would not like to participate in social gatherings (contamination, symbolic impurity), while his non-Traveller wife said that it had been fun and that she would welcome more social gatherings.



In the autumn of 1997 and spring of 1998 some Travellers organised a counter movement against the proposal from the government to officially recognise Travellers as an ethnic or national minority, as well as against the work being performed by the emerging Travellers' organisations. In particular, the counter movement addressed the Romani People's National Association, which had been given more public attention and support. "We believe that such organisations only lead to more focus on our people. The focus does not lead to anything positive, just more stigmatisation and bullying. We are better off the way things are now" (spokesperson for the counter reaction, *Hamar Arbeiderblad*, 31 December 1997). As Travellers gained increasing legitimacy in the greater society, the inner barriers to social mobilisation became more apparent. The new possibility to be recognised as an ethnic or national minority and to organise and present collective claims was inconsistent with denial, concealment and avoidance, which have been prevalent coping strategies among Travellers.

Even Travellers who otherwise conceived of themselves as part of a separate people, more or less intuitively opposed the proposal by the government to attribute Travellers a formal status as a national minority. The government's proposal was presented as a forced categorisation that would apply to all Travellers, independent of personal preference, and weaken the opportunity to decide by oneself and control when the Travellers' status should be made relevant, and more exposed to unwanted or involuntary attribution of status. Consequently, the proposal came to be conceived not as possible protection and recognition, but rather as disciplining through sequestration, construction of a rigid social order and enforced social division lines ("put in a box").

The counter-reactions should be understood with Travellers' historically low legitimacy in mind. The measures to strengthen the cultural rights of Travellers were easily associated with the former targeted measures to assimilate Travellers in Norwegian society. The consequences of the government's proposal and following up of the framework convention were perceived as unpredictable and potentially risky. It was unclear what the implications would be. Non-Travellers could consider the uncertainty and fears to be unsubstantial or exaggerated. Still, the reluctance should be interpreted on the background of the Travellers' historical social position. The future was assessed on the background of the past. The more or less intuitive reactions and coping strategies among Travellers were justified by reference to prior negative experience, whether the event was in the recent or distant past. Both were seen as

relevant to justify reluctance to become involved with the social and political elites. Even if the conditions had improved the last two decades, there was a fear of backlash and worsening of the conditions in the future. Hence, they kept to old coping strategies in a new social environment.

### **Ambivalence about involving other category members in organisational activities**

Despite the emphasis on community building, several of the activists expressed ambivalence about involving other disadvantaged people in the organisation. The ambivalence about involving peers as activists to a large extent appeared to be associated with contradictions between the perceived needs for human resources and the problems arising from the mobilisation of others in a similarly disadvantaged position. First, this was seen as associated with internal problems and conflicts. Second, people often disappeared shortly after they had become involved. New participants could strengthen the human resources of the organisation. But often there was more bother than gain from involving others if one had to use much time to harmonise and co-ordinate the number of hands at work. It was striking that prior experience had led to a *de facto* reformulation of the working strategy or action repertoire, as adaptation to one's structural conditions for social mobilisation. I identified three development paths and adaptation strategies:

### **Exhaustion and resignation (I)**

*The Job-seekers' Interest Organisation:* Especially in the beginning, the main activists actively sought to recruit and include other claimants. In 1992-93, the core activists arranged open meetings for people out of work in the local community about once a month (10-20 attendees). The core activists helped initiate local organising efforts among people out of work in seven municipalities during the spring of 1993. In June 1993, twenty-five people from thirteen villages attended the initial meeting for the countywide board to co-ordinate the activities. But although some of the local boards managed to recruit as many as twenty people to their first meeting, many of the local initiatives petered out after a short period of time the same year due to internal conflicts and aggression towards the other activists and members. The main activists stressed that

it was difficult to get started and to co-ordinate people. Internal conflicts made it difficult to get started and continued to threaten the existence of the organisation if they eventually managed to establish a local board. More often, the attempts disintegrated into conflicts and the interim board was divided before they had really started their work.

When I asked the participants what they considered the main obstacle to increased mobilisation was, I repeatedly heard them say that “difficult”, “weird” and “peculiar” people were a major problem. The two key informants were especially explicit on this and identified this as a general problem across the claimant organisations they knew of. Particularly, they pointed to people who appeared to have mental-health problems and who were perceived as too unstructured; they talked too much and were disjointed, or talked about issues not related to the set agenda, got hung up on details or did not listen to other people. Several other claimants were also keen to distance themselves from participants with mental-health problems, considered them to be different from themselves, to be causing a nuisance and to be unwanted in the organisation. Admittedly, I had given up trying to interview some of the participants due to such reasons myself. But the observations of the two main activists appeared also to reflect a more general experience; that it was difficult to get people to co-operate and pull in the same direction.

Prior experience had led to redefinition of the goals and profile. The meeting frequency and number of participants declined after the initial period with a high activity level, and more emphasis was given to meetings and informal contact among the core activists. The continued efforts to mobilise other claimants were time-consuming. With few exceptions, they did not charge a membership fee, since that would be more work than gain. Allegedly, the financial paucity among claimants limited their chances of charging a membership fee. The leader claimed they used to want to have as many members as possible, but that it had proved more important to find suitable persons. Allegedly, the most difficult aspect was not to get in touch with and recruit people, but to find the appropriate and most suitable people. Now they worked more like the environmental organisation Bellona, as a small group of well-educated activists and expert advisers, according to the leader (1999). Nevertheless, they continued to seek new alliances, but little was done without the involvement of the most active person of the two, and activities stagnated during periods when he was

employed as a salesperson for a local firm in the wood-processing industry or was on sick leave.

*The Fredrikstad Client Action* initially had a board of eight people who were dependent on social benefits (“clients”). Close to twenty-five people attended the foundation meeting in 1992. During 1993-94 they had a large number of board meetings, but few people attended the open meetings arranged during the period. Moreover, huge conflicts arose between the board members:

“The interests of the active ones were so different that it led to huge conflicts. As a result, many people backed out. To begin with we had a board of seven. The board was composed of drug addicts, alcoholics, communists, anarchists. I mean, they had totally different opinions and abilities to accomplish their goals. (...) Someone thought we should do charitable work and have a street kitchen. Others thought we should run courses or beat the social workers. To put it mildly, the board was not synchronised” (from interview with male activist, born 1950s, the Fredrikstad Client Action, April 1996).

Despite advice and support from lecturers in social work at the Oslo University College, the co-operation problems led to serious desertion. Later, they tended not to ask claimants to participate or pay the membership fee. According to the main activist: “They’re so disempowered. You can’t expect that they’re going to have any surplus energy.” It was perceived as more work than gain to involve other claimants. They anticipated that people would not want or be able to participate and the main activists resigned.

At their annual meeting in 1996, they were four people altogether; one outside supporter, a new pensioner and the two remaining original activists. The activist who worked in the office hoped the new pensioner could relieve him of obligations at the office, but considered the new person uneducated and ignorant of social-assistance and income-security legislation. He could see that extensive training would be necessary to replace himself. This was never given priority and the pensioner disappeared shortly after. In 1997 they made a new effort to establish a board. Three new women joined the two main activists. But the majority of activities continued to be carried out and controlled by the main activist, and the women pulled out. Consequently, the main activist ended up working alone. Following this, the activities ceased during periods when he was sick or exhausted.

*The Poor House:* I did not find quite the same change in the number of activists involved in the Poor House or redirection of the action repertoire. But the activists

expressed many of the same considerations or concerns as in the other claimants' organisations. The activists did not ask other claimants visiting the Poor House for help, to become members or pay for the food, and did not expect people to return after they had received help ("guests"). Other claimants were commonly conceived as "clients" rather than potential activists. With few exceptions, the activists did not invest in mobilising more support, and the recruitment of new members was low. For instance, in a discussion one of the participants agreed they might need more human resources. Usually the same people appeared (1999). The activist regretted that they did not receive more media attention (expression of a victim position), but admitted that they had not recruited people through the media before. They more often recruited people through informal networks. He then suggested that they possibly could recruit the sober people from the nearby public shelter, but this was not followed up.

As the moral support from others was low, it is difficult to distinguish here between fatalism and resignation. The three organisations of social-security benefit claimants received little support from people in better social positions, but were also reluctant to involve outside supporters and ask for financial and moral support. They did not want to ask for too much, as they to a great extent explicitly blamed themselves for their situation and used the dominant judgements against themselves. This was reminiscent of what Erving Goffman has called "a sense of one's place" (after Bourdieu 1987).

If outside supporters became (too) involved and a threat to their independence, the claimants would see this as a source of external control and surveillance. For instance, participants in the Poor House sometimes complained that the lecturer in social work was too much involved and found it amusing when they managed to annoy her, a form of self-assertion or symbolic resistance strategy. The participants were also sensitive to paternalism. Activists were interested in presenting their *own* view, improving their control and influence over their own lives, and creating a space or an arena free from inspection by actors conceived as representatives of greater society. If outside supporters or non-category members became dominant in the organisation's management, the initial self-organising effort could end up as more traditional charity and "help to self-help". If that happened, the Poor House could end up being more similar to a provider of resources from helpers to improve the life chances of individual claimants and *others* who speak up for the needs of the disadvantaged. Thus,

involvement by outside supporters was conceived and experienced as problematic and unwanted.

All in all, these three cases risked suffering from burn-out and resignation.

## **Turning to outside supporters (II)**

We found a different course of development in *the Losers' Association*. They also started with a board where the majority of members were claimants, and experienced similar problems to the ones we have described. As a result, the organisation almost died because of internal conflicts. Consequently, the Secretary General mobilised a board of outside supporters and the organisation was changed to a “one-man firm”:

“There were representatives from Oslo, Horten, Bergen and Dokka on the board. They had the impression that I made decisions without conferring with them, I guess. There was probably something in that. It was not so farfetched. This led to a serious argument between me and the others. They claimed I had abused their confidence and done things the board had not decided. Some of them also assumed that I had used them as an alibi for my own work. In the end five people left. Meanwhile, we had established a group of outside supporters in the local environment, including [name of the chairperson]. The central board assumed that I consulted more with the group of supporters than the board. The five losers had major personal problems. They wanted to advocate their own interests rather than build a network. During the meeting in March '94 it was mentioned that I had claimed at the congress that next time it should not be a board of losers. They live too close to the problems. There was dissatisfaction with this in the former board. I thought I was a good enough spokesperson. I have been a loser for 25 years myself” (from interview with the Secretary General of the Losers' Association, April 1996).

The redirection of the organisational work can be interpreted as a readjustment to the previous problems in the board. Other claimants were considered less qualified to participate in management. The Secretary General complained about difficult and demanding “clients” to us. They needed to learn to behave, act moderately and not be too demanding (cf. similar observations in Risøy 2000). Rather than organising regular social gatherings, he suggested group therapy with a “skilled professional therapist” to improve the self-confidence of their clients. This was a more obvious “conclusion” in this case, as the Secretary General perceived himself as a *former* loser, and not in the same disadvantaged situation himself anymore. As an alternative or supplementary interpretation, the Secretary General regarded himself as helping *others* in need and wanted to establish an ombudsman service. It was also easier to mobilise outside supporters, as they had more victim capital compared to the other claimants' organisations.

In the claimants' organisations there was a tendency on the part of core activists to "diagnose" the less active participants to explain why their involvement created problems. It could be that these 'diagnoses' or 'labels' to some extent served as a cover for disagreements on issues of choice and priorities.

### **Combining group members and outside supporters (III)**

*The Romani People's National Association:* More than twenty-five persons were appointed, elected or acted as board members from 1995 to 1999. It differed as to and who acted as board members during the year. The chairperson repeatedly complained that they were short of human resources, people who could do a job for the organisation. But fluctuating with this, he expressed concern that too many members might turn up at the annual meeting open to all Travellers so that he might lose control of the organisation's development. In a similar vein, he expressed ambivalence with regard to whether he should take back board members who had previously stepped down or been excluded.

The chairperson often appeared to find it easier to ask outside supporters for help and assistance rather than other category members. But it was perceived as undesirable to involve outsiders as board members, and they continued to recruit other Travellers to the board. The favoured self-presentation of Travellers as a minority and an ethnic group led to persistent efforts to mobilise other Travellers. Travellers who were involved in other organisational efforts had ended up working alone or expressed that they preferred outside supporters as board members, since this involved less trouble.

Following the internal problems, the chairperson chose to employ a non-Traveller at the office (May 1999). The chairperson more often ended up asking non-Travellers, including us, for help and assistance to write documents, applications and budgets, come up with suggestions for projects and translate English publications. He seemed to prefer this to asking Travellers with equally good writing and language skills or knowledge about the politico-administrative system to help him with external communication. At the annual meetings, outsiders acted as chairpersons and were responsible for the minutes.

The perceived vulnerability among Travellers appeared to make it easier to mobilise outside supporters than other Travellers in the early stages of the mobilisation

process. The Romani People's National Association had a large number of outside supporting members. In 1999, the Romani People's National Association had one hundred members from a university college. Intellectuals and academics risked little by participating. On the contrary, they could achieve social rewards in the form of more positive self-esteem or recognition from elites within the politico-administrative system, the mass media, the museum sector, the state church, universities and university colleges.

### **Disappointment**

Although several informants in the claimants' organisations stated that they regarded poor people in general as people with resources, many of them had come to consider a number of other claimants as their 'clients' rather than potential activists. Activists sometimes expressed views on the participants on the periphery which were reminiscent of the dominant view in society; as passive and in need of help. The complaints and cadres' presentation of the less active members could be interpreted as the outcome of internal stratification or ranking. The active members managed to emphasise their superiority at the cost of the other category members. In part, this may be interpreted as an expression of their disappointment and resignation. This later account was more in accord with our findings in the Romani People's National Association. The more active members ended up moralising over people who did not turn up at the meetings, courses and social gatherings, or were otherwise seen as not pulling in the same direction or taking their turn. Finally, this finding could also be attributed to the problems in applying structural accounts of individual behaviour. Activists assumed that lack of support from other category members was the outcome of individual failure, disloyalty, betrayal or free-riding ("laziness"), and not a result of societal conditions which furthered adaptation and coping strategies on the individual level ("why can't they give support when I can?"). Thus, activists sometimes attributed responsibility to other category members rather than the government as representatives of society at large. In this respect, the more active participants sometimes tended to individualise the obstacles to increased social-movement mobilisation.



### **Other peoples' problems and misery**

It appeared that intensive and long-term provision of help to 'peers' was perceived as exhaustive. Efforts to help others in a similar situation appeared to reinforce the negative experience and the situation one sought to avoid, limit or escape from. The inherent ambivalence about interacting with others in a similarly disadvantaged position appeared to contradict the fact that the helper in other circumstances may benefit from the help. Such concerns were less apparent in the *Losers' Association*. The Secretary General would not consider himself in the same disadvantaged situation as their 'clients'. The board members of outside supporters saw themselves more as a resource group supporting the initiator.

Merton, Merton and Barber (1983) have argued that helpers often need to be helpful as much as the recipient of help needs to be helped. The provision of help may give the providers of the assistance payback in the form of positive self-esteem, respect and recognition. The problems of one person become the resource of another (Merton 1971 [1961]: 803). An individual who supplies rewarding services to another person takes on an obligation. To discharge this obligation, the receiver must give benefits to the provider in return. Blau (1964: 91-92) argued that a social exchange is involved when an individual provides help or assistance to the underprivileged because he or she wants to receive the gratitude of the recipient of the help or stop giving if the recipient does not express gratitude. The giver expects to receive an equivalent in return, although not of the same kind. In other cases, men donate money, become members of charitable organisations or give help not to earn the gratitude of the recipient, but the approval of their peers. The approval is supplied by a third party (Blau 1964: 88-114). In practice, the motives for helping, whether altruism or egoism is involved, may be equivocal.

Whereas unilateral provision of help (beneficence) assumes an asymmetrical relationship (recipient – donor), peer relations presuppose reciprocity. When people in a similar position or 'peers' act as providers of help, this could lead to inconsistencies in statuses as helpers and being one among equals. The activists sometimes expressed a moral obligation or commitment to help their 'peers'. However, the provision of help contradicts the stated equality in status, at least if the exchange relationship does not balance in the long run. In cases of shame by association, the provider of help may risk not becoming the starting mechanism of social cohesion among peers, but rather cause

the termination of the reciprocation (cf. Gouldner 1973: 226-299). It becomes the beginning of the end of the relation among peers; associated with embarrassment on the part of the recipient and discomfort on the part of the provider. Conversely, when there is a certain level of honour on the part of the category, the reciprocation may escalate. Small exchanges can be replaced by larger exchanges and/or they may increase in frequency. In such cases, social cohesion may emerge among peers, given that both parties manage to give in the long run.

Outside supporters appeared to have an easier attitude or relationship to the member categories and categorisations than people who were themselves seen as insiders. Categorisation of *others* as different, strangers or in need of help may serve to mirror or “confirm” one’s own status and self-identity as ‘normal people’, who “we” are and are not (MacLaughlin 1998, 1999a and b; Riggins [Ed.] 1997a, Ytrehus [Ed.] 2001). Travellers and claimants can be construed as the Other among us. The social constructions may serve as reminders of tolerance, multiculturalism and the Protestant work ethic as socially recognised norms in society. The social distance implied in the marking of difference and construction of taxonomies of ‘deviance’ would not affect outside supporters negatively, quite the contrary. Arguably, the social consequences of Othering can be widely different for the outsiders. Yet, the effects for the insiders may possibly be much the same. As indicated earlier in this chapter, in our cases, the outside supporters expressed a greater degree of ease with regard to the disadvantaged categories and labels. As seen from the point of view of the disadvantaged, this could be perceived as naive, possibly as a demonstration of lack of empathy, or as a sign of a social gap between oneself or the group members and outside supporters.

Society’s elites lacked knowledge about the lives, history, experience and how the world might look from the point of view of disadvantaged categories of people. It was not until the 1990s that the greater society in some respects started to acquire knowledge of society as seen from Travellers’ point of view, in some cases even to learn that they existed. The dominated actors had been socially invisible to the dominating actors in the sense that the former knew more about the latter, than vice versa. The disadvantaged will to a greater extent have learned to see society from both perspectives, as they have been exposed to the dominant view in interaction with society at large. It becomes the task of the dominated actors to educate and inform the greater society. This tended to be perceived as a burden. It could be tiring or exhaustive

to make active resistance or defend and justify oneself – for instance to explain to others what it meant to be a Traveller – in the long run.

### **Discussion: opportunities for agency?**

Not surprisingly, there was some difference in degrees of conceived compatibility with other statuses between claimants and Travellers. Claimants especially felt that their status was perceived as nothing that could be easily played out in another area or could be combined with other statuses. This undermined the opportunity to build bridges with other statuses on the individual level. Several informants expressed difficulties in maintaining continuity in their self-biography. This was expressed as inconsistency between their different statuses ('Traveller', 'job-seeker' and so on), or as a discontinuity between their former and present life experience ('worker' vs. 'claimant'). If the status became publicly known, this was assumed to be associated with a possible breakdown of relations, with the expectation that people would avoid or cut off contact with you or that the quality of the relation would change as your reputation and honour were likely to decline. Nevertheless, even claimants did not rule out the possibility of identifying themselves as poor or unemployed to selected others. The practices on the part of the disadvantaged were sometimes context-dependent and had strategic dimensions.

The choice of a differentiated information strategy among some of the informants resembles Merton's (1957) argument that status involves a complex set of associated roles, a role set. The holder of the status will have to relate to diverse others. Problems may arise in managing to organise the different relations if these are perceived as conflicting. One mechanism for avoiding potential disorder has been to insulate role performances from other actors involved in the status holder's role set. By making efforts to keep members of one's role set at physical distance from each other, one may seek to avoid social control from others and maintain a proportion of the self away from surveillance. Segmentation of roles in a single status could be seen as a structural basis to live up to the expectations of several others in different places.

Elaborating on Merton's (ibid.) theorisation, Rose L. Coser (1975) argued that the role complexity in a single status can provide for individual autonomy. The many and in part contradictory demands and expectations associated with a single status

opened up for more or less conscious choices and thus construction of individuality. Rather than seeing the disjunctions and contradictions as a problem and a threat, she suggested that role complexity provided an opportunity for agency. The status holder will have to reflect upon the appropriate course of action and make decisions as to what expectations he or she is going to live up to. Differences in expectations, observability, authority and interests on the part of members of the status holder's role set improve the individual's opportunities for manoeuvring. Conversely, there will be less space for manoeuvring within simple role sets and segregated networks. Following the general hypothesis, Coser (ibid.) argued that the superordinates tend to have more options or degrees of freedom available than the subordinates in a workplace, as the former tend to relate to more people who are different from themselves. She mainly focused on the role complexity of a single status.

I suggest reformulating this to apply also to the status set. The actor or agent may hold different statuses (Traveller, unemployed, employee, husband and so on ), which are associated with different identities. Following T. H. Marshall (1965), status can be taken to mean a position in a social system and defined through the rights and duties binding on the incumbent by obligations or expectations. Identity refers more to the personal attributes and qualities ascribed to the individual in a structural position. The statuses and identities could be seen as situated in different arenas, thus opening for the actor's efforts to insulate different statuses and keep some of their many identities apart. One opportunity for achieving this was *audience segregation*, maintaining segregated networks and making the discredited or disadvantaged status relevant only in selected arenas, cf. the Travellers who visited other geographical areas to behave as Travellers.

In other cases, the status holder may disregard the status as irrelevant to the situation, either through denial, avoidance or concealment. Such cases of segmentation may be interpreted as efforts to reduce complexity in the status set – not the role set of a single status. One could have argued that if, eg. a Traveller argues that the status is irrelevant in the workplace, this serves to reduce the number of people in the role set for the Traveller status. While segmentation of the statuses may diminish the disorderly effects of contradictory or conflicting identities, it does not necessarily prevent different expectations for behaviour or attitudes, eg. for a person *qua* 'Traveller' versus 'worker'. In other words, in some cases of audience segregation, potential or perceived

contradictions between the identities appeared to be of larger concern than conflicting statuses as such.

The participants sometimes denied or downplayed the relevance of the status as a form of resistance to categorisation and being labelled as mildly or radically different. Detachment and audience segregation was in slightly moralistic terms sometimes referred to as “self-denial” by the organisation participants, especially by activists who had chosen a less differentiated strategy and were more visible in public, especially in the media. This may be interpreted as disappointment over the less active for choosing a different strategy than the core activists who had committed themselves to collective mobilisation or even made a profession of the status.

Organisation representatives, especially among Travellers, aspired to make the status compatible with other statuses or claimed that the status was relevant for or had consequences in other or even all areas, as a form of holism. In a similar vein, several of the more profiled activists who had appeared in the media tended to consider a differentiated information strategy as inconsistent, and ridiculed this. In part, segmentation or sequestration was seen as unhealthy and unwanted. Denial of importance, insulation of statuses or status denial ran the risk of giving the impression of shame, at least as seen from the more outspoken status holders’ and organisation representatives’ points of view. In other cases, or additionally, one ran the risk of being seen as vague and evasive. The coping strategy could, however, also be interpreted as deliberate efforts on the part of the individual to withdraw from social control and discipline, to refuse to keep his or her place and reject existing authority relations.

Arguably, the alternative has been to become demonstratively visible, as in the case of the organisation leaders, but at the risk that the status, or, rather, the associated identity, could overshadow other qualities in the person. One could risk being locked or trapped in a disadvantaged position, for instance through expectations to represent the category in various contexts where other statuses would be equally relevant, eg. when activists in the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation appeared as ‘unemployed’ rather than ‘local party politicians’ in the mass media. Thus, the individual’s space for agency or degree of freedom could be limited. The organisation’s representatives’ demanded loyalty and total commitment in which all other loyalties were to be subordinated to the dominant status, which was claimed to be more important. Demands for holism and unity – combining and building bridges between the different areas of activity – and

consistency (distribution of the same information to everyone), as sometimes advocated by the organisation's representatives, could in such cases run the danger of limiting people's opportunities.

The participants acted on the dilemma of maintaining flexibility through invisibility and detachment, or achieving recognition and redress, but at the cost of being forever labelled different. Different from those on the outside of the organisation, the organisation members and representatives had to define their status as something that deserved attention, something that constituted a difference. Thus, they had to accept that others perceived of the status holder as different. Those on the outside of the organisations were, however, more easily able to deny and downplay the significance of the alleged difference. They could claim that the difference was non-existent, a mere mental construct, made up, artificial or contingent. The organisation's representatives tended to make an effort to stabilise the categories and present the statuses as more clear-cut and absolute and downplay gradualist differentiation between the disadvantaged. Following this, the organisation's representatives ran the risk of advocating a more rigid social order.

### **Concluding remarks**

Feeling some honour of membership in a category emerged as an important precondition for peer solidarity. As argued by Mathiesen (1972 [1965]: 185), if there is enough honour for peer solidarity to be established, peer solidarity may in turn further alleviate a feeling of dishonour. However, prevalent coping and resistance strategies appeared to impede mobilisation of human resources for the organisational efforts. Many of the participants tended to define themselves as peripheral in the organisation system. They often emerged as uncommitted or reluctant to see themselves as part of the collective system. This impeded the mobilisation of human capital for the organisation. Thus, prior experience had led to a reformulation of the working strategy or action repertoire, as adaptation to one's structural conditions for social mobilisation on the part of the core activists.

I have identified different coping strategies among the central and peripheral participants in the organisations. The disadvantaged appeared in many cases not to remain passive to other people's judgements and reactions. This included not only one-

sided avoidance, detachment and concealment on the part of the disadvantaged, but also efforts at actively controlling others' perceptions of themselves. In particular, I have pointed to status avoidance and status segregation. *Status complexity* appeared to provide for agency on the part of the disadvantaged. One can be marginalized or vulnerable in certain respects, but not others. But it did not appear that vulnerability or a disadvantaged position in one area could be compensated for by a higher position in another area.

In Goffman, the arenas of interaction among co-present actors were often pictured as fluid settings and with fluctuating boundaries of an unfocused kind. But when considering the discredited, Goffman (1990 [1963]) appeared not to fully consider the consequence of his prior writing on the many selves of the actors. The complexity of only partly overlapping social worlds and contexts he depicted appeared to have more extensive implications than he found in other contexts. Segmentation of sites of face-to-face interaction could provide a possibility for manoeuvring on the part of the disadvantaged. This emerged as an opportunity, especially in the case of Travellers, as there was more honour and pride associated with membership in the category compared to claimants.

In recent post-structuralist readings of Foucault, the organisation strategies have typically been construed as being opposed to individual subjectivity and agency on the grounds that they reproduce the imposition of an arbitrary grid (Fairclough 1995, Lemke 1995, Riggins [Ed.] 1997a). From this perspective, human categories invested with ontological attributes have often been dismissed as 'essentialism', ruling out the possibility that they are constructs founded in reality (*cum fundamento in re*). In comparison, role theory has had the advantage of focusing on the various arenas for participation, rather than on narrative structures or semiotic systems' *per se*, but has tended to ignore issues of social control. From a sociological perspective, the issue of social categorisation is a question of whether it has social consequences for participation in different areas of society. Social identities may have much to do with social control, but also enable and facilitate agency. It is this subject that I will examine in the next chapter.





## **Between individual and collective claims: The organisation as action channel**

This chapter argues that the individual participants' or users' relationships to the organisation as such were influenced by or even reflected their relationship to the welfare-policy measures. I do not only examine the users' relationship to the organisation *per se*. Indirectly, I also consider their relationship to the government and the greater society, and the way in which this was mirrored or reflected in their relationship to the organisation. I argue that the assistance services presented both fragmenting and connecting problem conditions for the participants. The welfare policy both divided and united the disadvantaged, drawing them together and pulling them apart. This concerned the *structural forces* or institutionalised expectations of the individual participants, and their perception of and adjustment to these.

Your troubles may be similar with those of other sufferers, nonetheless you may remain in solitude. Given similar problem situations – as a condition for social mobilisation or self-organisation – members of the social category may interpret their situation differently or develop a common problem understanding through communication and interaction processes; develop agreement about who they are and what they want (Dahrendorf 1959, Lysgaard 1985 [1961]). This raises the issue of achieving unity in social movements based on one status while members are differentiated by other cross-cutting status sets (Merton 1972: 115). I ask whether the disadvantaged perceived that they had something in common with respect to *self-presentation* and whether the participants had available symbolic resources for claiming differences from other categories of people, and having these recognised by others.

I shall argue that the combination of structural forces and self-presentations had consequences for whether the participants pursued individual or collective identity and interest claims.

### **Boundary drawing, connecting and fragmenting problem conditions**

Social categories have been compared with clouds or a forest, or a flame whose edges are in constant movement around an axis: They have vague boundaries, and it is unclear where they start and end (Bourdieu 1987: 13). The clarity of the bounding of different social categories also varies. In Mary Douglas' (1973 [1970]) work on *Natural Symbols*, 'grid' was taken to mean "the scope and coherent articulation of a system of classification as one social dimension in which any individual must find himself" (ibid. 82). The classification system may be fuzzy or rigid, clear-cut or contingent. I shall argue that the options for mutual identification and collectivisation of identity and need claims are weaker when the categories are vague and open. Boundary drawing and definition is an important aspect of asserting and manifesting oneself as a social unit that can be clearly defined and identified. This affects the possibility of changing serial existence in a social category into an operative social group. It concerns not only the presentation and legitimating of oneself to others, but also to one's 'peers'.

A well-known example is E. P. Thompson's (1963) examination of *The Making of the English Working Class*. Various occupational groups – miners, weavers, tailors and so on – came to be construed and represented as 'the working class'. Through social processes including both failures and success, people who claimed to represent the social category managed to establish networks and organisations, develop an ideology and identify a counterpart or "enemy". Flags, songs, aesthetisation and conscious use of language among the lower strata of the population in writing and speeches ('working class language'), and public appearance in working cloths (overalls, etc.) were important tools for visualising and asserting their unity and differences from others in social position and life chances.

In a study of the constitution and maintenance of an informal protective community among subordinated workers, Sverre Lysgaard (1985 [1961], especially 197 ff.) argued that if symbols are visual and possible to classify in clear-cut categories, they are more likely to be successful in demarcating differences. Furthermore, the similarities within subordinated categories should be significant, in the sense that you do not find the same features among superiors, and thus serve as underpinnings of their status as different from the superiors or the dominant actor. How important the similarities are would then depend on how many features they shared, and whether these were seen as supporting the status they pursued or the self-presentation they sought to

advocate. Thus we expected that differences in access to affiliative symbols between Travellers and claimants would affect the possibilities for collectivisation. Peer cohesion emerged as a necessary condition for peer solidarity.

Lysgaard (ibid. 186-197) assumed that the workers faced similar problems as a precondition for development of a protective community among co-workers. He identified three factors: First, the probability of finding peer solidarity was higher if there was a high degree of pressure from the superiors, especially if the pressure was perceived as unpredictable and illegitimate by the subordinated actor. Second, the likelihood was greater if the subordinated actor felt strongly dependent on the privileges that the superiors controlled the access to and which could not simply be drawn on. Third, peer solidarity appeared to be more likely when the people in similar situations felt subordinated and experienced this as illegitimate. We may regard this as *connecting problem conditions*.

There may be legislation and other institutionalised expectations and obligations that although they not necessarily positively or negatively sanction collective claims in a direct way, nevertheless impede or promote transformation from a social category to a social group. The impact of such factors may be balanced or reinforced by the available cultural resources; the possibilities for self-presentation and self-assertion.

In a study of power relations in a Norwegian treatment-oriented correctional institution, the criminologist Thomas Mathiesen (1972 [1965]) found a striking absence of defensive collective systems among inmates. But the incarcerated did not remain passive in the face of their problem conditions: The inmates frequently pointed to the shortcomings, inconsistency and failures of the staff. Many of the inmates as lone individuals were the critical 'censors' of the staff, using 'the pointed finger', arguing that the staff deviated from their own rules. They appealed to the formal, written norms or widely recognised principles of justice. It appeared to vary to what extent the inmates recognised the norms as legitimate or used them strategically to their own advantage (ibid. 16, 23-24, 120, 150).

By stressing the established norms, they made efforts to make the staff appear and feel as the real deviants. These were efforts at blurring the line by trying to convince everybody, including oneself, that their superiors were not much better than themselves. The censoriousness emerged as a self-assertive reaction against the prison system. Mathiesen (ibid. 6, 15) interprets this as a functional equivalent to in-group

solidarity among prisoners. Failures at establishing and sanctioning norms horizontally among peers can be substituted by vertical sanctioning of norms against one's ruler.

The individual did not present him or herself as part of a subculture of alternative norms, but as the defender of the established norms. This type of reaction appeared in itself to weaken the opportunities for a community system among the inmates. Mathiesen (ibid. 26-28, 188) argued that institutionalised cultural dissent is a necessary condition for cohesion among members of a larger social category. There must be norms that negate the norms and values of the adversary party. When they lack a subculture, the ruled are liable to fall back on the established norms of their rulers (ibid. 223-225).

As prisoners were handled individually, they were divided from each other. What they had in common was that they were punished by incarceration and similar criminal offences were punished with fairly similar sentences. However, they did not arrive on the same day. In those cases where they did arrive simultaneously, they did not expect to leave at the same time. They applied for furloughs at different times and they were eligible for transfer to better jobs at different times. In the treatment-oriented institution, the prisoners were also involved in individual therapy with psychiatrists and psychologists. Reports from the therapy had consequences for whether they were conferred more liberal forms of preventive detention. Overall, they did not have exactly the same relationship with their rulers, or they were in different stages in their relationship with the prison authorities and the judicial system. We may regard this as *fragmenting problem conditions*.

The individual treatment was associated with a feeling of unpredictability. Staff-members were confronted with a heterogeneous inmate population, and several circumstances had to be taken into account when granting rights, eg. age, type of criminal offence, progress in therapy and date of release. When several criteria were referred to, the inmate could lose sight of them or the complex relationship between them, even if the decisions on the part of the prison authorities adhered to rules rather than discretion. Several other circumstances promoted the same experience on the part of the incarcerated. In the treatment-oriented prison, the relationship between the administration and the experts was associated with avoidance of responsibility on the part of the staff. In a more traditional maximum security prison Johan Galtung had previously observed how staff-members evaded answering clearly the inmates'

questions to avoid conflicts and crushing the hopes of improvement the inmates had (after Mathiesen *ibid.* 215-218).

Up this point I can accept what Mathiesen says, but then he proceeds to argue that Lysgaard's argument about perceived unpredictability as a connecting problem condition does not apply to inmates in the correctional institutions, and that unpredictability rather appeared to impede peer solidarity among inmates. However, it appears that Mathiesen (*ibid.*) did not distinguish clearly between factors that broke solidarity and factors that elicited some counter-reaction on the part of the subordinated. The way I read his data, it seems to me that perceived unpredictability and paternalism led to a counter-reaction on the part of the inmates. But the fragmenting factors led the inmates to react with individual rather than collective coping and resistance strategies. I will illustrate this point in more detail in the presentation of my own data below.

All in all, I expected the claimants' problem situation to be more similar to that of prisoners: They were faced with more fragmenting problem conditions and were more clearly exposed to system demands than Travellers. The claimants emerged as more dependent on the system and could not withdraw as easily. But when the Traveller status was made relevant, they could emerge as vulnerable *vis-à-vis* non-Travellers. They were exposed to pejorative symbol systems they had to relate to. In other words, there were slightly different reasons why they felt dependent, vulnerable and suffering from illegitimate conditions. Below I will first attempt to account for the problem conditions claimants and beneficiaries of social-security benefits were exposed to.

### **Expectations and obligations placed on claimants**

A central axis in the welfare-policy field is the divide between means-tested and categorical right-based benefits. In the case of categorical right-based benefits a judgement is made of whether an individual fulfils general criteria and may be subsumed to general arrangements. It depends on the citizenship status whether one forcefully can claim rights or will have to plea for benefits. Means-tested benefits are granted to individuals under the scrutiny of public agency representatives. In Norway, implementation of the social-protection schemes has been divided between three types of offices. This has provided for different degrees of clear entitlements:

- €# Staff in the *social-services offices* should to a larger extent than the labour-exchange offices and national-insurance offices exercise discretion to test the claimants' needs for economic assistance. Employees in the social-services offices were to judge how much financial assistance the client should receive. Thus, the control functions could easily become more apparent than in the labour-exchange office and national-insurance office. Clients of the social-services offices had few clear social rights (Act on Social Services of 13 December 1991 no. 81 [*sosialtjenesteloven*]; *Ot.prp.* no. 29 1990-91; *St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, chapters 5.5, 6.14; Halvorsen 1993: 43-44; Lødemel 1997a, Terum 1996; Øverbye and Sæbø 1996).
- €# The *labour-exchange offices* have been more goal-oriented and instrumental in their approach. One main objective has been to implement measures to increase participation in the labour market by the claimants. In the labour-exchange office, the welfare officer and claimant might easily agree that the main objective is to find paid work for the claimant. The temporarily unemployed had certain financial rights if they had a record of previous work. The labour-exchange office did not directly disburse benefits. Even though staff in the labour-exchange office and the client could make different judgements about which job openings the client should accept and how geographically mobile the client should be, the financial conflicts were likely to be less obvious than in the social-services office. Clients in the labour-exchange office also had the opportunity to apply for means-tested benefits from the social-services office in addition to the rights-based income maintenance (*St.meld.* no. 39 1991-92; *St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, chapters 5.5; Halvorsen 1994: 216-258; Nervik 1996).
- €# Work in the *national-insurance offices* has to a larger extent been rule-based and the framework for the discretion they perform has been stated in legislation and provisions in and regulations based on the acts. Nevertheless, conflicts could occur if the staff and claimant disagreed about whether he or she meets the criteria for receiving help or benefits, eg., questions about disability benefits where the recipient has an unclear medical diagnosis or the basis for the sick leave from the physician is in doubt. The national-insurance offices were also to follow-up people on long-term sick leave, and consider the opportunities to return to the labour market directly or through vocational or medical rehabilitation/training. The National Insurance Services has therefore also been oriented to the labour market. In this area the boundaries between the National Insurance Services and Government Employment Service have been contested (Hvinden 1994a; Hvinden and Ford 1994; *St.meld.* no. 39 1991-92; *St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, Ch. 4).

The assistance services have to a large extent been given to individuals and have depended on an individual assessment of each applicant. This is especially likely to be the case under circumstances of a wide scope for discretion in the distribution of assistance services. But even if the social rights are highly regulated and rule-based, they apply to individuals and are not granted collectively to a group or members of a group *en bloc*. Claimants are not treated as a collective by the government, but rather as single 'clients' that need to be followed up and treated individually. Staff should not

only administrate the rules, but also provide pertinent “treatment” – job-training, education and so on – to help their clients (re)enter the labour market. Each case is considered as unique and treated on the basis of its own merits. The claimant has to present individual claims and prove that he or she meets the entitlement criteria. The claimant needs to account for his or her individual biography, personal finances, qualifications, experiences and life situation, in short, a history that justifies claiming benefits.

There are certain similarities or parallels between the socially expected behaviour associated with a social position as ‘client’ and ‘patient’. Parsons (1951: 428 ff.) argued that sickness is associated with patterned social expectations, both rights and obligations. Sickness was seen as a form of deviance and medical treatment as a form of social control or compensatory mechanism to restore equilibrium in social systems. He distinguished between four aspects constituting what has later come to be known as the “sick role”: (i) The person is exempted from normal social-role responsibilities. As opposed to what has sometimes been asserted (Hansen 1996b), this is not only a social right, but occasionally also an obligation. In some cases, the claimant is told by others that he or she should not work. Otherwise, one could come to question whether the claimant was sick and entitled to treatment or welfare benefits. (ii) The person is considered in need of help or assistance from *others*. It is a crucial assumption that a mere attitude change would not suffice to change the condition. (iii) The condition is seen as undesirable. The “fault” or “deficiency” is in the individual, not in the social structure, but outside his or her control. The individual is under obligations to want to recover but also have a right to require help. (iv) The sick should seek help from professionals and co-operate as patient, as one by definition is considered unable to help him or herself.

Claimants have been expected to want to get out of the undesirable situation both by strength of will and by accepting help from professionals and co-operating with staff in welfare bureaucracy. However, it has been a contested issue whether the claimants live up to expectations. Different from patients, claimants of temporary social-security benefits have not only been expected to accept being helped through guidance, but also through training or even therapy. Norwegian legislation and stated policy have recently emphasised claimants’ co-responsibility to find a job and qualify for labour-market participation, and not rely solely on help from others (*Ot.prp.* no. 35

1995-96, OECD 2000: 129-153, Clasen *et al.* 2001, Moe 2000). Similarly, the government has emphasised more strongly than before that all options for re-entry into the labour market should be sought before one is granted a disability benefit (*St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, *Ot.prp.* no. 8 1996-97, Hvinden *et al.* 2001). When there are no objective indicators of disability for measuring independently of the patients' own statements, the morality of the individual has been questioned. Hence, vocational training and rehabilitation may serve to test the claimant's willingness to work (Midré 1995).

To maintain control over the spending of money on welfare and help people to return to the labour market, the government introduced or reinforced several obligations for recipients of working age who were receiving benefits from time-limited income maintenance schemes during the 1990s:<sup>6</sup>

- ⌘ Recipients of *social assistance* from the social-services office: The claimant should seek employment and be registered as a job-seeker at the labour-exchange office, accept offers to participate in labour-market qualification courses, vocational training and work, and account for the economic situation, family relationships and responsibilities in detail (*St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, chapter 5.4.1; Lødemel 1997b, Nervik 1996, Vik-Mo and Nervik 1999).
- ⌘ *Unemployed* person registered and recognised as entitled to unemployment benefits at the labour-exchange office: He or she must be considered a bona-fide applicant for employment. The claimant should be available to the labour market, accept job offers and placement in labour-market measures, actively seek job opportunities, submit biweekly reports on possible employment activity, sign a plan for systematic efforts to re-enter the labour market, be willing to move everywhere within the nation state to find a job-opening, and demonstrate that it is plausible that one does not have undeclared or "black" work (*Ot.prp.* no. 35 1995-96, *St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, *Ot.prp.* no. 40 1997-98, K. Halvorsen 1999).
- ⌘ Recipients of *single-parent allowance* from the social-insurance office: The claimant should account in detail for work, finances, family relationships and responsibilities. One is expected to report any changes to the family situation. i.e. re-partnering; re-establishing with the father of the child (more rarely the mother) or finding a new live-in new partner who acts *de facto* as financially co-responsible for the child or children. The recipient must not have undeclared work. Furthermore, the claimant should demonstrate willingness to plan the future after the entitlement to support has been exhausted, and should study and obtain qualifications for labour-market participation (*St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, Terum 1993).

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<sup>6</sup> The official English description of the National Social Insurance Scheme may be found on the web-page of the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs ([www.dep.no/shd/engelsk](http://www.dep.no/shd/engelsk)).



⌘ Recipients of *sick-leave allowance, vocational or medical training/rehabilitation* (allowance) or *disability benefit* from the social-insurance office: The claimant should accept the offers provided, follow up the initiated measures and training, not drop out of the measures, sign a contract with the employer for systematic training and assessment of the progress, not have undeclared income or work, and demonstrate willingness to return to the labour market and prefer work to receiving welfare benefits (Ford and Hvinden 1997, *St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, The Act on National Social Insurance of 28 February 1997 no. 19 [*folketrygdloven*], *Ot.prp.* no. 48 1998-99).

Not all the practice and control measures of the first-line services have been outlined in the provisions under the National Insurance Act. The various offices have had varying degrees of discretion, and it has probably varied to what degree the staff actually enforced the obligations and tried to closely follow-up the individual clients (Hvinden 1994a).

The social-security schemes can be regarded as benevolent assistance services. Bearing this in mind, individual “user-involvement” could be interpreted as efforts by the public authorities and frontline staff in welfare-state services to lend an ear to the users and recipients of those services. However, it has not been up to those seeking help and recipients of welfare benefits to define the objective for co-operation. Individual forms of activation and user-involvement have especially often been administrated forms of participation to become self-sufficient; the so-called “help to self-help” (Rønning and Solheim 1997). A person is made into an object by being placed under the control of staff in the first-line services, possibly under threat of negative sanctions such as withdrawal of services and social benefits. For these reasons, individual forms of user-involvement may be interpreted as a normalising technique in Foucault’s (1980) sense, or as an effort to discipline the users of the services. As seen from the users’ perspective, the efforts by government representatives to motivate, include and make the users of welfare-state services responsible may thus come to be conceived as social control and further resistance and reluctance among the target groups. At the same time, claimants have often not been in the position where they could afford simply to pull out of the relationship or stop seeking help. In other cases, or additionally, the services may have secondary advantages such as avoiding further disappointments and failures in the regular labour market.

## **Claimants' perception and account of the welfare-state services**

A general finding in our data was that the experience of control, unreasonable demands, nuisance, importunity and wrongful treatment on the part of the political elites and/or first-line services helped to unite members of the social categories. It was to a large extent as objects of other people's concern and targeted measures that the disadvantaged tentatively sought to join together in a cause and a defining feature of their commonality. Such concerns were to a large extent reflected in how the organisational efforts came about and their *raison d'être*.

*The Job-seekers' Interest Organisation* was started because of the perceived paternalism from staff in the labour-exchange office. About twenty claimants who had been summoned by the labour-exchange office to receive information about labour-market training schemes, reacted against the perceived top-down approach communicated by the welfare officers and started the organisational effort in protest. Activists in the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation encouraged claimants to develop their *own* ideas and new job opportunities, in opposition to the labour-exchange office, where job vacancies were conceived as imposed on people.

*The Fredrikstad Client Action* was initiated after the municipality reduced the local rate for monthly social-assistance disbursements to single claimants and there were relatively large differences in disbursement standards between the districts within the same municipality.

In the *Poor House*, the inferior position of claimants' in relation to government representatives was presented as defining their commonality ("unwanted dependency on others", "stand outside"). One informant who expressed he hoped to get out of welfare dependency and return to the labour market was introduced to me as an illustrative case:

### **Lack of social rights and protection 1985-1997 as presented by a claimant**

He had been there several days now. He had slept in a park one night then someone had told him about the Poor House. He had met others in his situation there. He had talked to three persons and stayed overnight in another's home, and received moral support, advice and tips. It had helped him to keep going. He had been surprised how well he had been taken care of at the Poor House.

The main issue was that he had come in conflict with the social-services office (in a municipality west of Oslo with a reputation for having a large proportion of affluent citizens). The supporting services failed him. He needed means-tested social assistance in addition to what the social-insurance office gave him. He was not given any reasons why he was denied money, and they did not tell him what they wanted in terms of documentation. There had been two welfare officers against him. He had asked them to pay his expenses for a solicitor, as they could not represent his interests. At that point, he had been kicked out of the office by a security guard.

The social-services office was known for refusing to grant assistance to people. Now, he had recorded the conversations on tape. He had played the tape for his psychologist and wanted to use the conversations in any court case.

He had been employed (in a large state company) until 1985. He had then been fired on the grounds of redundancy due to downsizing, even though it was proven that there were vacancies. He did not want to return now. They had psychologically tortured him. He had attacks of anxiety and pain in his chest. Physical complaints had followed the mental-health problems he had. He now received a vocational rehabilitation allowance from the national-insurance office. His physician thought they should try that first (before they applied for a disability benefit). The last time he had tried to become re-employed he had had problems with his immune-defence system.

The social-services office had stopped the disbursements when they learned that he had sued (his former employer). If he could afford a trial, he was not to have anything from them. But the solicitor had so far not been paid anything. Anyway, he had fired the solicitor, as he did not want to go to court, but wanted to be back in work. So he was looking for a new solicitor who would take the case, but it was not easy. He considered going to the press. When he managed to get on his feet again, he would save money for his own supporting fund. You could not trust public welfare.

(from note after phone call in October 1997 with male user at the Poor House. He was homeless or 'without permanent residence' [”*ufb*”], born in the 1960s. He was writing his autobiography. He used to vote for the Conservative Party [*Høyre*], but had stopped voting at that time.)

During a twelve-year period he had developed a downward spiralling client career. The unemployment resulted in insecurity, and he developed a tense relationship with agency staff, especially in the social-services office. The first event was seen as causing the later development, and one problem had led to another. He claimed to be “misunderstood” and “persecuted”.

Other participants told similar stories. When I asked why they participated and had joined the organisation, they often referred to their experience of decisive life events; being raped, perceived paternalism from staff in the first-line services and so on. In other words, these were histories of being denied autonomy and self-control and thus dignity (“they probably need some poor people to spit on”, “treat you like garbage”). We may distinguish between three types of charges from the claimants of temporary social-security benefits:

(1) *Paternalism*: Participants complained that the public authorities tried to force people into something they were not interested in or they were treated as if they were children (“keep you in order”). Others told them what they needed, they received less financial support than they thought they needed or had a moral right to themselves, and assistance was associated with admonitions and instructions (“*belæring*”). Obligations to participate in recurrent short-time courses to qualify for labour-market participation

and courses in how to apply for jobs were to some extent conceived as a nuisance and punishment rather than assistance.

(2) *Surveillance*: This was associated with the requirements for documentation of their needs and of meeting eligibility criteria. The participants strongly expressed that individual help and applications for support or compensation were associated with a large degree of social control and inspection. Some informants mentioned that they had felt uncomfortable when staff in the national-insurance office had called them at home. They felt this was unwanted and unwarranted penetration into their privacy, even when this was to inform them of the deadlines for appealing rejections of applications. As the staff members in the first-line services acted as controllers and gatekeepers of benefits, this stopped claimants from having trust in the staff. Staff-members, on the other hand, were likely to keep in mind that claimants might try to trick them. This appeared to bring about a mutual feeling of distrust. Weak social rights appeared to further some claimants secretly recording conversations and phone calls with staff in the first-line service. Others had a secret phone number and/or checked the display before they answered the phone to maintain control and protect themselves from unwanted penetration into their privacy.

(3) *Unpredictability*: This feature was associated with the use of discretion in individual case processing on the part of staff members in the first-line services. The complexity of the rules also, meant that the decision-making process often appeared as imperceptible, opaque and incomprehensible. Legislation was changed often and was difficult to fully comprehend. This reinforced the claimants' belief that "the rules of the game" were unclear and appeared to engender suspicion about arbitrariness and distrust in the delivery system. If there was a short time span from their appealed decisions to they received the final rejection, this was interpreted as evidence that the possibility of appealing had been *pro forma* and the real decision was made beforehand. Claimants complained that they had been refused access to the documents in their individual file or that they were not given any reasons for the rejection of applications.

When the welfare offices declined responsibility and the case did not under the staff members' mandate, what they were authorised to do, claimants felt they became "shuttle cocks" in the system. Several informants complained that they had not been referred to other offices or informed that other offices could assist them. The offices were physically inaccessible, had short opening hours and long queues. They did not

know who could help them or when they could expect an answer, they did not receive help in due time or it took a long time, as perceived by the claimants. For instance, a participant in the Poor House complained that the social-services office had paid his rent too late. Thus, he had had received a notification from the sheriff (*namsmannen*). Personally, he always paid his bills on time. This was an example of censorious arguments about inefficiency, lack of transparency and predictability in bureaucratic organisations, contrary to what is commonly expected of role incumbents in bureaucratic organisations (Weber 1982: 107-157). The perceived unpredictability appeared to be a factor that led the claimants to agree among themselves that their problem conditions were illegitimate.

All in all, these experiences with the operation of welfare services emerged as connecting problem conditions. Thus, they also appeared to contribute to strengthening the in-group alignment or what we may call *the community system* among ‘peers’; a more or less stable system or pattern of social ties where the members are bound together by mutual social expectations.

### **Ritual goodwill and censoriousness on the part of claimants**

Although the demands and requirements presented to social-security claimants were perceived as unreasonable and illegitimate, the weak rights status appeared to pull in the other direction and weaken the community system. Participation in and association with the claimants’ organisations risked being perceived as opposing the demands from government and welfare officers; seen as difficult and uncooperative clients, too demanding and unwilling to change or improve their status. The requirements faced by claimants appeared to affect how freely they involved themselves in the organisations. As they lacked a well-defined diagnosis to justify welfare dependency, they were suspected of unwillingness to work (“laziness”).

*The Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation:* The participants emphasised that job-seekers had resources, should be involved in decision-making and considered useful in preventing migration from the local area and promoting local development. For a period, they applied the concept ‘activity centre’ to please the government and avoid criticism for putting too much emphasis on informal and uncommitted social gatherings (“passive measures”). The organisation’s participants stressed that they had contributed

to a number of persons being re-employment and facilitated job openings, and thus conformed to the dominating orientation to 'full employment' in public-welfare policy.

The main activists complained that they had become unpopular among local politicians due to their former public actions and presentation of collective demands during election campaigns. The more peripheral participants in the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation expressed concern that the core activists blamed the government and envied those with a job rather than taking responsibility for themselves and coping with less money.

"I'm afraid that we'll become too political. The labour-exchange office doesn't like that. I once asked for monthly orientation from the labour-exchange office about the new daily-allowance scheme. I got the feeling that they didn't want to provide that. (An employee in the labour exchange office) asked if the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation was going to be involved as well. I said that we were interested. "It must be a misunderstanding," she said. She did not plan to consider the rights. She had planned something more technical about job-applications and would summon two groups of ten people. As representatives of the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation people ask us 'what's going to happen to me now, then?' We haven't been able to answer that. They think we're going political if we question the schemes. (...) It's very important that we have active people with us who work. It would have been very negative if we only had unemployed people. From political quarters they consider it very negative if it's a gang of unemployed people making trouble."

(from interview with male cadre, born in the 1940s, recipient of unemployment benefit, May 1997).

On other occasions, participants complained that the main activists spent too much time presenting demands to the national government and that they should rather focus on local development of job-opportunities. They repeated the demands from the government. They thus presented themselves as conforming with the values of greater society.

The same informant expressed that it was important to follow up the requirements from the labour-exchange office. He had continued to submit the biweekly report to the labour-exchange office during periods of vocational rehabilitation, even though this was not required – just to make sure he was enrolled in the system, according to him. Other informants subscribed to this view.

Expression of discontent with the requirements was sanctioned promptly by the cadres. In the 1996 annual meeting of the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation, one female participant expressed concern over the length of time that she would have to continue to submit the biweekly reports on her employment activity, if any, to the labour-exchange office. She argued that this was a burden, as it labelled her unemployed and was an

unwanted reminder of the attributed status. She would only consider herself a job-seeker for half a year and justified this by saying that she had other activities which occupied her time. This was strongly condemned by the other attendees. In this case, it was argued, she had only herself to blame for the disadvantaged situation.

Nevertheless, several of the others expressed doubts about whether they would get a job and showed clear signs of resignation. The labour-market training and follow up of the requirements from the labour-exchange office were not conceived as enabling them to become re-employed. In practice, the symbolic aspects appeared to be more important; to demonstrate their willingness to work and please staff in the labour-exchange office almost as a biweekly ritual to avoid being blamed for one's own misfortune. In such a case they were not to be blamed if they remained out of work.

*The Fredrikstad Client Action:* The main activist expressed that users who contacted the organisation were careful not to say anything that could be used against them later. It was important to be careful to make sure you did not risk worsening your own financial situation and the relationship to welfare officers. Bearing this in mind, some users who called to get information and advice while I visited the office refused to give their name or phone number. The two activists described the regular users as anxious that being associated with the organisation or its representatives could be conceived as contradicting the expectations and obligations presented by the front-line staff in the welfare offices. The main activist was criticised by some former participants for promoting "old-fashioned communist propaganda", and for being too demanding and aggressive. The former activists presented modesty and use of a moderate language as a virtue, as it were, when presenting collective claims or representing the organisation. They wanted to be taken seriously and not end up on the wrong side of the government. This was substantiated by the alleged experience of negative reactions from welfare officers during the period they were active ("we were known as a bunch of old hippies, alcoholics and homosexuals").

*The Poor House:* It was sometimes claimed that welfare officers had threatened claimants that they would not receive assistance if they contacted the organisation. When I asked the informants whether the Poor House was mostly a place to meet others, they swiftly replied that there were several other activities at the house. Several participants justified their own involvement by saying that they used the computer to improve their own individual situation or learned new skills (job-training). When

visiting the centre, I was repeatedly approached by participants who were eager to tell me about their personal merits and activities. Participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the low activity level, and did not want to be associated with people without resources; homeless people, drug addicts and scroungers of the relief system, see Chapter 7. The users had to be sober and the activists insisted that they follow the law ('good citizens'). For instance, it was stressed in meetings, informal talks and the newsletter that overnight stays at the centre had to come to an end, as it was against the law.

Yet, the organisations of social-security claimants sometimes sought to stage their misery and expose their victim position in public. Such actions included sit-ins at social services offices dressed in garbage bags and setting up a 'soup-kitchen' outside the social-services office. The collective protests appeared to be rare and other types of counter-reactions more prevalent. Sometimes the organisation participants appeared to dress in their worst clothing when meeting with politicians; jeans and a T-shirt or jogging suit rather than the dark suit I had seen them use at other occasions. Some said they should at least not dress up before meetings with politicians. Through such action strategies they could try to achieve sympathy or pity ("cannot afford a warm dinner"). These were appeals to common values and norms shared by many in society, but without using the 'pointed finger'.

On other occasions, probably especially in the mass media and among themselves, the claimants accused politicians and first-line staff of injustice ("greediness", "egoism", "bad treatment"). They claimed that the rulers did not follow their own rules and Norwegian legislation ("ignorant of the rules"). Public officials were allegedly not fulfilling international obligations, especially the UN declaration on human rights. They claimed that politicians and employees in the welfare bureaucracy did not to comply with normal moral standards. Claimants pointed to inconsistency in the case processing on the part of the welfare functionaries, and pointed to the cases where the state representative in the county (*fylkesmannen* – the county governor) had reconsidered the decisions of staff in social-services offices. A media report about public officials who had employed their own children in summer vacancies was taken as evidence of corruption and a sign that public officials were only interested in increasing their own wealth ("feather one's own nest"). Job application courses arranged by the labour-exchange offices were condemned as "courses in how to jump the job queue"



and promotion of disloyal behaviour. Among themselves, sarcastic words about the requirements of the welfare offices were not infrequent.

Sometimes it was also claimed that the first-line staff they had met suffered from mental-health problems, drug addiction and so on. The dominant images of social-security claimants were turned against the dominating actors. Thus, they could blur the distinction or division line between themselves and their adversary. Through such actions, the participants could make efforts to assert the moral correctness of their own views and claims. This had similarities to the counter-strategies that Mathiesen (1972 [1965]) called ‘censoriousness’. The claimants could possibly reduce the personal feeling of shame otherwise attributed to them and try to bring the dominant actor down a notch or two.

### **Demands of uniqueness and expressiveness**

In the case of the *Losers’ Association*, the advocacy of individual claimants was to a lesser extent defined by their relationship to welfare offices in the present, and more often for wrongful treatment, mismanagement, negative discrimination and targeted measures in the distant past. The organisation was started because a large number of people contacted the initiator and wanted help and advice in *their* case after he had published a book about wrongful treatment he had endured in his childhood at public institutions. They wanted moral redress and compensation for former wrongful treatment in adulthood. After a large number of people had asked him for assistance with their individual cases, he suggested to the Minister of Social Affairs that they needed an ombudsman for the losers in society.

As will be recalled, we received several personal letters and copies of ‘client files’ from respondents in the Losers’ Association. Often, the respondents emphasised the extraordinary circumstances of their own life situation. Data from short interviews and phone calls indicated the same. Although they all had complaints against the welfare state, there were striking claims of uniqueness and expressiveness on the part of users of the organisation (“if anybody is a loser, it’s me”).

One could have assumed that the social costs were too high and respondents would have wanted to avoid being associated with the status as ‘loser’. However, as much as 64 per cent expressed they definitely regarded themselves as losers. Another 18 per cent would regard themselves as being in part a ‘loser’. In comparison, the

respondents had greater hesitations against classifying themselves as part of a social class. But of those who were willing to categorise themselves as part of a social class, 35 per cent characterised themselves as belonging to the underclass. Thus ‘underclass’ appeared to be conceived as more stigmatising than ‘loser’. The difference may be explained by referring to the victim capital implied in a self-presentation as ‘loser’. The self-presentation as ‘loser’ carried elements of attributing responsibility for their present life situation to other people or bodies, especially the public authorities. Possibly, the greater hesitation to categorise oneself as part of the underclass was reinforced by the social myth of sameness and equality in Norwegian society (cf. Chapter 2).

The self-categorisation as ‘loser’ did not necessarily imply that they unequivocally approved of this, wanted others to consider themselves as losers or that this reflected on their self-esteem. It could rather express that they claimed the organisation was of relevance for themselves. The categorical data does not tell us much about their underlying considerations. In-depth interviews with informants who had contacted the Losers’ Association indicate that the approval of the label was more strategic, reserved or conditional (Lyngstad 1998). For instance, one informant claimed the Poor House was a place for “we who manage best”, and the Losers’ Association for “those who cannot afford to take their own case to court”. Nevertheless, he was also a member of the latter organisation:

“I will not reject him (the leader of the Losers’ Association). He’s helping the weakest in society, even though I don’t consider myself to belong to them. I know best what my situation is like. (...) I got in touch with the Losers’ Association. He has taken on a fairly large burden. He needs the time. As he has experience with wrongful placement himself, he has had to concentrate on this. Even if it goes slowly, he does a good job. There are so many members who are going to have their case presented, so he has to take it in turns. At least he’s systematic, so he’ll make things work. He has a lot of irons in the fire. Sometimes I talk with him. I ask him how things are going. I had to ask him (the leader) for support to get drop the expenses in the case against the municipality. They agreed to waive their claims. Then we approached the appeals court (*lagmannsretten*). We don’t know how that will turn out yet. It was only thanks to (the leader) that we managed to get the claim removed. I want to claim my rights, but the judicial system thought they were right. Many years of my life were lost. (The leader) thought I should have a right to a considerable amount (of money) because the government had violated so many rights. If I manage to get this through, (my former employers) can’t stop me from criticising them. (The leader) will process the application for financial compensation this autumn.”

(From interview with 50-year-old male user of the Poor House and member of the Losers’ Association. He had a disability benefit as his main income and was writing his autobiography when he was at the Poor House, October 1997).

In particular, he wanted compensation for having been wrongly classified as ‘mentally retarded’ and for not receiving sufficient education. He had been to an orphanage, lived

with foster parents, been to an institution for the 'mentally retarded' and a special school for the blind. Later, he had been loosely coupled to the labour market and had worked in a sheltered working environment in a large state company. The last decade, he had come into conflict with his employer before he was transferred to a disability benefit. The informant had reservations about being labelled a 'loser', but justified contact with the organisation by stating that he expected help in the future. He sought individual help and considered his case unique. So far the interviewee had received assistance so that the municipality waived their financial claims against him. The case in the high court was unfinished and the application for financial compensation from the state had not yet been submitted.

Most of the users we managed to get in touch with reported that they contacted the association to obtain help with their own personal case (85 per cent). The association with the organisation was more strategic or justified on account of the individual help provided by the organisation. Only four per cent expected the organisation to be an arena where they could talk with others. Taken into consideration that this could include talking with employees in the office, this should be regarded as a low figure. Only four per cent reported that they had no expectations that the organisation management would do anything for them when they contacted the organisation.

We may regard this as a fairly strong expression of *individualisation* and pursuit of individual charges against the state.

### **Problems of boundary drawing among claimants**

Social-security claimants were divided in different social-protection schemes and combinations of these. The differentiated or specialised measures provided *fragmenting problem conditions*. Claimants were objects of different and combinatorial benefits and obligations, subsumed different offices and related to different staff members. When they were enrolled in the same kind of programme, they were likely to be enrolled in and attending different education, individual therapy, medical treatment measures, and labour-market training and courses. They were in different 'phases' or 'stages' in the case processing and efforts to remedy their problem. The participants had widely differing attachment to and experience with the regular labour market. They had different part-time jobs and occasional work. Some of them had until recently been in

regular work or wanted to return to this. Others had always or for a long time been outside the regular labour market. Individual case processing led them to focus on their personal merits in courses and education, and individual accounts for their claims of social-security benefits. In efforts to negotiate access to benefits with welfare bureaucracy, the claimants could emphasise what made their case unique and appear as the deserving in need (“my case is different”). Thus, they could make efforts to influence the decisions of their rulers.

Such circumstances appeared to promote individualisation in their coping with their social problems. This made it more difficult to agree on demands they everyone would benefit from, as perceived by the organisation representatives. What they had in common appeared to be perceived as too vague and abstract. This was reflected in disagreements on what defined who they were (collective identity) and discussions about which label they should apply to themselves; client, poor, loser, patient and so on. Participants complained that people were widely different and it was difficult to find something that could unite them.

Efforts to draw clear boundaries were unsuccessful. Some of the users at the Poor House were receiving a disability benefit or old-age pension, and this intensified internal tensions as they had a predictable and guaranteed income (“not the same as us”, “not belonging here “). Similar objections were raised about people with psychiatric problems. There was little agreement about such distinctions and the views were not sanctioned. The status differences and definition of boundaries towards others, the external demarcation criteria, were not clear-cut and the field was amorphous. Thus, the basis for elaborating on and presenting oneself as different was small. Hence, most of the participants pursued their individual interests. Work to strengthen rights, reduce discretion, increase benefit levels and so on was virtually absent.

### **Travellers: United in demands for compensation and redress**

Travellers emerged in certain respects as a clear contrast to the claimants. Organised Travellers demanded particular policy measures on the basis of claims to cultural differences. This was work for institutional change and categorical rights that would benefit all Travellers who wanted to make claims for such rights. The participants stated that they needed particular arrangements operated or controlled by themselves, as they

did not trust others. They presented demands of a separate ombudsman, administrative offices, teams of health professionals and solicitors who knew their history and particular needs, and arenas for self-reflection and identity development among Travellers (“cultural centres”). However, as the former assimilation policy had weakened their independent symbol system (clothing, lifestyle, language and trading), the opportunities for maintaining and presenting a collective community system had been weakened.

This appeared to have contributed to easing the Romani People’s National Association recruitment of people who had been objects of or otherwise adversely affected by the special measures administrated by the Norwegian Mission for the Homeless. For instance, many of those who were members of the Romani People’s National Association communicated strong bitterness and loss from being deprived of a normal childhood. They had been placed in public childcare homes or foster homes, or they had for periods been to the Svanviken settlement camp together with their parents. In that respect, it appeared that to some extent it was Travellers with specific claims against the state who often became members or contacted the organisation to seek information, assistance and advice.

It seemed as if the organisational efforts mainly recruited “the strong” among “the weak”. Those with substantial health problems or otherwise adversely affected by the former assimilation policy, directly or indirectly, did not have the capacity to get involved. Those with more and other types of capital (education, a network of acquaintances, organisational experience, language skills) contacted the central government on their own, wrote their own books, “lobbied” Members of Parliament, and made efforts to improve the life chances for Travellers mainly outside the organisations.

Many of those involved in the Romani People’s National Association had recently discovered their Traveller origin or were in a personal process of coming to terms with or reconsidering their prior life experience. There appeared to be more reasons to become actively involved when one sought to develop a new platform or a newly gained identity, explore possible new directions for one’s further life-course and improve one’s self-esteem. The participants were involved in processes of subjectively defining themselves as Travellers and members of an ethnic minority rather than a client category.

When appearing in public, board members in the Romani People's National Association often used traditional clothing, especially in the first meeting with new counterparts and meetings for the members (neckties, waistcoats, knives, pocket watches and large hats for the men; long skirts in bright colours, large earrings, gold jewellery and knives for the women). Travellers could thus stage their unity and difference from others in public and confirm this to each other. However, the participants risked over-communicating their attachment and giving the impression of a newly gained self-identity by applying the most visible signs of belonging (cf. similar observations in Bjerkan and Dyrliid 2000).

Sometimes board members in the Romani People's National Association who were asked to represent Travellers in seminars and conferences did not feel competent to say anything about the culture, claimed they did not know it, and preferred to talk about their own individual experiences of social control and surveillance. On such occasions they sometimes even referred to outside supporters to inform about Travellers' culture. The knowledge of the Romani language was variable or limited, most Travellers had become settled and stopped wearing traditional clothing, and few traded in special niches of business or peddled wares. Some Travellers claimed to represent values different from those held by the majority population: the freedom (*open space*), a flexible time budget (chatting, laughter, coffee, accordion, guitar, songs, fire, "few Travellers in 9-5 jobs") and strong family ties and values, but had problems getting them recognised as unique by non-Travellers. Others had difficulties in defining what was culturally distinct about themselves today and tentatively sought to point to features that were rejected by other Travellers.

Travellers were more easily united in efforts to sue the state and demand collective financial compensation and moral redress from the state for former maltreatment and atrocities. The former assimilation policy had applied to all people of Traveller origin and special targeted measures. As it was time consuming, difficult and complicated to mobilising people to come to social gatherings, and difficult to recruit Travellers to participate, not to mention the internal conflicts, it was easier to pursue questions about financial compensation from the state. Raising lawsuits against the state became an important part of the social mobilisation as this served to unite Travellers against the government. A separate foundation (*stiftelse*) with representatives from one

of the other organisational efforts and outside supporters in addition to the Romani People's National Association was also established in order to pursue this issue.

Following the consequences of the former assimilation policy, self-presentation as an ethnic minority demanded considerable reconstruction of their symbols of cultural differences. Almost as compensation for this, the reconstruction work included *invention of new traditions and rituals*, deliberately invented in memorial services, annual revivalist tent meetings and regular social gatherings and meetings. The cultural heritage was interpreted in retrospect, as reinterpretation of the lives and lifestyle of their ancestors and connecting with the historic past (collecting songs, photos, old crafts, clothing and jewellery, arranging courses in old crafting techniques and guitar playing). This could be interpreted as efforts at formalisation and *ritualisation* of what may have been more similar to customs, conventions or routines in the past. Following Hobsbawm (1992 [1983]: 9), the invention of tradition can be interpreted as having the function of establishing or symbolising social cohesion or the membership of groups.

Through representing fixed practices, the more active and organised Travellers made an effort to construct invariance and continuity with the past. Their story was told as if it had always meant the same to be a Traveller; no development and no change. Different from other ritualised practices, this did not include institutionalising or demarcating transition and change, but rather constructing continuity and publicly proclaiming a collective identity and unity. But when the re-constructions included creating an ancient past beyond available historical and linguistic sources or otherwise effective historical continuity, eg. when they claimed to be of Indian origin, people of Traveller origin ran the risk of being accused of romanticising the past and mystifying their origin.

A great deal of work needed to be done to re-establish and define the distinctiveness of Travellers' culture in the present and provide a basis for celebrating their present cultural differences, their contributions to a 'multicultural society'. This involved visualising differences from others and demarcating a distinct, bound solidary group and thus provide a subjective feeling of belonging together and ordinary reciprocation among peers. Judging from the way Travellers were presented in public, it appeared that they first and foremost had in common the fact that they directly or indirectly had been affected by the former assimilation policy. Consequently, this implied a constraint that the social movement among Travellers mainly recruited

Travellers with particular charges against the state while younger generations so far showed little interest in this.

### **Discussion: expressiveness vs. predictability in interaction with the welfare state**

Social-security claimants were exposed to a regime of formal requirements presented by staff in the first-line services. I have indicated that use of discretion in individual case processing was considered a nuisance, as this increased the power of the first-line staff in relation to the applicants. More rule-based services would limit this power and make it possible for the claimants to more easily manoeuvre and predict the outcome. More rule-based services and disbursement also make it easier to compare with others and control for the fairness of disbursement and distributions, and it becomes easier to compare one's situation with that of others. Thus, these claimants tended to support and demand more standardised social assistance and clear-cut entitlement criteria. They would then be more equal vis-à-vis the welfare state.

At the same time, demands for uniqueness and expressiveness appeared to be prevalent. When there is more rule-based and "bureaucratic" service provision or categorical treatment, obligations and requirements will apply. One cannot then expect much indulgence and understanding for one's individual plight. The welfare bureaucracy would be more unmerciful or unresponsive. In negotiating with the staff members, it may therefore be tempting for claimants to stress aspects that make them unique and incomparable to other claimants and 'clients' to eschew ordinary requirements and eligibility criteria. The claims for uniqueness, a subjective feeling of uniqueness and the wish for a particularistic and expressive response pointed in the direction of individual consideration and demand for more use of discretionary service provision. This would be necessary in order to ensure that all relevant circumstances in your individual case have been taken into consideration; that you are taken seriously, not worked against and listened to by the staff in the first-line services or the political elites.

The defensive function of appeals to a person's own uniqueness represents the possibility of alleviating the unmerciful character of welfare bureaucracy. The claimant may achieve individual benevolence. He or she lays claims to the idea that one should be treated according to one's personal needs. Comparison with others should be



eschewed. At the same time, it becomes impossible to compare themselves with others. They do not know what the others get. There will be a lack of comparative frame of reference. Everyone knows that others will do the same. “Everybody” seeks to maximise their own interests and disregard or bend the rules to their own benefits (Jordan *et al.* 1992). Moreover, the power of the staff might increase as more importance is attributed to their discretion.

The ambivalence probably referred to real, but contradictory needs on the part of the claimants: There were both needs of expressiveness or being followed up individually *and* predictability. For instance, it was sometimes perceived as an advantage that disability benefits were more predictable and associated with less control when one eventually had been conferred this kind of benefit. But at the same time, it could also be seen as a disadvantage if this meant that one received no further help and training for increased labour-market participation in the future. Thus, some complained that they had involuntarily ended up on disability benefits and the system had given up on them, especially among members of the Losers’ Association.

At the same time, the contradiction gave a strategically good position for negotiations with the system. The claimants could consider it illegitimate whether the welfare functionaries followed the rules or stressed the need for discretionary adjustment in each individual case. If they referred to the rules, the claimants could complain that they were “insensitive”, “too strict” or “dogmatic”. When the welfare functionaries used their discretion, the claimants could complain they were “ignorant of the rules”, “unfair” and “inconsistent” (cf. Mathiesen 1965: 83-84).

Stress on the element of bureaucracy could reduce the discretion on the part of welfare functionaries. The experience with the distribution system elicited arguments of *justice*. The experience with bureaucracy elicited arguments about *efficiency*. The experience of degradation, paternalism, institutionalised distrust and accusations of abusing the social security schemes elicited arguments on *human values* and *morality*. One may attempt to blur the line between the insiders and outsiders. Pain may be reduced when the blame can be attributed elsewhere. In this respect, the opportunities for censoriousness could be a functional alternative to victim capital. Censoriousness emerged as an opportunity for self-assertion even in cases of low victim capital.

Sometimes the claimants expressed expedient compliance with the wishes of welfare functionaries and staff in local government administration in order to attain

benefits and avoid unfavourable conditions. The claimant's compliance with the rules and efforts to demonstrate one's willingness to return to the labour market probably reflected a belief that a system after all was concealed behind his or her uncertainty. If one does not demonstrate all signs of living up to the established norms, welfare functionaries and others may not have to take their arguments seriously or more easily dismiss them as difficult, tedious or captious. Some of our informants appeared to be conceived as difficult and demanding 'clients' by staff in welfare bureaucracy. Some spoke of both how themselves or others had become angry in meetings with the functionaries in the social-services office. From the perspective of the claimants, the self-assertive strategy could be seen as involving a great deal of risk. Some informants stressed that they were extremely careful about what they said in meetings with the welfare officers. Although we do not have much data to rely on, it appeared that this sometimes was more an ideal self-presentation than a reality.

There could possibly be cases of conspicuous "over-conformity" on the part of the disadvantaged (Blau 1955 [1963]: 183 ff.). This was unlikely, as the regime tended to be perceived as unpredictable and/or unfair. They were more likely to vacillate in their views of the social-security schemes. As former insiders, they had internalised the dominant views. But as outsiders, they sometimes expressed that they had come to reconsider their views and now viewed the schemes differently. In other words, the collaboration on maintaining the rules could be superficial. But if one does not know what to conform with or finds a complete lack of system, one may resign and give up. In a similar vein, if the claimant feels there is too much bother and degradation involved in continuing to report to the welfare officers, he or she may choose to leave or not present claims.

This is not an experience, a dilemma and coping strategy that is unique to welfare bureaucracy. On the contrary, it probably reflects quite common experiences with and reactions to bureaucratic organisations. The bureaucratic society can emerge as efficient but also as a controlling and unmerciful society (Weber 1982: 107-157). The full or partial citizen tries to negotiate with the state, county, municipality, hospitals, insurance companies, universities and so on (Mathiesen 1972 [1965], Chapters 9-10). The contradictory needs of the individual can be conceived as reflected in the tension between particularism and universalism with regard to treatment and access criteria in the welfare state; whether one should consider only specific criteria or the whole person

(Løchen 1965, Solheim 1996: 147-148). Employees in bureaucratic organisations can constantly be criticised for illegitimate actions; either for treating people differently or for not considering each case individually, for superficial case-processing or for making unreasonable demands and being insensitive. From the perspective of staff in welfare bureaucracy, this could possibly be experienced as a catch-22 situation (“damned if you do, damned if you don’t”).

The effect of censoriousness is probably dependent on how much the functionaries pay attention to the arguments of their ‘clients’; whether the staff considered treatment of individuals or administration of rules as their most important task. All three types of welfare offices in Norway have had both administration of rules and treatment-oriented tasks. It could also be that staff sometimes would be inclined to give in to the demands from the claimants to “get rid of” the problem and achieve “peace”. As we do not have data about this we will have to leave our hypothesis to future research to explore.

### **Concluding remarks**

Institutional expectations and the available symbol systems affected the construction of a community system among the disadvantaged, and influenced whether they used the organisation as an action channel or chose more individual strategies.

Their relationship to the assistance services both united and pitted the disadvantaged against each other. The structuring and functioning of this apparatus made social mobilisation possible, but also more difficult. The services represented both connecting and fragmenting problem conditions for the participants. Thus, official welfare policy both enabled and prevented group identity and in-group alignment.

It was to a large extent their relationship to the social and political elites and the first-line services that defined their commonality. The welfare policy necessitated social mobilisation. Government, welfare agencies and the media exposed the disadvantaged to interpretative frameworks and judgements that members of the subject populations had to relate to. In other words, their position as objects of other peoples’ concern, assistance and control measures helped to unite them. Both claimants and Travellers had been defined by their relationship to representatives of greater society. Sometimes it was *only* in relation to government that they perceived that they had anything in

common. Along other dimensions they were different. In such circumstances, this appeared to promote the pursuit of individual rather than collective identity and interest claims. However, when there were cultural resources available to show unity and clear-cut differences from others, it appeared to be easier to present collective claims. This was more apparent in the case of Travellers.

The claimants were in different phases of the system, exposed to unstable situations and sudden disruption of peer relations, and more concerned with their own private problems than those of their fellows. Thus, they lost a possible defence against greater society. The community system cannot accept crossing the boundary of loyalty for personal reasons. One may have to sacrifice immediate private interests for the sake of common interests. The one who remains untied by bonds of loyalty is not exposed to the unmerciful rules of the solidary group. The needs of the personality system can be given priority to that of the community system. But then the individual stands alone against the demands of bureaucratic organisations. It is possible that institutionalisation of norms that negate the authority and legitimacy of the rulers may lead to solidarity and censoriousness being combined (Mathiesen 1972 [1965]: 26). But in our cases of claimants, institutionalisation of the alternative was difficult.

All in all, Travellers appeared as the more united group against the government. The informal community system provided a resource for the formal organisation system. In this case, it appeared to be easier to canalise more human capital from 'peers' into the organisation system. Thus, they had more of an added weapon *qua* Travellers in negotiations with representatives of greater society.

## **The temporal dimension of the participants' relationship to each other and the organisation**

This chapter analyses a particular feature affecting the two relationships addressed in Chapters 7 and 8. This concerns the association between temporality, the duration or time perspective, of officially recognised statuses and participants' self-defined identities, but also the participants' temporal association with and commitment to the organisations. Temporality is connected to how actors interrelate the past and the future in the present and its intended and unintended consequences for their actions. I shall take temporality to refer to the *endurance* of sociological phenomena, including the more transitory aspects of social life. However, explicit focus on duration of interaction patterns does not exclude the possibility of continuity or stability. A focus on temporality differs, for instance, from the focus on timing of events, tempo and rhythm or exploration of chronology. In this respect, I follow Adam (1990, 1995) in arguing that temporality is only one aspect of the complexity of the times.

To a certain extent, time perspectives have been written into the assistance services and social-protection schemes as formal and *institutionalised expectations*. The dominant time perspective and temporal disciplining of the disadvantaged had consequences for the actors' adaptation and coping strategies. But in other respects, the temporality has been embedded in informal norms and more or less tacit and taken-for-granted assumptions in culture, and a question of *self-presentation*. The temporality was sometimes a negotiated part of the actors' problem understanding and not given prior to interaction or reciprocation and therefore associated with discrepancy and friction. This allowed more flexibility and agency on the part of the disadvantaged than one otherwise could have assumed. I seek to combine a top-down and bottom-up perspective, arguing that temporality is constructed through dynamic interaction processes and associated with self-reinforcing processes, unintended consequences and social risks on the part of the disadvantaged.

## **The temporal dimension of status**

In an effort to “identify uncodified elements of social structure”, Robert Merton (1984) distinguished between three types of expectations about temporal duration claimed to be embedded in social structures. These were claimed to be relatively stable normative features of social systems. *Socially prescribed duration* refers to formalised and institutionalised norms and requirements. They are inflexible and imposed by authorities through acts of legislation and enforced by lower-level bureaucracies. *The collectively expected duration* is more imprecise than the socially prescribed duration. It is informal, and often has the character of collective “common sense.” This knowledge may both be explicit and implicit in actions; assumptions which are taken for granted or assumed to be shared by most or all people. *The patterned temporal expectations* concern the routine and patterns of everyday life. The actors’ life course, adjustment and planning are affected by what is considered the appropriate timing for life events that involve transition from one status to another or status sequences.

In Merton’s discussion, the expectation types appear more to be seen as guiding or standardising individual anticipation and action than a basis for negotiating the conditions for interaction. He did not model the internal relationship, the intermediate processes and mechanisms between structural features and the individual action. Rather the normative expectations were suggested both to be linking social structure and social actions, and to be a fundamental part of social structure. This appears to be self-contradictory, at least if one does not assume a total conformity. Merton’s structuralist perspective could be said to represent a ‘*top-down*’ or institutional perspective; how the context of lower-level actors is shaped by choices of politicians and chief administrators.

Given Merton’s theorising, one should assume that the socially prescribed durations of statuses were more authoritatively enforced and of higher concern to the claimants than the other two types. On the other hand, there was reason to expect a certain self-selection of members to organisations, as the claimants’ individual life projects, expectations and perceived alternatives would vary. Among Travellers, a kind of collectively expected duration was more likely to be relevant for perception of the temporality of the status, since there were no officially and formally prescribed expectations anymore. One could also argue that the vocabulary Merton developed

presupposed a rather one-sided cognitive orientation in the actors; key words such as expectations, anticipation and sanctions could be said to hint in such a direction.

Anselm Strauss (Strauss *et al.* 1973 [1963], Strauss 1988 [1978], 1993) has argued that the conditions for social order are neither stable nor permanent. He has argued that the impact of previously negotiated orders, legislation and institutionalised values is not total or permanent: The negotiated order has a temporal aspect. It is not a given that a contractual relationship will be renewed, for instance when there is considerable change in the conditions for interaction. Some rules tend to be broken, stretched or ignored when certain exigencies arise. All rules are not enforced with the same determination or in all relevant circumstances. In other cases rules are ignored, forgotten or fall into disuse. This has led him to depict "... a universe marked by tremendous fluidity, it won't and can't stand still. It is a universe where fragmentation, splintering, and disappearance are the mirror images of appearance, convergence, and coalescence" (Strauss 1993: 209). Although he in brief has mentioned the constraints actions and decisions of prior and higher-level actors – policies and rules – set to local 'negotiations', his main focus has nonetheless been a '*bottom-up*' perspective.

Developing hypotheses about the circumstances in which informal community among subordinated co-workers were likely to emerge, Sverre Lysgaard (1985 [1961], especially pp. 191-196) argued that the actor's perception of the future affects the actor's interpretation of the more immediate situation. Whether the workplace was conceived as a place where one should stay in the foreseeable future or a temporary workplace was likely to affect the actor's participation and degree of investment in the community among subordinated ("blue collar") workers. First, *future dependency* of income from the workplace, he theorised, was likely to promote investment in interaction with other co-workers. This could be due to structural features, the risk of unemployment and one's transaction value in the labour market, if there were alternative income sources. In other cases, such constraints could include individual family obligations and commitments which made a predictive income more important or impeded residence mobility. Second, the significance of the immediate situation as subordinated in the work place could also be reduced if the employee felt that the *duration of the subordinate position* was time limited. The perceived possibility of individual upward mobility would probably reduced people's inclination to be associated with and invest in the informal collective among co-workers.

Following this line of reasoning, we should expect to find stronger involvement of the members and better conditions for recruitment when the organising attempt was based on statuses perceived as permanent or long lasting. When the status is perceived as permanent, at least after one has acquired the status, as in the case of many disabled people, or one is considered as born into the status, as in the case of Travellers, we should expect to find that people were more inclined to become involved in the self-organisational efforts.

### **Socially prescribed duration of the claimant status**

The Scandinavian welfare states have been characterised by expectations to participate (Hernes 1988). The income-maintenance schemes were meant to provide financial and other incentives to seek or return to paid work rather than to receive benefits. With the exception of old-age pensions, the income-maintenance schemes have all been presumed to be time limited. Since the late 1980s, the Norwegian national-insurance system has been marked by certain curtailments and a resurrection of the so-called 'work orientation' (Drøpping, Hvinden and Vik 1999). Eligibility rules for daily allowance for the unemployed and the disability pension were tightened, requirements about participation in activation measures were reinforced, and the conditions for continued receipt were made stricter; eg. availability for work, actively seeking work, reviews of benefits already granted (Ploug 1999, Hvinden *et al.* 2001, Clasen *et al.* 2001, OECD 2000: 129-153). The maximum duration of daily allowance, single-parent and medical-rehabilitation benefits was shortened. Similarly, means-tested social assistance has been more closely connected to requirements about participation in 'active measures' or work. Thus, the temporariness of the social protection for people of working age has become more strongly emphasised in Norway. We may understand this as a stronger endorsement of paid work as a life interest (positively defined) or a more narrow understanding of work and what are activities of value to society (negatively defined).

Social-protection schemes can be interpreted as instances of socially prescribed duration, although how much the granting of benefits is based on the rules or administrative discretion varies (1995-99):



- €# *Social assistance* has been means-tested and dependent on the discretion of the staff in the social-services offices. How often this is tested will vary from case to case and depend on the local practice of the social workers (*St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, Hvinden 1994a, Terum 1996).
- €# *Unemployment benefits* have been limited to a maximum of three years, given that the claimant has a previous record of recognised labour-market participation, and a minimum record of past earnings. Before 1998 the entitlement did not have a time limit, but there would be intervals of waiting periods after 80 weeks (*Ot.prp.* no. 35 1995-96).
- €# The *single-parent allowance* (literally: “transition allowance”) has been granted regardless of a previous labour-market record. The parliament increased the work requirement in 1998 when, as a main rule, they introduced a three-year time limit from the birth of the youngest child. Before this, the allowance could be granted until the youngest child was ten years old (*St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, *Ot.prp* no. 8 1996-97).
- €# The *sick-leave allowance* has been limited to one year and granted on the condition of previous labour-market participation. If the claimant is found by staff in the national insurance office to fulfil the requirements, he or she could be transferred to vocational training or rehabilitation after this. The *vocational rehabilitation/training allowance* has as a main rule been limited to two years, including the period on sick leave. Thus, access to long-term education has been limited under this scheme. The vocational training allowance has been made dependent on previous labour-market participation (*St.meld.* no. 39 1991-92). The *medical rehabilitation allowance* was limited to maximum one year and made independent of previous labour-market participation from 1994 (*St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95).
- €# The *disability benefit* has in principle been assumed to be temporary, but most of the recipients have received the benefit until they were transferred to the old-age pension or passed away. A qualifying criterion has been that the claimant had his or her earning capacity reduced by at least 50 per cent due to illness, injury or disability. In principle, the younger recipients should especially be reconsidered after some time. In practice, this has often not been given priority by staff in the local national insurance offices (*St.meld.* no. 35 1994-95, Hvinden 1994a, Ford and Hvinden 1997).

As this summary illustrates, social-protection schemes have been characterised by differences in duration of the disbursement. This influenced the turnover of recipients within each scheme, i.e. whether the help recipient is pushed into or transferred to other social-protection schemes. As argued by Leisering and Leibfried (1999: 6-7), social protection schemes are likely to provide different incentive structures for construction of individual life trajectories. In Norway, the disability benefit has in practice emerged as the only income-maintenance scheme for people of working age without a fixed time limit or regular testing of eligibility. But even if they receive benefits for relative short periods from each of the other schemes, a comparatively large proportion of the

claimants continues to receive other types of benefit or relapses into such programmes after short-term employment and labour-market training (Hansen 1996a, 1998, Dahl and Hansen 2001).

### **Duration of the status as perceived by claimants**

People involved in the claimants' organisations fluctuated between talking from the point of view of the community system and from the point of view of *the personality system*; the need and want dispositions that affect the life-course expectations and aspirations of the individual.

As will be recalled, the degree to which the informants positioned themselves as activists or individual claimants varied. The organisation and the individual user appeared to have contradictory interests, at least on a superficial level, when it came to duration of affiliation to the organisation. This inflicted ambivalence in these informants with respect to the fact that other users and activists got a job. Spokespersons of the three claimants' organisations reported and even moralised that many people were only interested in solving their own specific and individual problems and withdrew as soon as they had achieved this. In discussions between themselves, some activists condemned others who were excited when they got a job, and labelled it as betrayal, deceit and unsolidary behaviour when they left their former network (the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation, the Poor House).

At the same time, and fluctuating with this, the activists argued that people's short-term and temporary perspective could be an advantage. For instance, the remaining activists in the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation mentioned that several members of the first local boards during 1992-93 had obtained new jobs within three to four months. When I asked them whether or not they saw this as something that impeded the self-organising effort, they replied in the negative, even if it meant that many of the local boards were short-lived. One activist in the Poor House even said that it could be seen as positive that many of the claimants' organisations were short-lived if this implied that people became re-employed. It was also a part of the organisation's success. To the extent that the organisation contributed to re-employment or did not impede re-entrance into the labour market, it became a "victim of its own success".

*The Poor House:* A majority of the activists appeared to have some association with the labour market; at least through vocational rehabilitation, vocational training or small part-time jobs. When people had this weak link to the labour market, this probably helped to sustain the claimants' temporary time perspective even when their welfare dependency was recurrent. Several of the activists claimed that they were in *transition phases* in their lives; they were waiting for court cases against former employers or the social-insurance office, intending to finish education or trying to become re-employed or increase their employment activity.

Claimants often emphasised their prospects of becoming 'self-sufficient', being re-employed in paid work or recovering from illness. Some informants strongly expressed that they perceived the disability benefit as a lasting solution to their economic distress, although the level of monthly payment could be low, especially for those with a limited record of labour-market participation. The scheme was clearly perceived as a more lasting or permanent solution to their individual financial paucity than what was intended by the government. The temporality of the officially recognised status and the claimant's perception of their status differed. The disability benefit was associated with less red tape than other benefits for people of working age, as granted pensions were rarely reviewed. One did not have to participate in repeated courses or reapply for social protection to continue to receive the benefits. The disability benefit could thus be seen as the next best solution or answer to their financial distress.

To a large extent claimants shared many of the dominant judgements and views on what was recognised as 'work'. The main activist in the Fredrikstad Client Action represented an exception in this regard. He regretted that claimants only focused on getting back into regular paid work. Having a disability benefit himself, he expressed his pity for those who expended all their energy on applying for new job opportunities. Although he occasionally admitted that he could use a job to earn more money, he regarded cultural activities as preferable. Other claimants considered his view heresy. In practice, several informants appeared to be ambivalent.

*The Losers' Association:* To a greater extent than the other claimants' organisations, they acted on behalf of claimants conceived as suffering from an irremediable, and in that respect, more permanent situation. In most cases, their marginality was seen as irreversible although the official ideology of the organisation was to make "losers" into "winners". It was, however, claimed that former wrongful

treatment and encroachment, often dating many years back, could not be changed, only be compensated for, although the claimant could experience the compensation as a certain degree of moral redress.

As opposed to the Losers' Association and the Romani People's National Association, the three claimants' organisations based on temporary statuses had few paying members. One could of course claim that the financial paucity of the individual claimants prevented people from paying, but the membership fees were small and symbolic. To pay the membership fee, or to register, appeared to have a symbolic dimension as "confirming" the status to oneself and belonging to a certain category of people. Personal expectations as well as others' expectations made it less likely that they would commit themselves by paying the membership fee, or socially, by involving themselves with others in the organisation, if they expected or hoped their own status as client or claimant was going to be short-lived. Joining the organisation might even be conceived as betraying that hope and aspiration, even though they could have been better off seeking help and support from other claimants in a similar situation or with similar experience.

### **Actual duration of the claimant status**

On the national level, a large number of people benefited from assistance and/or welfare transfers during the year:

**Table 9.1: Total number of assistance and benefit recipients per scheme 1999. Schemes for people of working age.**

<i>Number</i>	<i>Social security scheme</i>
269,840	Disability-benefit recipients
126,200	Social-assistance recipients
105,000†	Sick-leave allowance recipients
59,558	Registered unemployed
55,194	People on vocational rehabilitation, vocational training or in permanent protected work environment
30,265	Medical rehabilitation-allowance recipients
41,328	Single-parent allowance recipients

Number of recipients as of 31 December 1999 per scheme. Sources: National Insurance Services (2000), Statistics Norway (2000a) Table 276, verbal communication with Statistics Norway and the Government Employment Service. †The figure is a provisional estimate as the employers may declare demands of reimbursement several months after the disbursement (National Insurance Services, letter of 2000).

'People on vocational rehabilitation/training' included people on hold and under deliberation (*vente- og utredningsfase*), employed in a position which was financially

supported by the Government Employment Service (*formidlingstiltak*), employed in adjusted work either in the regular labour market or a sheltered work environment (*arbeidstreningstiltak*), or people enrolled in courses and studies recognised by the Government Employment Service (*kvalifiseringstiltak*). Together with ‘people in a permanent sheltered work environment’ (*varig vernede sysselsettingstiltak*), these constituted the total number of people officially categorised as ‘people with a work handicap’ (*yrkeshemmede*).

The categories of people listed in Table 9.1 were not necessarily mutually excluding. Some people received benefits and assistance from more than one scheme. For instance, in 1999, thirteen per cent of the social-assistance recipients also received disability benefits, nine per cent received a vocational-rehabilitation allowance, seven per cent received unemployment benefits, and six per cent received a single-parent allowance (Statistics Norway 2000b, Table 8). In other words, one cannot easily add up the number of people registered in the various schemes.

Nevertheless, one would have thought that the high number of welfare recipients would be sufficient for providing a solid basis for recruitment and building perennial interest organisations. But many of the beneficiaries received cash transfers only for time limited periods. An overview of the average duration of the social-security schemes in question, which de facto were temporary, excluding disability benefits, shows that the time spells tended to be fairly brief in most cases. Arguably, receipt of the various allowances was limited in duration but long enough to cause adaptation strategies among the claimants and recipients:

**Table 9.2: Average duration of status as registered by the government 1995-99 (number of months). Schemes for people of working age.**

<i>Status/year</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>
Sick-leave allowance, finished spells	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7
Social-assistance recipient spell(s) within the year	5.2	5.3	5.1	5.0	4.9
Self-reported unemployed (The Labour Force Sample Surveys)	8.8	6.2	5.6	4.4	3.9
Registered full-time unemployed, finished spells (Government Employment Service)	5.5	5.5	5.7	5.3	5.5
Period as unemployment benefit recipient, finished spells (all recipients, not only full-time unemployed)	11.3	11,0	12.0	13.2	11.8
Vocational rehabilitation/training allowance recipients, finished spells	18	20.2	21.9	21.6	20.7
Medical rehabilitation allowance recipients, finished spells	12.2	10.8	10.9	10.2	10.6
Single parent allowance recipients, finished spells	40,8	43,0	44,7	46,4	47,9

Sources: Verbal communication with Statistics Norway, separate analyses ordered from the Government Employment Service and National Insurance Services (letters of 2000), National Insurance Services (2000) figure 2, and Statistics Norway, Social Statistics Table 1.4 for 1995, 1996 and 1997. 1 month = 4.333 weeks or 30 days.

This table gives an overview of the average duration of uninterrupted periods in the status, as registered, defined and recognised by the government. Other social-security schemes were not intended or claimed to assist people in returning to the ‘ordinary labour market’ or provide social protection while they were attempting to (re)-enter the labour market. The sick-leave allowance differed from the others in the sense that the spells were significantly shorter on average compared to the other schemes. Arguably, receiving a sick-leave allowance did not give the same reason to develop new adjustments. For all three measures of ‘unemployment’, the person had to be deemed an active job-seeker, available and oriented towards the labour market. Even if they were all registered as having or representing a problem, the legal provisions did not grant all people out of ‘work’ entitlement to unemployment benefits.

*Unemployed as defined in the Labour Force Sample Surveys [AKU]:* This was a measure of self-reported unemployment, although restricted by certain criteria given by public authorities. The measure included people without paid work who reported that they had tried to get such work during the last four weeks, and who were prepared to start working within one week after the interview (from 1996: “within the next two weeks”). In 1996, the question was changed from how long people had been unemployed to whether they had applied for a job opportunity/vacancy during the last

two weeks. Thus, the possibility for self-definition of unemployment was restricted, and the average duration of ‘unemployment’ declined (N = 21-23,000) (Statistics Norway 1997b).

*Registered full-time unemployed as recognised by the Government Employment Service:* The claimant was recognised and registered as full-time unemployed by the Government Employment Service if the person did not have paid work or any other income, was available to the labour market and had confirmed the status during the last two weeks. Claimants on vocational training were not counted. Others who contacted the local labour exchange office were registered as ‘job-seekers’, but not as ‘unemployed’.

*Vocational rehabilitation/training allowance recipients:* This covers people who for medical reasons or because of “social handicaps” (alcoholism, depression and so on) have difficulties in getting paid work and registering at the local labour-exchange office. As will be recalled, these benefit recipients have been divided into five categories (Government Employment Service 2000). People in the last category usually receive a disability benefit. These are included in the figures, probably making them higher than they otherwise would have been. Recipients registered for seven years and more were given the value 365 weeks.

*Single-parent allowance recipients* stand out from other welfare beneficiaries. This scheme (literally, “transition allowance”) allowed recipients to be in the scheme for a longer period of time. But single parents have met contradictory expectations. You should take care of and spend time with the child, but also seek paid work and be self-sufficient. It has been a contested but dominant view that it was better for them and society at large if they participated in the labour market. This has been interpreted as being in line with issues of gender equality and promotion of increased self-respect and financial autonomy on the part of the single parent. Others have argued that it was preferable or equally valuable to society if the parent spent the time with her/his children compared to sending them to day-care centres. This position was more often associated with protection of ‘family values’, but also with freedom of choice and autonomy on the part of the beneficiary.

For all measures, the median value was probably lower than the average duration. A minority of claimants with relatively longer time spells probably increased the average. Thus, the above statistics should give a fairly conservative indication of

how time limited the duration of the welfare was. It is also worth noting that one person may represent more than one spell. For instance, one person may receive social assistance in time limited but recurrent time spells during the year or over the years (Birkeland (Ed.) 1999). In a similar vein, a claimant will be measured as a “new” case in the unemployment statistics if he or she has had intermediary periods of employment. When the welfare dependency is fragmented in shorter but recurrent time spells this is likely to support the actors’ temporary time perspective on their welfare dependency. Part-time employment or an otherwise loose association with the labour market gives reason to regard the unemployment as temporary even if they have had several periods of unemployment benefits during the year.

A few studies suggest that a significant proportion of claimants receive benefits in recurrent time spells or are transferred or pushed into other benefit schemes: In a 1989-1990 survey among recipients of the single-parent allowance, Terum (1993) found that nearly 40 per cent received such an allowance for more than one period. Of those who left the scheme in 1989-90, one in three received new types of income-maintenance benefits when they followed up the respondents one and half a years later. Similarly, in a study of claimants entering and leaving public income-maintenance schemes among claimants between 18-29 years old in 1987-89, Nervik (1996) found that a large proportion of the social-services recipients left social assistance schemes, only to be found again later in national-insurance schemes. Conversely, several of those in receipt of temporary social-insurance benefits or enrolled in temporary employment were later transferred, moved to or ended up with social assistance as their main source of income during the observation period. Despite relative short-time dependency on each income-maintenance scheme, a relatively large proportion of the claimants continued to depend on other types of benefits or relapsed into such programs after short-term employment and labour-market training. For many, actual participation in employment was intermittent or periodic. Thus, the welfare dependency was often prolonged in practice.

### **Permanent temporality**

The period of unemployment or welfare dependency may obviously last longer than one hoped and envisaged, and the temporary adjustment of the unemployed becomes permanent. In practice this may imply that claimants develop adaptation forms which



assume many features of what we may call *permanent temporality* (Nervik 1996: 87-88).

#### **Permanent search for new job opportunities 1983-1997**

“I have been partly unemployed since 1985. I have had too little education. Up to 1980-82 I had no trouble getting a job. I started my own business in ‘79. At that time it was easy to make money. I got sick in ‘83. Then I had to close down. I had to hire someone to drive the truck for me. It became too expensive. And I had some debt. I lost my rights after I finished rehabilitation. There were still prospects for improvement, so I got an extension. I finished the 9th grade (lower secondary school) three years ago but I wasn’t accepted for upper secondary school. You had to have an average of B (*M*) but I had some D’s (*Ng*). So I wasn’t allowed access to the job-training course. I wasn’t prioritised for school. Otherwise, I would have continued just for fun. Then I got a job for half a year at a neighbour of (NN)’s. It was work on his farm. Then I got my social-insurance rights back. There isn’t so much work on the farms anymore.

It is a bit fast, the course I am following now, but it’s positive. It’s about firms producing for the price of each unit. It’s about production, marketing and accountancy. I have a project on producing firewood but I think it’s useless. But I’ll complete it. It was said that BU (the Rural Development Foundation [*bygdeutviklingsfondet*]) would not give priority to businesses that competed with others. So it’s difficult to find anything you could get support for. I would probably not get any support for that. I have surveyed the market situation and completed an overview of the competitors. The wholesale buyers and the market are in Trondheim. I have also contacted Rema (a larger grocery-store company). They’re selling coal so why shouldn’t they sell firewood? If only I could get the raw material it could be something.

Now, I attended the course to learn how to establish new enterprises. I don’t have any plans to establish anything, but it could lead to something. You can meet other people there who run a firm and you can get in touch with them. And then they might need you for their own firm. It was fun to get the lower secondary school diploma when I was almost 50. It’s really questionable whether I’ll ever become a lorry driver again. I’ve always had enough to do, but it’s of no use if you don’t have anything to live on. Many people have been unemployed for so long that it turns out rotten even if you are qualified. That’s the biggest problem.

I’m going to attend a course in Oslo on transport of dangerous materials. I have an old mother at 83 and a sister who is retarded and working in a sheltered work environment. I can’t just run from that either. I turn 53 in June, so it’s a question whether I will ever start driving a truck again.”

(From interview with male cadre in the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation, May 1997. He became a board member in 1996. He was divorced and had adult children. In 1998 he obtained an employment opportunity in a one-third position indirectly through the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation, at the local ‘centre for voluntary work’.)

As can be seen from the quotation above, the informant made continued efforts to qualify for participation in the regular labour market. But over the years he was confronted with new and repeated disappointments and started to doubt whether he would ever re-enter a regular job and workplace. It seemed as if he did not believe that he would eventually manage to become re-employed. At the same time, he would not betray that hope and aspiration. He also continued to submit the biweekly report to the labour-exchange office during periods of vocational training, even though this was not

required – just to make sure he was enrolled in the system, according to what he said. Other claimants in the Poor House and the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation told similar stories about prolonged dependency on ‘temporary’ social-protection schemes and absence of regular full-time employment.

In some cases, participants in the self-organisational efforts remained connected to the organisation for a longer period of time than first intended. But as they assumed that they were about to leave, they did not want to become too involved in the organisational matters and remained loosely connected. For instance, some of the people I first talked to in 1996 stated that they had applied for a job and expected to leave soon, but were still involved in the Poor House in 1999. Cadres also assumed that *others* would exit as soon as they were applying for job opportunities. Consequently, they did not invest much effort in involving these participants in more demanding and time-consuming activities.

If one assumes or hopes that the present condition or status will be short-lived or transitory and thus of temporary duration, there is less reason to invest in social interaction with others with the same status or organise on the basis of that status. Hence, if a participant seeks to become re-employed, this will likely lead him or her to ignore or rule out the possibility of taking part in organising work as a claimant or client. This could be said to be in line with the Kenneth Burke (1965 [1935]) theorem: “A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing – A focus on object A involves neglect of object B.” When the status or immediate subordinated position is conceived as temporary, this is likely to weaken the in-group alignment and the efforts at collective mobilisation. The normative expected duration of the status and expectations of individual mobility may imply that claimants and service recipients participate less in other and alternative arenas in the intervening period of time. Committing yourself in joint efforts with others in similar situations or persons in the assumed temporary social environments may then be seen to conflict with improving one’s own individual status and returning to working life and self-sufficiency.

Such considerations appeared to contradict claims that long-term recipients of social-security benefits have demands of immediate gratification as their “time preference”. Wilson (1994) argued that they hold different attitudes and preferences from the rest of society. He claimed that they “have been habituated in ways that weaken their self-control and concern for others” (ibid. 55). Allegedly, this weakened

their willingness to postpone gratification. In contrast to this, several of our informants continued to maintain their long-term goals to achieve regular employment and endorsed the same values as the greater society. It appeared that many would prefer to avoid immediate gratification as they continued to have prospects for a later and larger benefit; paid work and the social status and recognition associated with this. This was expressed by some by the hesitation to accept a disability benefit. However, fatalism and resignation sometimes had the result that they did not believe they would manage to live up to their own standards and expressed disappointment about themselves.

### **Justifications for breaking or evading temporal expectations among claimants**

Claimants had some space for agency and negotiated with frontline staff about the problem understanding. Staff had discretionary power to decide which rules applied and define the problem situation. Claimants would negotiate as laymen, unless they had worked as welfare officers themselves or otherwise gained professional knowledge about the operating rules. Some claimants had gained considerable experience with and knowledge about the rules and system. Even if there were stringent rules and administrative regimes, one should avoid an overly deterministic perspective.

When claiming benefits the claimant enters into a process of negotiation in terms of bargaining for privileges with front line staff. It is always a question of the extent to which formal rules and informal expectations apply in the individual case. The entitlement criteria are not always clearly stated, and the scope for administrative discretion may be wide. There have generally been complaints about the complexity and imperceptibility of the rules, both among employees in the welfare bureaucracy and the claimants. This most likely contributes to the tendency of rules falling into disuse or being forgotten, and staff adopting simpler “rules of thumb”. Staff may for instance seek dissimilar ‘solutions’ for similar cases. If the problem situation or conditions change, the problem understanding can be perceived as in need of reinterpretation, the individual file re-examined and the ‘rules of the game’ reconsidered. This will especially be so in cases of de facto temporary income maintenance schemes and services.

In our cases, claimants did not remain passive in their encounters with the institutional expectations. Different negotiation processes were taking place between the

system demands and the individual claimant or 'client'. People considered able-bodied but without paid 'work' might involve themselves or become involved by others in negotiations about the temporariness of the problem with politicians, bureaucracy, the mass media and other representatives of the greater society. During conversations and interviews, the participants raised a number of such concerns; the level and duration of benefits, eligibility rules and conditions for continued receipt of benefits. This included issues of what were reasonable costs to be covered by social assistance, whether they were to be considered able-bodied or as having health problems, whether they should be expected to move residence and how long the education could be to qualify as vocational training, and whether they should be allowed to refuse offers of jobs or job-training courses due to failing health, family obligations or wages below tariff regulations. Some of the participants in the organisational efforts were also involved as authorised representatives of other claimants in negotiations with staff in first-line services and assisted in "finding a solution" (peer support).

Social timing concerns the informal norms for how long, when and under which circumstances it is socially acceptable to be in receipt of social-security benefits. This is reminiscent of Merton's (1984) notion of 'patterned temporal expectation': Under certain circumstances it may be considered legitimate to be out of work, as in cases of temporary sickness and injuries, or even inappropriate to have paid work, as is the case with elderly people or when you have newly born children. Actors may be temporarily excused or expected to withdraw from normal social responsibilities and the general obligations bracketed. Claimants who did not meet these entitlement criteria were more in need of justifying their claims. It was more important for some than others to bargain over the temporal expectations and justify that they did not live up to institutional expectations.

Both in the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation and the Poor House, several informants tried to neutralise the temporal expectations of employment by excusing themselves by claiming that they were "soon" too old to be re-employed (informants in their late forties and older). The two organisations were also over-represented by male cadres and activists between 40 and 60 years of age. Some claimants involved in the organisation expressed difficulties in moving to a different place due to family obligations and financial debt on real estate, and thus asked to be excused on the grounds that they were less geographically mobile than many of the younger

generations. Their younger relatives who were unemployed were not involved in the organisations. This has also in part been accepted as a valid argument by staff in the local labour-exchange offices and stricter requirements for residence mobility are applied to younger claimants. In other cases, participants referred to or even over-communicated their previous record of paid work or other past merits to sustain their respectability in the greater society (cf. Wadel 1973 for similar findings).

There are reasons to believe that it was also felt to be less accepted for men to participate in alternative arenas compared to women. Women involved in the Poor House acted more or less as “housewives”; providing food, care and shelter for the others. Women who used the “activity centre” run by the Job-seekers’ Interest Organisation took part in embroidery and similar indoor activities (“hobbies”). In other words, they managed to draw advantages from and played on *other* action repertoires or sets of expectations (‘roles’) but in a new and more formalised setting outside the private home. Admittedly, such activities have not always been recognised as ‘work’.

Some of the male participants appeared more often to be trapped in a cultural and social vacuum, and presented ‘spare time’ as a problem rather than an opportunity to explore other activities. However, the availability of other resources from which to draw advantages varied. There were differences as to the degree to which the participants had studies or other respectable activities and well-known people they could be associated with and arenas they could involve themselves in (cf. Wadel 1973). Local party politics appeared as one such option for several of the male participants.

The manifest role and identity as ‘client’ had the fullest claim to application, most institutionally relevant and legitimately mobilised. However, claimants made efforts to influence other people’s perception of them by over-communicating and leading attention to their ‘latent identities’ (Gouldner 1957). Latent roles and identities (sick role, family roles and so on) could be mobilised to spill over into the setting where the claimant role was more pertinent and thus contribute to altering the conditions for interaction. Some of these accounts were likely to be considered institutionally irrelevant and mis-recognised as reasons in negotiations with the welfare bureaucracy. However, reference to latent roles and identities could be mobilised to make efforts at improving their individual standing in the greater society and de-emphasise or compensate for the sociological effects of the dominant and institutionalised expectations to have paid ‘work’.

The *Job-seekers' Interest Organisation*: Some claimants questioned the dominant problem understanding of the unemployment rate and the availability of paid work. The leader of the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation repeatedly maintained that "the new poverty has come to stay", and that unemployment was structural, not only cyclical, to justify that the issues were permanent or long lasting, at least on the category level, even though it was temporary on the individual level. Furthermore, activists in the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation sometimes suggested that one ought to define people on disability benefit as 'out of work' or 'unemployed'. Thus, they claimed that the problems of long-term unemployment and poverty were more severe than officially recognised by the public authorities. This clearly differed from the dominant problem understanding. Claimants on more permanent income-maintenance schemes (eg. disability pension) were not recognised by the government and mass media as unemployed, out of work or in principle available to the labour market.

Several claimants' organisations were concerned that government in their opinion underestimated and under-communicated the 'real' number of people out of work. A greater recognition of the de facto unemployment would have served to normalise being out of work. Their legitimacy as organisations could possibly improve under circumstances of a higher level of officially recognised unemployment. Participants also argued that there was a lack of available work and complained that employers hesitated to employ people over fifty or who had been out of work for a long period of time. The claimants tended to more readily accept the fact that there was a shortage of work than the public authorities. In comparison, during the period of the study, the Government Employment Service tended to argue that there was shortage of employees as the official unemployment rate was low. In other words, there was discrepancy in the problem understanding between the claimants and chief administrators of the welfare bureaucracy.

In accordance with this, representatives of the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation maintained that it used to be easier to obtain financial support to engage people in labour-market training programmes when the official unemployment rate was higher in the early 1990s. If there was a higher number of 'unemployed', one could more easily define the problems as 'structural' and 'socially conditioned' and not the outcome of individual failure or shortcomings.

It has often been observed that people with impairments or people who are recognised as ‘disabled’ have been more easily accepted as involuntarily out of work (Swaan 1990, Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971], Stone 1985 [1984]). The able-bodied unemployed and those not recognised as ‘disabled’ by the health professions and staff in social-insurance offices have had greater difficulties in justifying why they did not comply with the usual life-course expectations. As opposed to claimants recognised as ‘disabled’, these claimants have more easily been suspected of being ‘work-shy’ and being out of work by choice and without good cause. This prevalent observation has been in need of further differentiation: Among the ‘able-bodied’ claimants, evasion of institutional expectations appeared to be easier for some under certain societal circumstances than others, both when it came to justifying why they did not comply with expectations, negotiate access to continued benefits and services, and sustaining their symbolic capital (social respect). To what degree they succeeded in avoiding being labelled as work-shy and succeeded in justifying their claims varied.

### **Travellers: coding of culture as nature**

In comparison, the cultural assumptions about the temporariness of the Traveller status was at first glance a striking contrast to the able-bodied social-security claimants. But Travellers also contributed actively to negotiating the temporality of their status in interaction with the greater society. ‘Ethnicity’ has been regarded as a question of origin (past) but also of current identity (present). Thus, it has been open to tensions and efforts to construct links between these two temporal reference points.

Barth (1969) has suggested applying self-definition and recognition by others as the major criteria of ‘ethnicity.’ This includes both recognition from other status holders and from non-category members or “outsiders”. The group members have to identify themselves and be identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order. Advocating a more generative and relational perspective, he argued that one should focus more on the construction and maintenance of boundaries between social groups. Ethnic boundaries should be seen as the result of social processes of exclusion and inclusion whereby categorical cultural distinctions are generated (‘negotiated’) and maintained. By contrast, more ‘substantial’ perspectives have focused on objective cultural features and distinctive traits, but at the risk of seeing

ethnic groups as given and self-perpetuating and boundary maintenance as unproblematic. Generative and relational modes of thought have paid more attention to what is sociologically effective. Self-definition and recognition by others of a unity has sociological consequences even if the members are overtly different in their behaviour. As long as the actors claim they constitute a unit and agree on this and are willing to be regarded and treated by others as one, this constitutes a basis for organising interaction between people.

Barth's criteria were, however, conceived by the Travellers themselves as creating too vague and subjective boundaries and being too open to outsiders, especially to other peddlers and itinerants who had some outer similarities with Travellers in the traditional nomadic way of life. Allegedly, many people had tried to claim they were Travellers, but would not be recognised as such by "genuine" Travellers. The dominant criterion for the ascription of individuals to the Traveller category has been descent from a known and proved member of the category. One was considered born into the status. Travellers expressed a strong belief in blood relationship and common descent as symbols of who one considers a 'genuine' Traveller. This has been perceived as both essentially meaningful 'descriptions' of oneself, involving complex constructions that appear as self-evident, without the need of elaborated accounts, and instrumentally useful.

Many Travellers were eager to construct phyletic lines (family trees and so on) in efforts to trace the history of Travellers – especially their personal history – through time. In part, this resembles a more common concern; the occupation with developing tables of descent as past-oriented and individual self-reflective projects in the general population. This has represented construction work that to many people has appeared as meaningful and more or less self-evident as accounts of one's origin and who one is. People participate in different and separated areas, different and coexisting temporalities, each with their own rhythm (tempo) and logic. Information society, a more global economy, demands of mobility, re-education and reorientation in working life, and demands of availability ('flexibility') have led to more blurred social reference points. The diversity of experience has sometimes been perceived as challenges to construct a coherent and consistent self-identity. The focus on genealogy can be interpreted as one effort to seek coherence and consistency in personal life despite diversity of experience, as efforts to define personality in more absolutist terms, seeking



purity and clarity. One's personal identity or self-identity is defined by referring to the past, different from identities defined and meaningful only in given social positions on more or less specialised and separated social arenas. Following Touraine (2000), one could argue that people in the information society have increasingly come to define themselves in terms of what one *is* and not what one does. Hence, claims to absolutist identities have become more important.

In part, it was seen as easier and more clear-cut to follow kin back in time compared to tracing linguistic and cultural features through history. Hence, it was sometimes suggested that one should apply DNA tests to determine once and for all who were of Traveller origin. Whereas the cultural features have changed and been modified, the biological links could be perceived as persistent against societal changes and thus representing continuity and stability.

The leader of the Romani People's National Association once mentioned that he had asked a person whether he was a Traveller. The other person had answered that he used to be one, but was not anymore. This was conceived as a ridiculous statement. In the case of Travellers, the idea of a *permanent* membership has worked to strengthen the internal community among Travellers ("something you cannot run away from"). Whether one was actually travelling or otherwise maintaining the cultural heritage was perceived as less constitutive of who one was. This made it possible to construct continuity or persistence in Travellers' history despite societal changes and decreasing or weakening cultural differences.

On other occasions, differences in culture and life style were naturalised and coded in ways reminiscent of racial assumptions and thus appeared to be 'natural', given as part of a natural order, inflexible and outside what one could choose. Informants claimed that the desire to travel was inborn ("become restless in the spring") and they had human qualities different from other Norwegians; more hot-tempered, but also more easily forgiving, and more musical and emotional compared to others (cf. also Dyrliid and Bjerkan 1999). People who had become aware of their Traveller origin in adulthood claimed they had shared much of the same emotions and temper and had come to understand why they had felt different from 'settled people' during childhood. The social world was transformed into a natural order or natural world. Boundary maintenance was made more absolute by coding this as nature or naturalising the claimed differences. This also served as justification of the target group, as one could

argue that one was victim of circumstances outside one's control. But to argue that the qualities were innate or biological conditions became a double-edged sword, as one had historically been exposed to other forms of social control; eugenic measures and sterilisation (Fodstad 2000, Haave 2000a).

The significance attributed to biology sometimes stood in temporal tension to how long they had known about their biological kin, for how long they had considered themselves Travellers and had been recognised by other Travellers as such. There was distance between birth and self-identification as temporal reference points for one's Traveller status. If there was a longer distance in time between the two reference points, this demanded considerable reconstruction of one's life history. The autobiography had to be reinterpreted on the basis of the new information. Travellers often spoke about "coming out of the closet" as Travellers. This implied self-identification, disclosure and recognition of formerly concealed kinship to others. Sociologically speaking, 'coming out of the closet' represented new recruitment to the category. One came back to "one's own people". 'Coming out' referred first and foremost to the initial self-identification to some others, especially other self-identified Travellers, independently of how freely one later distributed information about one's status. According to this interpretative scheme, one did not 'become' a Traveller through processes of self-definition and other-definition, but 'discovered' that one was one. Although previously sociologically ineffective, biological kin was interpreted as *prima facie* evidence and a signifier of one's 'true self,' who one "really" was and in retrospect had been all the time.

In practice, self-identification and recognition by others was more effective and played a larger role than one could have assumed. Some people passively ignored or actively refused to attribute significance to the background and identity of their biological kin and turned this into a basis for their own self-understanding and self-presentation, or considered this insignificant. This was sometimes interpreted as 'self-denial' or labelled as 'closet Travellers' by self-identified Travellers. The criticism and disappointment especially concerned people who had been successful in greater society and could have been 'good' representatives of Travellers ("role models"). The same criticism did not apply to their own children, although several informants regretted that they would probably not come to see themselves as Travellers. In other cases, recently identified Travellers claimed they had discovered that others in the local community had known about their Traveller origin long before themselves. When there was

discrepancy, the signifier or information was less meaningful and relevant as a basis for interaction, or at least less likely to be sociologically effective as an organising basis for interaction when people did not act on the basis of the same information or did not share problem understanding.

In other cases, only the individual person knew about his or her background. If he identified himself as a Traveller only to himself and no one else, this should be considered an individual fate and not sociologically operative (cf. Simmel 1971 [1906]). This also emphasises the importance of existential choice, whether one chooses to make the information or knowledge relevant. The extreme case was that neither the person concerned nor any others were aware of the possible interpretations. This had been the situation of several recently identified Travellers. In such a case, one would not be a Traveller in a sociological sense.

### **The temporal dimension of attachment to the organisation**

From previous theorisation and reports, I expected to find differences between claimants and Travellers in attachment to the organisational efforts. My assumption was that I would find time-limited attachment among claimants and more durable attachment among Travellers. In conjunction with this, Piven and Cloward (1979 [1977]) had reported that the local activity among claimants tended to diminish as the respective individuals had solved their personal economic problems and their personal interest in the membership had evaporated.

*Claimants:* The process data gave ample opportunity to see expressions of the participants' time perspective in what they actually did or generally told about their life situation or were occupied with even though I had not asked directly about this.<sup>7</sup> The informants' practices shed light on their statements about their association with the organisation, and the discrepancies between perceived or stated and actual duration of the attachment. Some of the core activists I interviewed left the organisational efforts during the data-collection process. Others remained associated with the organisation, although they repeatedly stated they "were about to leave" (unsolicited accounts). In

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<sup>7</sup> In theory, I could have asked people more directly about their time perspective, but this would not necessarily have given more elaborated accounts. Solicited accounts tended sometimes to lead to oversimplified statements and idealisation, even rejection of the problem as significant. Moreover, the informants would not always have considered their attachment to the organisation in the same terminology or level of abstraction as developed and applied in the research literature. Arguably, 'unobtrusive measures' could in these cases be seen as preferable.

other cases, informants pulled out during periods of vocational training, subsidiary and unreported income-providing activities and employment, but repeatedly returned to the organisation.

#### **Some exits from the claimants' organisations**

The informant had to call the social-services office before we started the interview. He excused himself: "I don't usually go to the social-services office. I work, but just now the social-services office was going to pay the rent for me. They haven't paid it yet and then I received an eviction notice from the sheriff (*namsmannen*). I have always paid on time. Now I'm going to renovate a loft. I work here just now. Somebody has to take care of business here too. (NN) is attending a vocational training course in how to establish new enterprises now. So he isn't here during the daytime just now. I live a bit on the edge. I don't always have so much money. I visit the social-services office at times."

(From an interview with a male cadre in the Poor House, April 1997. He worked as a carpenter. He had children and lived together with a new girlfriend. In addition to downplaying his association with both the organisation and the social-services office, he also expressed a view of both welfare dependency and affiliation with the organisation as temporary and sporadic. He left in 1998 after he was employed as a caretaker. Born in the 1950s.)

"I became unemployed on 1 January '95 because my (workplace) was closed down. After 10 months I couldn't get a rehabilitation allowance anymore and I didn't want to apply for a disability benefit. I've sold everything that can be sold. Eventually I was summoned to the social-services office. It was after the electricity had been turned off. Now it has become a lifestyle. So I don't know whether I would accept a job if I were offered one. I have turned 56 now. There are few employers who want a 56-year-old. I reacted quite neurotically against applying for a disability benefit. The doctor said I had to realise that. Maybe I have realised that I can receive and not only give. Darn. I've worked so much overtime and voluntarily without payment that I could accept a disability benefit."

(From interview with a female cadre in the Poor House, August 1996. She was one of the most active ones in 1995-96, and more or less lived at the Poor House during that phase. She moved out of town after she was granted a disability benefit, as living expenses were lower in the countryside. She then left and continued to develop her interests in textile design, which she had worked with before. She occasionally turned up at meetings at the Poor House after this, and also appeared in the media as a representative of the poor or working with the poor. She was born in 1940, previously a member of the Conservative Party, divorced and had adult children.)

"I have realised that I at least have to start taking care of my own life. I can probably take the experiences with me from here, work experience as they call it. Now I don't want to go in that direction (organisational work). If I don't move on I'll be stuck here. I've been almost schizophrenic about this. In the worst moments. I just want out and away from this. It's hard only to give and not get any fuel. On the other hand, I know that what we do is very important. That keeps me going. But I have to take care of myself and then I necessarily will have to pull out a bit."

(From phone call with a male cadre in the Fredrikstad Client Action, May 1996. He worked with individual cases in their office during 1992-96. Left in the autumn of 1996 after the labour-exchange office demanded back payment of NOK 88 000. Former artist, single, no children, born in the 1950s.)

Many participants invested little in the development of the organisation as such and pursued their own interests as perceived by the individual claimant. In this respect,

many of them acted more as the “clientele” (“users”) than the operating personnel of the organisation. Some people chose to withdraw when they had been granted a disability benefit, providing a more or less permanent solution to their financial distress. One could have assumed that more predictable personal financial circumstances would have made it easier to become involved in the organisation. But a disability benefit gave them the opportunity to pursue other interests and activities they had developed before they got in touch with the self-organisational effort or developed during that period.

A temporary time perspective pushed users or members of the organisations to seek contact with appropriate organisations to change their own individual status (individual mobility), rather than seeking improvements for the category as a whole (collective mobility). A significant proportion of the members in the organisations appeared mainly to be concerned about how the organisations could help *them* solve their personal problem. The members were primarily concerned with improving their own status. The participants did not only become passive users or ‘consumers’ of the services offered by the organisations, they also developed a short-term and instrumental relationship to the organisation.

As we have seen, the claimants’ organisations offered individual help to a varying degree. Development of self-help activities and alternative welfare services had been important in legitimising the organisation in relation to the public authorities and potential users and participants. The organisation representatives adapted to what they believed other category members and the social and political elites expected of them. Especially in cases where it was considered that the status would be temporary, it was important to ensure legitimacy for the organisations’ activities by developing activities and services which could help change the status of the members and reduce their dependency on public assistance. This contributed to limiting the users’ involvement in the organisation. In the next instance this undermined the recruitment of cadres and made the organisations more vulnerable.

*The Losers’ Association:* The organisation concentrated on helping its members with their personal cases. Adopting the claimants’ instrumental relationship as perceived by the organisation representatives, they charged fees in return for assistance. If people wanted help, they had to pay an administration fee (NOK 900) in addition to the membership fee before their case would be taken on (June 2001). If the case was transferred to a solicitor, there were additional costs. The organisation representatives

probably also contributed to increasing people's expectations of a straightforward economic compensation. In one case I followed, the claimant wanted to leave the organisation before the organisation had applied on his behalf for financial compensation for lack of education during childhood. The employee at the office then raised doubts as to whether one could apply for compensation without using professionals, and the solicitor referred to a prior successful applicant who had received NOK 250 000 after help from them. The Secretary General also regularly sought to arrange a press conference after each successful application. This contributed to considerable media attention for the organisation, especially in the local press. Thus, it is probably reasonable to assume that the leadership created expectations of financial compensation in the those who were seeking help. When applications were successful, the applicant was encouraged to grant a certain percentage of the awarded amount to the organisation.

*The Job-seekers' Interest Organisation:* People were recruited to the local boards to develop job opportunities for themselves, thus making the local branches more likely to be time limited and more similar to self-help groups. On the other hand, the two somewhat more permanent centres they managed to establish were financed by public means assumed to meet permanent or lasting challenges to society ("centres for voluntary work"). Although they emphasised activation of the claimants, the two local centres in practice served more as social arenas to meet others and break with social isolation.

The one centre that was successful in recruiting people was run in co-operation with an association of people with mental health problems, and to a great extent used by people receiving disability benefits and/or suffering from mental-health problems. Four men with learning difficulties and mental-health problems used the workplace for those who did not fit in regular vocational training or required a sheltered workshop. Hence it was claimants with a more permanent status or small prospects to return to the regular labour market who came to use the services on a more lasting basis. These were people who allegedly were not provided for by the regular public services.

Those who remained active in the organisational efforts had skills to articulate needs and organise, but did not have knowledge and experiences in great demand, skills or qualities other people were willing to pay for. Their expertise was not easily converted into paid work. Several of the cadres were in their fifties (qualifications seen

as outdated, inflexible and so on), or had health or social problems that did not qualify for a disability benefit. People who represented qualifications and experiences that were easily traded in the mainstream labour market (“people with resources”) tended to leave first or had never joined in the first place.

To summarize, actual or expected individual upward mobility appeared to make collective mobility more difficult and to undermine the community system. It appeared that if the status or condition was perceived as significant for one’s future, rather than the past, one was more inclined to invest in the status, and develop vested interests in improved life chances for the category of people at large.

### **Concluding discussion: Did time matter?**

Merton (1984) gave us a too deterministic view. Formally and informally sanctioned interpretative schemata influenced, but did not determine, the temporariness of the problem understanding among the disadvantaged. The temporality of the problem understanding emerged as more of an issue of negotiations than implicit in Merton’s writing. There was no total correspondence in time perspectives between higher- and lower-level actors, society’s elites and the disadvantaged. Although it is important to assess what premises the strategies or practices of local actors will be based on, Merton (ibid.) overstated the degree to which higher-level actors structured the actions and time perspectives of lower-level actors. The disadvantaged were active shapers of their conditions. Although time was a more outspoken concern or issue as regards claimants of income maintenance benefits, Travellers also actively contributed to constructing the temporality of the problem understanding. They used the cultural tools and repertoire they had available to temporarily structure their life experience, justify that their status was permanent or excuse themselves from temporary expectations. Both among claimants and Travellers this had both interest and identity-political aspects.

In comparison, Strauss (1988 [1978], 1993), situating himself within the Chicago interactionist school, may have over-communicated the fluidity, opportunities for negotiations and changing relationships among actors, and under-communicated the power bias and prior structuration of the social and cultural opportunities for negotiating with the political elites, bureaucracy and the mass media. Although Strauss (ibid.) did not exclusively focus on lower-level processes, there was less of an account of the

relations between situations or elements that constitute durable meaning and interaction systems. Hence, the ‘negotiated order perspective’ has had problems grasping the challenges posed by social and cultural structures.

In accordance with the symbolic interactionist perspective, Strauss (*ibid.*) asserted that prior decisions, legislation and customs (“rules”) were claimed only to be sociologically effective if the actors perceived, experienced and defined them as significant in the present. Definition of the situation was claimed to be the crucial mechanism for maintenance and change in relations. This has, however, fallen into a subjectivist fallacy by ignoring the objective constraints upon human action (Merton 1976: 174 ff.). First, people cannot define the situation just as they please. As Kane (1997) has argued, meaning systems have internal structures that work against manipulation of symbols and reinforce the durability in culture-systems of meaning. For instance, claimants could not easily present themselves as an oppressed minority. Second, a one-sided subjectivist perspective does not take into account the constraints placed upon claimants’ and Travellers’ actions by issues such as economic resources, health, geographic distance, organisational skills and social networks. These are features of consequence for the participants’ relationship to each other and the organisations, even if the actors themselves do not define them as such.

There are also reasons to differentiate the hypotheses previously suggested by Lysgaard (1985 [1961]). As opposed to my initial hypothesis, there was no simple relationship between the temporality of the status and organisational attachment. In this chapter, I have argued that we can identify transition phases in which attachment to the organisational efforts are perceived as more meaningful, even in some cases of a status conceived as nearly permanent. The participants’ trajectories crossed each other before they moved on and departed. The organisations worked as a context for self-reflection and self-development or reorientation even in cases of a perceived permanent status. The organisations served as temporary arenas for pursuing one’s own problems, agendas, interests and needs, as perceived by the individual participant. Thus, the participants followed individual path dependencies. Those with most ‘resources’ left the organisation first, established other networks, had other statuses and identities to draw on, established themselves in other areas, and became self-sufficient or independent in a broad sense. However, in our cases, organisational efforts based on perceived permanent statuses had more paying members, and the participants more often tended to



remain passive members, more similar to charity but also as an investment in their future. In such cases, a permanent status led to more human and moral capital for the organisations.



## **Part IV**

### **Between the organisational efforts and representatives of greater society**



## **The charisma of the centre: The relationship between the organisation participants and the elites**

This chapter asks what social costs the achievements vis-à-vis the greater society could have on the part of the organisations. I trace which mechanisms decided whether the organisation participants achieved a dialogue with the social, religious, political or administrative elites. Moreover, I discuss whether this should be interpreted as inclusion, subordination or co-optation: Which factors structured access to government? Was the emerging relationship characterised by dependency or autonomy on the part of the organisations? The preceding chapters have considered how the member categories' relations to public officials were reflected in and affected their "internal" relations. This chapter examines the direct relations between the organisation participants and the elites. Here I consider more extensively the consequences for their external actions. As part of this, I explore the structuring of the relations, what resources were needed, the modes of competence and interaction that counted and the possible social costs involved on the part of the organisation participants.

### **Relations between centre and periphery**

In the 1950s, Edward Shils (1982) presented one of the more explicit and elaborate images of society as one of centre-periphery structure. Different sectors or subsystems of modern society have separate centres with a varying degree of centrifugal power or charisma. In some cases, elites consult each other and co-ordinate their decisions, or act as a unitary whole. In other cases they have become more segmented. Actors in the core sectors of society express and sustain the dominant values and beliefs considered central or even necessary to the integrated society, and tend to consider themselves responsible and as playing a key role in maintaining the value system. Shils described actors at the periphery as less attached to and affirmative of the central value systems, and less appreciative of authorities.

Later, Johan Galtung (1964) pursued similar ideas in his work on foreign-policy opinion as a function of social position. Social distance from the centre of society appeared to influence or be associated with different modes of communicating and talking about the social world and modes of orientation and conceiving it. There appeared to be greater differences in *how* opinions were held than in which opinions people at the centre and periphery actually held. Galtung asserted that tendencies towards ‘absolutism’ permeated the periphery and ‘gradualism’ the centre of society. Differences in social cosmologies were characterised on a continuum from moralist to pragmatist, and revolutionist to reformist attitudes. In the periphery, there will be demands for absolute change and change defined as a moral problem of will. Political expressions will be protest, denial and accusations. Change should be implemented dogmatically and according to the programme. In comparison, the decision makers at the centre will seek gradual change and small-scale experiments when introducing change. Proposals will be concrete and change defined as an instrumental problem of feasible means.

Differences in social cosmology were explained by several factors: The discrepancy between ideal and reality tends to be larger at the periphery. The periphery has been institutionally rejected by advocates of the dominant social order. In return, the periphery may reject that social order, as a form of what we could call mutual exclusion. The centre has vested interests in the existing social order. Decision makers will also be pressured to focus on and solve the immediate problems. Knowledge about decision-making processes and experiences that count in the centre and what are the pertinent and socially acceptable means will be scarcer at the periphery.

More recently, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998a [1994]) essay on the genesis and structure of the ‘bureaucratic field’ can be interpreted much in line with this kind of reasoning and image of society. Even if there in some respects are several and partly overlapping centres and centrifugal powers that attract different actors, the state is in a special position. Reformulating Max Weber’s conceptualisation, Bourdieu suggested defining the state as an institution X to be empirically determined by that which “successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical and *symbolic* violence over a definite territory and over the totality of the corresponding population” (ibid. 40, his emphasis). Concentration of different capital forms – physical power, economic means, information and authority – reinforced their stronger position in

struggles for monopolising the capacity of representing universal values and the public good, and maintaining a metaposition in relation to other fields. Emphasising the symbolic power of the state nobility, he stressed how the social world has been created (“constructed”) through nomination processes and the dominant visions, often presented as disinterested and value-neutral actions, and maintained through the sanctioning of it by actors who acted *ex officio*.

The ability to move in the bureaucratic field with success requires a feeling of the game. Bureaucratic capital has evolved into an important type of resource for generating results in the welfare-policy field. It is a form of competence and skill to act and present one’s case in a manner that complies with the *modus operandi* of the politico-administrative system (“bureaucracy”). Mastering bureaucratic interaction requires knowledge about the political agenda and legislation, and about the way political institutions and public administration function. This has included knowledge of the division of duties between branches of the civil service. The actors must possess the ability to formulate themselves in a language which is considered neutral, detached, balanced and factual, be perceived as non-controversial, and remember the names of the central actors. There must be awareness that oral statements do not have official status, as they cannot be filed or referred to later on. Written applications, communications and agreements are required. Written communication formulated in a less bureaucratic way – such as open protests, appeals or accusations – are considered “noise” in the politico-administrative channel.

The bureaucratic capital type is structured by *social closeness* to the political elites. As opposed to victim capital, this demands proximity to and contact with the government. This depends on a certain degree of recognition of the organisation representatives by political elites. Bureaucratic skills or competence are developed through negotiations with the public administration and are almost antithetical to acting as an object or victim, as it requires confidence in one’s own abilities and opportunities to influence the decision processes. One has to present oneself as ‘serious’ and ‘responsible’. Developing close ties to central actors and first-hand knowledge about development of the welfare-policy agenda are likely to affect the faith in the established political system and the desire to participate in and have an impact on this system.

Schaffer and Huang (1975) argued that several factors help to structure the relationship between public administration and the individual citizens, ‘clients’ or

beneficiaries of welfare-policy measures. According to these authors, actual distribution chances tend to be influenced by the individual resources one possesses and the administrative allocation system one experiences. One must have the resources to demonstrate eligibility, present claims that are persistent with existing rules and provide the relevant information. Those with low disposal income, little education, low status, influence and access to information are less likely to be able to make use of public services. This was conceived as consequential for the ways in which resources are distributed and the kind of links that developed between the centre and the periphery.

In the encapsulated society, those conceived as in need of help and assistance do not come forward as applicants. In the adaptive society, the applicants play an active role in determining the public good, initiating further services and shaping the welfare-policy measures. Schaffer and Huang focused on the intermediary situations where the individual claimants have to adopt strategies to achieve what they want. Problems of access were more likely to emerge in complex than simple access structures. In such cases, the bureaucratic administrative distribution system was characterised by imperfections that were likely to contribute to reproduction or reinforcement of social inequalities.

In a Norwegian context, Bleiklie *et al.* (1989 [1979]) elaborated on the perspective of Schaffer and Huang (*ibid.*). In addition to the barriers to approaching the public services, priority problems and transaction problems in interaction with welfare functionaries, they argued that there are differences in participation from groups and organisations in determining the public good. By focusing more on the shaping of the qualifying, priority and transaction rules, they wanted to account for systematic differences in resources as the outcome of complex processes. Interest organisations that participate in designing the public policy are more likely to achieve services that benefit the group. However, Bleiklie *et al.* (*ibid.*) did not explore the structuration of access to public administration on the organisational level. They appeared to assume that the same mechanisms were operative as on the individual level.

### **Ambivalence to contact with the government**

Horizontal ordering of society appeared to have extensive consequences for the category members' positioning in relation to society's elites. In our cases, perception of



the government was initially influenced by a large social distance. At the same time, our process data suggested that there were transformations and change in the organisation participants' perception of the political, religious and social elites. Especially among Travellers, it became evident that the organising attempts differed with regard to the extent to which they managed to expand and accumulate resources and develop co-operation with public officials. Differences between the organising attempts within the Traveller category appeared almost as ideal-typical contrasts of mobilisation and demobilisation processes.

Isaiah Berlin (1969) distinguished between positive and negative freedom, which may be considered as two different strategies for attaining self-control and are connected with different positioning with regard to society's elites. Negative freedom is a coping strategy to avoid inspection, control and interference from others. Positive freedom is a strategy to seek influence and co-determination and to be involved in deciding the community good, including designing and implementing the welfare-policy measures.

Our data suggested that there was a large degree of switching between negative and positive freedom as ideal-typical positions on the part of the organisation participants. On the one hand they wanted to avoid contact and "manage on their own". On the other hand they demanded compensation, redress and assistance. This was not a univocally passive shelter of life experience and identities (the "lifeworld"), characterised by withdrawal or protection against welfare-policy measures or market forces. Neither was it an univocal movement towards the state which previously has been construed as a definition criterion of social movements (Tilly 1984, 1993).

The ambiguity of welfare-policy measures, both as assistance and control, appeared to amplify the ambivalence of assistance recipients and the target groups as to contact with the elites. Government representatives control access to the dominant or authorised view of society, recognition and economic support, and have the power to introduce changes of great significance to the people concerned. But as many users and participants from the disadvantaged member categories mistrusted and experienced social distance to the public authorities, they tended to be ambivalent to attempts to seek co-operation with these bodies.

*Travellers:* To begin with, mistrust in public officials was substantial, and the consequences of co-operation with the public authorities was perceived as

unpredictable, and having opaque and inconceivable consequences. At the same time, the organisation representatives wanted to receive recognition from representatives of the politico-administrative system. After a seminar where, among others, the Secretary of State to the Ministry of Culture was present, one board member said:

“Imagine what our forefathers would have said if they had experienced this day. To them government ... If they wanted to talk to a member of the government, they were arrested. ‘You damn *tater*, pack off!’ Now they came one-by-one and wanted to give us a hug. We had an enormously constructive dialogue with them. It is so wonderful to feel inside that we have done them right. We have pulled them up from the dirt we have always been in. Those who really fought for us, they had it much tougher than we did. There are many people here who have had a tough time, but we must stress that in one way we have much better lives. Before, it was not a question of whether they wanted to go out and do something. They had to, winter and summer. Moreover, they were hunted. It’s hard. Then I thought that, if only mum and dad were alive, grandma and grandpa. We have bashed our heads against so many walls now, I said. That when we get through this concrete wall, the landscape is wide open, the road is open” (from group interview with the board of the Romani People’s National Association, June 1997).

There were different opinions both in the Romani People’s National Association and between leaders of the different organisation attempts about whether they should seek co-operation and a dialogue, negotiate step-wise solutions and partial victories. The ambivalence towards co-operation was not only the Travellers’ subjective feelings, but built into their social position (Merton 1976: 3-31). If the organisation participants became involved in the design of welfare-policy measures, they would to a lesser extent be able to decline responsibility for the situation and present themselves as victims of circumstances outside of their control. Whereas they wanted recognition from representatives of official Norway, co-operation could imply new forms of discipline. The organisation representatives have had to adapt to the bureaucratic mode of interacting. Assistance from outside supporters and the government gives outsiders an opportunity to attain knowledge about the intra-group relations, possibly inspection and surveillance. Hence, as dominated and a target of public concern and attention, Travellers fluctuated between expressing a desire to avoid interference and seeking co-operation and a dialogue. But the ambivalence and scepticism appeared to decline as the consequences have been more transparent, they had established contact and a dialogue and developed trust relationships.

We observed a similar ambivalence among *claimants of social-security benefits*: Several participants were uncertain about the consequences if they applied for financial support from the government. They would rather choose to stand outside and confront

the government. Experiences of surveillance, paternalism and social control by welfare agencies created a need for a sphere for autonomy and shelter, to avoid inspection and interference from representatives of greater society or the government. Willingness to seek compromises and co-operation was construed as weakness. They would be loyal to their position, immovable, and keep to their beliefs and demands (“will not sell our soul”). They claimed it was not an important goal to be accepted by politicians. At the same time, or fluctuating with this, they complained that they were excluded from participation. Consequently, the efforts at seeking co-operation were not given a high priority, the efforts were few and far between or only in part followed up.

*The Fredrikstad Client Action* was invited to take part in a municipal consultative group of users of the social services provided by the local authorities. The main activist was, however, reluctant to participate, and claimed that they could be exploited and used by the municipality to legitimise the local social policy (“hostage”). However, they published an authorised information leaflet on social services in co-operation with the local authorities. The Fredrikstad Client Action was also represented in a municipal committee that was going to suggest new local standards for social-assistance programmes. On other occasions, the main activist claimed that it was useless to seek contact with and financial support from the government. They should rather seek to disrupt politicians’ meetings and make them feel uncertain and uncomfortable. This was presented as an effort to avoid disciplining, co-optation or normalisation. The main activist in the Fredrikstad Client Action sometimes expressed that he was satisfied if he had managed to destroy or spoil a debate. It was seen as successful if they had managed to disrupt the social order without presenting an alternative (‘disruption without alternative’, Mathiesen 1980 [1977]).

In our cases, similar coping strategies were used against ‘peers’. This was especially evident in the Fredrikstad Client Action. When new claimants contacted them and expressed interest in becoming involved, these appeared to be put in their place, pushed away or kept at a distance (“misunderstood everything”, “ignorant”, “do not pay attention”, “too occupied with getting a job”). When there were possibilities for making alliances and mobilising others, the internalised barriers became more evident. The remaining activists appeared to be entrenched in a victim position. This became more apparent when we compare with the development paths in the Travellers’ organisations.

## Negative and positive spiral effects

We could have assumed that a self-presentation as victim only would be associated with withdrawal from and social distance to public authorities. Although the use of victim capital and bureaucratic capital implied different types of self-presentations and positioning in relation to staff in public administration and politicians, victim capital could under certain circumstances be converted into bureaucratic capital. This became especially evident in the differences between the *Travellers'* organisations, as they were in possession of a significant degree of victim capital:

Use of the victim status as a resource was fluctuating and context dependent. The same person sometimes exaggerated his or her politeness and gratitude. Such forms of making oneself smaller and demonstrating submission were associated with a self-presentation as victim (“worked against”, “isolated”, “have no money”) and demonisation of others; for instance, Travellers presented former employees in the Norwegian Mission for the Homeless as perverse and sadists. This was sometimes swiftly replaced by quite another approach: Organisation representatives demanded to be involved and to receive immediate financial support and assistance. Participants adopted coping strategies such as intimidation, ridicule, self-assertion (idealisation of oneself), opinionated reproaches, pointing to how others did not live up to their own moral standards or rules, and threats about discrediting people (“stir trouble”). The latter approach could be interpreted as a sign that many Travellers refused to become subordinated and disciplined, or administrated by others, but had decided to speak up and resist. These kinds of coping strategies could sometimes be associated with immediate benefits and short-term victories (Arnstberg 1998: 175). However, there was a great deal of evidence to suggest that the coping strategies created greater social distance, increased social isolation and reluctance from others, even peers, and locked the participants in a victim position rather than liberating them from it.

The reluctance associated with such coping strategies could be interpreted as the outcome of a failure to live up to expectations of gratitude and subordination on the part of organisation participants in return for help, acceptance and indulgence from better-positioned actors (Merton, Merton and Barber 1983). However, similar coping strategies were adopted and led to similar reactions among other Travellers. There was therefore reason to consider the coping strategies as expressions of an entrenched victim position, even a victim *mentality*, implying that the organisation’s participants as a point

of departure assumed that they being undermined by others and doomed to failure (fatalism).

Participants in one of the organisation efforts managed for a period during the early 1990s to achieve considerable sympathy and public attention about the issues they raised. They received economic support from the government to publish and distribute information about the situation of Travellers in the present and the atrocities they had been subjected to in the past. Later, the media coverage was more fluctuating. Much of the support and sympathy they initially received had diminished. The activists claimed it was because they had been undermined and misunderstood by others for no reason. The entire responsibility for the situation was attributed to others; it was *the others* who refused to co-operate or listen to them, who were difficult, capricious, erratic and so on.

In some cases, the activists were initially hostile and suspicious of people they had never met before. In other instances, they sought to de-legitimise former working partners and collaborators, both among Travellers and others who initially had been sympathetic to and supported the organising effort, as they no longer gave unconditional support to the activists or complied with their demands and requests. Former partners among Travellers were branded as not “true” Travellers and disqualified to have opinions (“do not know the culture”, “do not know Romani”, “did not travel with their parents during childhood”). Previously sympathetic outsiders were claimed to advocate pejorative and misinformed representations of Travellers (“say we come from the gutter”, “know nothing”, “have misunderstood everything”) and accused of not being independent (“bought by the government”). However, these efforts at discrediting people easily backfired on the activists and contributed to increasing their isolation. Many came to experience the activists as impossible to co-operate with, threatening and difficult to relate to. In the next instance, this made the activists more aggressive and confrontational in their dealings with others. In several respects, the activists’ perception of others appeared to have become a self-fulfilling assumption (*a negative spiral effect*).

Almost as an ideal-typical contrast to this, the *Romani People’s National Association* managed to mobilise external moral support and contributions to the organisation building (counselling, establishing connections, secretary functions) from academics who acted as outside supporters, and eventually financial support from the central government. The victim status – emphasised by the self-presentation as an

oppressed minority – was to a great extent converted into concrete human and financial resources. The number of members and external supporters expanded, relations of trust developed, and opportunities for participation and consultation increased. As they managed to document results in publications, exhibitions, meetings and social events, this opened up for new opportunities, increased the dialogue with the public authorities and eventually also brought them more generous financial support (cf. Chapter 1). By consulting and using external advisors, the board managed to meet the requirements from the central government to formulate applications and reports and to keep their books in order. In this respect, the organisation adapted to the conventional modes of interaction in public administration. This provided the basis for a stepwise expansion of the organisation activity, and increased the number of members and support (*a positive spiral effect*).

Initially, the Romani People's National Association felt that they received little understanding and support. On repeated occasions we were told about the applications they had sent to government ministries and the rejections they had received. The early applications had been brief and presented in an oral form, as one would have formulated them in a conversation, and did not comply with the requirements for detailed budgets and the provision of valid reasons to justify the claims. The participants demanded demonstrative goodwill and support. But the demand for demonstrative loyalty and unconditional expression of support (absolutism) stood in contrast to the demands in the bureaucratic field of reservation and not expressing more than one has the authority to, and a more gradualist and conditional expression of support (discussions of pros and cons, partial concession and reservation).

Early in the organisation's existence, the chairperson expressed: "The Government is our worst enemy" (*Østlendingen*, 14 November 1995). Government ministries, the parliament, public offices and universities were all perceived as part of the same system *en bloc*, in one word referred to as "the Government" ("*Regjeringen*"). The perception of the public authorities was influenced by the great social distance. As the organisation managed to increase the dialogue with and support from the civil servants, politicians, staff in universities and university colleges, the museum sector and the Church of Norway, the perception of the political, social and religious elites became more differentiated. They were to a lesser extent regarded as a co-ordinated unit, and actors appeared to a greater extent as individuals with different positions and opinions.

## **Laughter from the back bench**

*The Romani People's National Association:* We could have assumed that the organisation's members would have been servile and submitted to the authority attributed to researchers, especially as we provided assistance and advocacy of their case in their contact with the central government. However, they did not keep themselves in check. For instance, during a 1999 press conference where a number of research reports on the former assimilation policy were presented, the board members seated themselves in the back of the conference room. They commented on what was said freely among themselves and interrupted the speakers to express their own views on issues outside the agenda set by the Research Council. One board member complained about a report that had not yet been presented to the journalists present. First, the report was rejected as "rubbish" and "scandalous" (absolutism). This was later moderated to complaints that he had been too easily recognised by his own children who had read the report. As an alternative or additional account, one could have regarded this as an expression of unfamiliarity with the order expected in formal meetings. More importantly in our context, the organisation participants did not adjust to how others present subsumed to the set agenda. When asked by journalists what they thought about the research reports the board members laughed among themselves. They were not easily impressed ("we have known this all the time").

At the end of the press conference, a well-known journalist had been invited to present his comments on the research reports. He was generally positive, but made some critical remarks as a response to how one researcher had talked about the description of Travellers in the mass media. In a later break in the programme, this journalist was approached by one of the board members from the Travellers' association. He had pointed a finger at the journalist's breast and asked in a rather threatening manner what the journalist had against this researcher and the work he had done for them.

On the one hand, research and production of authorised knowledge was seen as a nuisance, as tedious procedures, vague expressions, impenetrable texts and inspection. On the other hand, they were able to use the research reports on the former assimilation policy in negotiations on recognition and redress with the religious and political elites.

On other occasions, they expressed their own superiority and appeared as masters in their interactions with us (“we have exploited the researchers excessively”).

### **Adjustments from below**

I have argued that organisation participants among social-security claimants and Travellers were ambivalent about contact with the government. The Losers’ Association appeared to represent an exception to this, as the Secretary General to a lesser extent perceived himself as now being in a vulnerable position. Thus, there was a lesser risk associated with being involved in decision-making processes, an involvement in negotiations not perceived as a threat to one’s autonomy and less need for shelter against perceived hostile environments.

Holding much of the same high level of victim capital as Travellers organisations and similar to the positive spiral effect of the Romani People’s National Association, the *Losers’ Association* managed to mobilise more and more human and moral support from local people with connections to the political system and financial support from the government. Their informal contacts and acquaintances were helpful as gate openers and behind-the-scenes supporters. These were mostly solid members of the Norwegian Labour Party, eg. a former Member of Parliament and the Chief Administrative Officer of the county. The Losers’ Association had several meetings with the Minister of Social Affairs and the Parliament Committee on Social Affairs. The association sought co-operation with civil servants and political leaders in the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Church and Education. The organisation also applied for an audience with the King of Norway and received substantial media coverage of that event. When a new Prime Minister was elected in 2000, they managed to arrange a meeting to brief him about the organisation.

The adoption of officially legitimate forms of work, such as the hiring of authorised public accountants, may be interpreted as more significant in symbolic than in practical terms. Adjustment to and application of the easiest accessible exterior signs of a “serious”, “responsible”, and better-positioned organisation may serve as a means if one aspires to upward social mobility in the organisational hierarchy. Organisational efforts may also be promoted by imitating the structures and procedures of more



established organisations. This way, the organisation may gain legitimacy and financial support.

According to the Secretary General of the Losers' Association:

“With the national congress we proved that we're serious. We adopted the regulations and discussed the name rather thoroughly. (...) We are now sending letters to people saying that their cases will not be processed before September 1. We have to finish the cases we already have. They are cases which demand much documentation. They are heavy cases. The Ministries demand documentation. When people call, we ask for their personal information and what the main problem is (...) As an organisation we are aware of swindlers. We undertake investigations to check if we are dealing with real losers. As mentioned, we have a filtering process” (from interview with the Secretary General, June 1996).

The organisation representatives stressed that they presented modest demands to be taken seriously and operated within the limits decided by the parliament (“don't give the applicants false expectations”). In this sense, they disciplined themselves in order to be considered “serious”. The organisation sought to *professionalise* applications for symbolic compensation from the state in the sense of turning this into a profession demanding special expertise. The institution was originally intended to be a way of having direct communication with parliament, with a small amount of formal requirements and demands for documentation. However, the organisation argued that individual claimants benefited from using them rather than applying themselves. In this respect, they assumed similarities with a semi-public office. They performed much of the work to give priority to some cases and not others which otherwise were carried out by public offices. The organisation worked with the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to narrow their scope and which categories of people they should focus on and assist. In 1999, the Losers' Association was defined as a legal foundation. They then came under the accountancy of the state representative in the county (the county governor). This guaranteed that the finances were spent according to the statutes of the association. It was then easier to receive financial support from the state. However, the Secretary General continued to pursue an expansionist and confrontational approach, especially in the media and in public meetings. In this sense, he did not come under the fold or adjust to demands for clear-cut categorisation, and resisted self-limitation.

## **Conformity pressure from above**

When the organisations received financial support from the public authorities, this gave the central authorities the opportunity to keep contact and follow up the organisations. Receiving economic support from government meant that the door was opened to inspection in the areas where they had received financial support and to some degree of influencing which activities the organisations pursued in practice. Public officials have been under pressure to ensure accountability. To be able to account for public spending, government demanded that organisations should work at a certain bureaucratic level – by requiring a minimum set of rules, annual reports, an accountant, a board and an annual membership fee – as a condition for acknowledgement, co-operation and financial support. Government representatives also visited their office after they opened in order to inspect their ways of working. In this sense, the organisations experienced pressure to produce formal organisation documents and to a certain extent to develop a more bureaucratic organisation. Arguably, the formal requirements presented to the voluntary associations as regards filling in applications, accountancy, obligations to report back after they have been granted support, could in certain respects stand in opposition to the local, variable and informal commitment on the part of the organisation participants.

Representatives of the public authorities sometimes stated that it was preferable to keep in touch with the actors in the field (“keep an eye on what happens”). This could be interpreted as benevolent paternalism or control and discipline. When compared to those organisations that did not receive any support, the first account could appear as more reasonable. But from the perspective of organisation participants, who already had a low-trust relationship with public authorities, the latter interpretation appeared to be equally or more valid.

*In the Romani People’s National Association*, distribution of documents created bewilderment and much talk around the table during our meetings. The board members did not file or systematise documents distributed in meetings. Documents were not stored until the next meetings and organisational documents were not prepared and distributed before the meetings. It appeared that this was an unfamiliar mode of interaction for many of the board members. To some extent, the bureaucratic mode of operation appeared to stand in opposition to the spontaneity, the local and informal

initiatives from 'below', and the reasons for becoming involved with the organisation participants.

Interaction with bureaucracy served as a source of training and competence in communicating with the government and achieving results, but could also widened the social distance to their own members and users. This meant that their outlooks were more and more removed from their 'grassroots'. It appeared that the leader of the Romani People's National Association who had the most and the closest contact with various public authorities experienced this the most. One of the effects of his extensive contact and dialogue with the public authorities was that he was accused and suspected of representing the government or working undercover on behalf of the government against other Travellers (cf. Chapter 6).

In a similar vein, the archive in the Poor House was loosely organised. But as they received financial support from the municipality of Oslo (the local government had a Conservative majority), there were some formal requirements related to accountancy and annual reports on the activities. Financial support from the municipality to the Poor House appeared to have been granted on the condition that the participants focused on self-help activities rather than collective-interest politics. Representatives of the municipality of Oslo visited the Poor House and expressed their wish to obtain a better idea of what the organisation did. The then government Minister of Social Affairs, from the Centre Party (*Senterpartiet*), also visited the Poor House twice together with journalists to lend an ear to the 'poor' and 'socially excluded' (1995-99).

Developments of a more gradualist approach and increased bureaucratic capital among the leaders demanded that they could manage to switch between contexts and address regular members and users differently from the way they interacted with the government. For instance, the Secretary General of the Losers' Association developed a quasi-familiar relationship to some of the users, visited them at home and so on. Other organisation leaders were under similar pressure to manage to switch between modes of interaction.

Claimants' organisations which suffered from mis-recognition and a lack of financial support from the government, however, did not experience the same pressure to comply with formal requirements. Initially the Fredrikstad Client Action and the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation had attempted to play the game of more perennial interest organisations (adjustment from below). They had started as rather traditional

organisations with rules, a board and a general meeting, and stressed sending newsletters, organisation documents and minutes to the members in order to be democratic. Eventually they did not prioritise this. They received little or no public support for the organisation as such, and recruitment of participants and users was difficult and unstable.

Distance to the elites structured the access to bureaucratic capital. The social distance to the elites depended extensively on whether the disadvantaged were conceived as a threat to the society as a whole. This was an important precondition for their relative success and achievements vis-à-vis the greater society.

### **Neglect of Travellers' opinions during the assimilation regime**

In the past, the official knowledge about Travellers and the design of the former policy towards Travellers had to large extent been based on the accounts and public images presented by the Mission, the local child welfare office, local social services, and the police (Hartmann 1934, Circular from the Ministry of Justice and Police 1935). The Mission was considered to have the professional expertise and to be particularly qualified to give advice on the situation of Travellers to the government ministries (*Ot.prp.* no. 57 1951, *NOU* 1980: 42). The Mission also considered themselves as promoting Travellers' interests and acting as their spokesperson or ombudsman. Conversely, the Travellers' identity and interest claims were ridiculed and ignored (Pettersen 1997). Fragmentation and intra-group conflicts among Travellers made it easier for the Mission to claim to represent Travellers' interests and opinions.

One of the most striking examples of neglect of Travellers' views occurred in the second half of the 1970s. They were not represented in the public committee to evaluate the life situation of Travellers, the work performed by the Mission and new measures to enhance the integration of Travellers in Norwegian society (*NOU* 1980: 42). In a 1975 debate in the Norwegian parliament on an interpellation from MP Torild Skard, the Socialist Left Party, the then Minister of Social Affairs Tor Halvorsen, of the Social Democratic Party, expressed that "the interests these people have must be included, and they must be allowed to express their own views" (reproduced in *St.forh.* no. 481 23 April 1975, page 3515-29). The Secretary General in the Mission, Olav Bjørnstad, was appointed as a member of the public committee. The Ministry of Social

Affairs assumed that the Mission could assist in finding Travellers who could participate in the committee, but the Secretary General could “not immediately suggest any representatives” (*NOU* 1980: 42, page 8). The committee referred on their part to internal conflicts, an absence of homogeneity and formalised organisation among Travellers as reasons for why they had not “succeeded in finding any persons who naturally distinguished themselves as representatives of the itinerants” (*ibid.*). It appeared also that the committee to some extent had been perceived as an extension of the work performed by the Mission, and that many Travellers for such reasons avoided contact and did not turn up for appointments with the committee.

The public officials’ relationship to Traveller’s opinions changed, however, after Travellers were no longer regarded as a threat to the integrated society:

### **Growing ease in relation to Travellers (I position)**

An important precondition for the social movement mobilisation among Travellers since the early 1990s was the change in perception of Travellers among the public authorities of whether the lifestyle and values Travellers were considered to contradict the integration of society as a whole. Formerly, Travellers had not been considered as victims, but rather as a target group that needed to be followed up, controlled and helped to change their way of life. Their possible social problems were attributed to their “itinerant” lifestyle. This was reflected in the governments’ attribution of responsibility and guilt.

From 1979 to 1996, Travellers were not granted individual symbolic financial compensation for the lack of primary-school education. There was one case before 1979 in which a person of Traveller origin was granted symbolic financial compensation for loss of primary-school education (*St.prp.* no. 39 1977-78, page 14-15). In 1979, the Committee for Financial Compensation from the National Treasury (*Billighetserstatningsutvalget*) received ten applications and then formulated their report. Before this, one application had been declined in 1975. In 1979, the public committee granting the compensation (two Members of Parliament, one Supreme Court judge) argued that it had hardly been possible for the local education authorities to provide sufficient education for the “itinerant children” as they rarely stayed long enough in one place to make it possible. Thus, Travellers were not granted

compensation if they had not been particularly worse off compared to other Travellers (quoted in *St.prp.* no. 89, 1995-96, page 9). The public compensation committee argued that adult education was more important for improving the integration of Travellers in society. The assimilation policy was still not questioned and Travellers were themselves to blame for their social problems and marginal position.

Around the same time as the special, targeted measures against Travellers came to a close, disagreement emerged between the Ministry of Church and Education and the Ministry of Justice (*St.prp.* no. 12 1987-88). The question was whether the applicant should be compared to other Norwegian citizens in general, or if Travellers should be regarded as a particular and separate group. The Ministry of Church and Education argued that the state had a particular responsibility for the lack of equal opportunity in education. The Ministry of Justice and the public compensation committee argued, however, that Traveller's children should be compared to other children of Travellers. They argued that the insufficient education was only to a limited extent associated with negligence on the part of the public authorities and should be considered in connection with the way of life among Travellers' families. The Norwegian parliament supported the rejection of the applications (*Innst.S.* no. 40 1987-88; *St.forh.* no. 112 page 1667-68, 14 December 1987). It was another ten years before the majority of the parliament support the view expressed by the Ministry of Church and Education that the state and not the Traveller families was to blame if Travellers had received insufficient education:

“In our evaluation we have emphasised that all children have an unconditional right to education, and it is society's responsibility to guarantee this. Society has not managed to meet the special situation of Travellers' children, and the consequences of insufficient and a lack of training is significantly larger today than only a short time ago. The itinerant life has ended, but the itinerants live on. Insufficient and lacking training becomes a real obstacle to integration in the labour market, and economically and socially. They no longer have the security and community with their own people, but seek to hide their identity to be accepted in society. Therefore, they appear in many ways to have a more difficult time than many of they forefathers.” (Reproduced in *St.prp.* no. 89 1995-96, page 10).

*The Ministry of Church and Education* appeared to assume that not only were children of “itinerants” not to blame for their parents' former way of life, but the state should have provided forms of education that would have been compatible with Travellers' traditional form of life. The need for an adjusted school system was, however, assumed to have vanished. *The minority* of the public compensation committee (the Supreme Court judge) as well as the Member of Parliament from the Progress Party argued,

however, that the families should take the responsibility themselves for their children ending up worse off than other Norwegian children:

“It is the chairperson’s view that the argument that the families were hunted hardly has any relevance. The families travelled from place to place. This was the outcome of their lifestyle and a consequence of the fact that the demand for their goods or services decreased or terminated after some time. It can then not be decisive whether a family was driven away when they would have moved on the next week anyway. It should be added that it appears that those who wanted to settle succeeded in their efforts.” (Reproduced in *St.prp.* no. 89 1995-96, page 11).

“Of course, children of Travellers have always had and have the same rights to primary education as other Norwegian children. But the parents have chosen a lifestyle that involved their moving from one municipality to another with their children, and it then goes without saying that it has been an almost impossible task for the public, the government, to secure the children proper education. There are reasons to emphasise that people must take responsibility for their own lives and the lives of their children, and not always blame society.” (Jan Simonsen, MP, the Progress Party, reproduced in *St.forh.* no. 110 1996-97, page 1650, 12 December 1996).

The minority in the public compensation committee did not question whether the former settlement policy had been appropriate for integrating Travellers in Norwegian society. The MP from the Progress Party appeared to reject the idea that it was the state’s responsibility to provide forms of primary education that would have corresponded better to Travellers traditional nomadic life.

In the 1975 interpellation about what could be done to ease Travellers’ integration in society, the Member of Parliament Torild Skard from the Socialist Left Party suggested that Travellers should be allowed to decide themselves how they wanted to live (*St.forh.* no. 481 page 3719-20, 23 April 1975). The Minister of Social Affairs, Tor Halvorsen from the Norwegian Labour Party, argued, however, that the goal was still that Travellers should be settled, employed in regular work and included in the regular education system. Later, the public committee that evaluated the special target measures against Travellers argued that there was no longer any need for them, and that these measures were inadequate in the long term if one wanted to achieve full integration (*NOU* 1980: 42, page 12). The ultimate objectives and the normative standards for integration were not questioned.

Eventually it came to be considered reasonable to grant financial compensation for the lack of education. At the same time, no political actors could be held directly responsible for Travellers having become worse off than others. Most present politicians distanced themselves from the injustice that had been committed. It was not a policy they had been responsible for or contributed to themselves. Hence, it was

relatively easy for the government to distance itself from the model of the integrated society and societal ideals that had been the basis for the former assimilation policy. It seemed to involve few risks to support ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘pluralism’, as this would have relatively few consequences for greater society. One was to a greater extent open to the idea that not all citizens had to be settled:

“I agree with the committee that it is important to recognise and maintain Travellers’ [*tatere*] traditions and history as a significant part of our society. Acceptance should also be expressed for those who are not settled and/or integrated – it should be accepted that people do not want to be like all other people” (Minister of Justice Anne Holt, the Norwegian Labour Party, reproduced in *St.forh.* no. 13 1996-97, 3-4 December 1996, page 1574).

Only the MPs from the populist and rightwing Progress Party expressed another view on multiculturalism and cultural rights. In their view, the integrated society assumed equality to the law and not any positive, proactive support of cultural differences:

“This member cannot support the proposal to recognise Travellers [*tatere*]/Romani people as an ethnic minority in Norway either. It would, according to this member’s view, be as unreasonable as to recognise Pakistani, Turks, Kurds, and other groups in the population who have their own ethnic or cultural background, as ethnic minority groups with particular rights. Division of the Norwegian population into ethnic minorities would destroy the community and unity in the Norwegian population, and demolish any possibility of harmonious integration of the various immigrant groups that are already in Norway, where many are Norwegian citizens” (Jan Simonsen, MP, the Progress Party, in *Innst.S.* no. 75 1996-97).

For most representatives of official Norway it was, however, unproblematic to give their consent to the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic or national minority. The new public attention focused on Travellers was to a considerable extent on the self-reflection and distancing of oneself from the former policy towards Travellers on the part of the political elites:

“When the Government has suggested that the Romani people according to the [Council of Europe] framework convention should be regarded as a national minority in Norway, this is meant as a positive signal that the culture and traditions of the Romani people are a valuable part of Norwegian cultural heritage that we should protect, and a redress for the wrong-doing that has been committed in the name of the larger society” (Minister of Municipality and Regional Affairs Ragnhild Queseth Haarstad, the Centre Party, in an introductory speech to a meeting between representatives of the Romani people and several government ministries, 11 February 1998).

People who still identified themselves with the Norwegian Mission for the Homeless represented an important exception to the accommodating attitude to Travellers’



demands now taken by most of the religious, social and political elites. These actors hesitated to distance themselves from the former policy and give an unconditional apology. The 1998 Church of Norway General Synod (*Kirkemøtet*) was also divided as to whether one should ask for Travellers' forgiveness for the assimilation policy many representatives of the Church had been involved in. In the public debate following the Synod, it became evident that former employees in the Mission were opposed to the Church of Norway admitting guilt for former atrocities and asking for forgiveness. Neither did they want to regret the general direction and content of the work performed by the Mission, particularly not in the period when they were active themselves after 1960. On the contrary, they protested against the accounts presented by the media and the Church of Norway's Council on Ecumenical and International Relations (*Mellomkirkelig Råd*) (correspondence between former employees in the Mission and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, February – April 1999; *Dag og Tid* 19 August 1999; *Vårt Land* 5 January 2000, 5 May 2001). They also criticised politicians and representatives of the Church of Norway for romanticising Travellers' former lifestyle, not taking into consideration the poverty and poor living conditions of many Travellers. They also claimed that many Travellers had received help to have a better life and that not only few people of Traveller origin were thankful for this today:

[We can] “ ... not use today's ethical standard to evaluate the problems of yesterday. We worked according to what was right and good and well recognised at that time. Then the social radicals with inspiration from the 1968 riots applied their standards. Perhaps there are equally good reasons to have a critical focus on these standards” (from interview with a former manager of Svanviken settlement institution, *Vårt Land*, 31 August 1998).

Altogether, people with a background in the Mission appeared to receive decreasing support and sympathy from Norwegian public for their justifications of the former policy towards Travellers. After lobbying from the Romani People's National Association and outside supporters the Church of Norway General Synod adopted an unconditional apology and prayer for forgiveness in 2000.

The values and goals of the official welfare policy have perhaps changed. Distinguished social democrats supported social planning based on science from 1930 to 1960 (Broberg and Roll-Hansen 1996). The political elite and state nobility appeared to be more concerned about society as a whole than protection of the integrity of the individual and the rights and autonomy of minorities. Increasing emphasis on such

considerations from the 1970s (Seip 1994b) may have led to a reconsideration of the policy towards Travellers. In conjunction with this, the individual measures against people of Traveller origin, in particular the sterilisations and castrations, but also the child custody measures, which affected the self-development, bodily self-control and possibilities for reproduction, raised a great deal of indignation at the end of the century (Hvinden [Ed.] 2000a).

Another circumstance leading in the same direction, was that as opposed to earlier times, Travellers were no longer looked upon as a threat to society as a whole. It appeared that the religious and political elites 50-150 years ago saw the Travellers' way of life and culture as a substantial treat and challenge to the dominant Christian faith, 'family values' and sexual morals, the protestant work ethic, the need for a disciplined work force in modern industrial society, respect for the compulsory education system, the tax system, and general 'law and order' (Sundt 1974 [1852], Carlsen 1922, Larssen 1946, Lyngstad 1947). As late as in April 1999, a former manager at the Svanviken settlement institution and the last Secretary General in the Mission wrote in their letter to the Church of Norway General Synod: "With their way of life Travellers [*tatere*] were in several respects a provocation to the values that society and church in Norway were based on."

One had also earlier discussed whether Travellers should be considered as an ethnic group (*Klassekampen* 18 November 1978, Moe 1979, Schlüter 1993). But only after many of the particular features of their way of life had been undermined, eradicated or less visible and clear-cut, was it possible to recognise Travellers' cultural particularities as legitimate.

It was striking that the political elites to a little extent saw Travellers as victims of negative discrimination in the present, despite the occasional reports of this both by Travellers' organisations and some media (eg. the local newspapers *Glåmdalen* 8 June 1999 and *Gudbrandsdølen Dagingen* 20 July 1999). The attentiveness and empathy among most non-Travellers appeared to be weaker when it came to negative discrimination, pejorative comments or offensive public images as experienced by Travellers in the present. The focus on the past was paralleled with initiatives to protect relics of the past and growing interest from the museum sector. Travellers' self-presentation as victims appeared to have become interwoven with constructions of public images and the official view of the social world. The renewed public attention

towards Travellers possibly served to connect public officials with humanity, compassion and empathy. Explicit demands of conformity were now to a larger extent directed towards other categories of people in Norwegian society.

From previously having been perceived as a threat to existing society, the established values and societal order, Travellers appeared in several respects to serve as objects of ritual regrets from the government, parliament and the Church of Norway. Representatives of official Norway had acquired a target group for statements of sympathy, excuses and a troubled consciousness associated with corresponding distancing from the former policy towards Travellers. Thus, Travellers appeared in new and modified versions to serve as a mirror for the social and political elites.

### **Contested support to losers (II position)**

*The Losers' Association* achieved much of the same sympathetic response from the political elites. To a great extent, these elites also distanced themselves from the former policies, actions and non-actions that had negatively affected the members of this organisation. However, the financial support to the Losers' Association was more controversial in parliament and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. The scepticism towards the organisation and the professional quality of services offered by the association were explicitly expressed in discussions on whether they should be granted a separate budget line in the government budget (*Document 8* no. 72 1996-97, *Innst.S.* no. 298 1996-97). The question of whether they simply duplicated the services offered by public offices, especially the social-services offices, was voiced. On the one hand, they held a large degree of victim capital. On the other hand, they did not represent a clear-cut member category, unlike the Travellers.

### **Ambivalence to the unemployed, poor and clients (III position)**

The connection between victim capital and recognition and support of self-organisation becomes even more evident when we address the elite's views of the claimants' organisations. It appeared that the claimant organisations were often perceived as breaking with the norms for accepted behaviour, with difficult and uncooperative 'clients', being unwilling to seek employment or even attempting to turn welfare dependency into a "lifestyle" without the culturally accepted excuses available.

There were different counter-reactions from public officials in the civil service and first-line services. The efforts to achieve a subject status and seek recognition as representatives of the member category were sometimes redefined or denied by the social and political elites (not ‘homeless’ but ‘people with psychiatric problems’). Staff in social services offices and labour exchange offices asserted that the claimants had other problems than just unemployment (drinking or drug problems, physical or mental-health problems) or the organisation participants were claimed not to be that deserving of assistance. Others who did not organise were claimed to be more in need of help. On other occasions, the corrections included ridiculing and patronising (“poor guy, he doesn’t know any better”, “should focus on getting a job”). The public officials questioned whether the claimants’ organisations were representative (“too few”) or they were mis-recognised as a unit and should be treated individually (“non-homogenous group”). It was also argued that the first-line services had contact with a broader spectrum of ‘clients’ and thus had a better overview of the needs and interests of the member category. Or it was considered as involving too much work (“we direct our efforts in a straightforward way at the front desk”). It appeared that participation on more equal terms on the part of the claimants was perceived as “noise” in the system.

The institutionalised part of the Labour Movement in Norway was pointed to as their adversary by several of the organised claimants. This reflected the relational character of their identity claims and could be seen as a structural parallel to the relationship Travellers had developed to the Church of Norway. ‘Social Democracy’ appeared to be perceived as the incarnation of the modern state nobility or establishment. The Labour Movement has been an explicit representative of wage labour as a crucial signifier of identity, societal participation, respect and honour, and advocates of the association between social rights and labour-market participation in Norway called the “the work line” (*arbeidslinjen*) (Terum 1996). The virtue of wage labour has been the main basis for their self-presentation. It has not been accumulation of economic capital that was considered the rationale for their high legitimacy in society. Rather, it has been the virtues of drudgery, patience, endurance and self-denial. The dignity associated with the significance of labour has been an explicit part of their self-representation.

“We are particularly sceptical to organisations of the unemployed. Their position is in the usual trade-union organisations. They have rightly felt a cold shoulder if they have tried to contact LO (confederation of trade unions). It is a detour to let them organise in an interest organisation while those who work stand apart. Those in work must have solidarity with those out of work. It is decisive that they co-operate. We need a working life that opens up for them and then we cannot make systematic barriers between those inside and outside. Three – four years ago the Trondheim Trade Union Co-operative (*Samorg*) wanted a separate organisation for the unemployed. We said no to that. We have been very much against an internal division. They should have a free membership fee. It is not forbidden to have social and economic measures for the unemployed, but it should be inside the established apparatus. The idea of integration includes organisational integration as well.” (From interview with a higher-ranking elected official in LO, April 1997).

The work ethic has been part of the *raison d'être* of the Labour Movement. This appeared to reinforce an ambiguous attitude to having the unemployed as allies. Conceiving of the unemployed as part of the labour force, as part of the larger “we” of the labour movement, appeared to contradict the self-understanding and self-presentation of the movement representatives. The Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) had also fairly limited contact with disabled people’s organisations, but there was some institutionalised contact on welfare-policy issues and discussions with the Government on annual indexing of the disability pension.

The trade unions have advocated a policy to keep unemployment rates low (cf. slogans such as “Full Employment”, “Work for All People”). It is equivocal whether this has been promoted first and foremost as a buffer against pressure to accept lower wages, or as help and assistance to those out of work. It could be argued that this was an expression of a dual objective: That it would be in the interests of both the ‘unemployed’ and society as a whole. This has been a prevalent justification of welfare-policy measures (Hvinden 1995, 2000b; Simmel 1971 [1906]). As indicated in earlier chapters, the national policy measures to increase the employment rate and reduce welfare dependency have been associated with limited degrees of freedom, voluntarism and space for choice, and associated with negative sanctioning, eg. cuts in and withdrawal of social benefits. Such features could raise the suspicion that the interests of the larger society or rather *other* people’s interests after all were more important than the interests of the individual welfare recipients and claimants (Hvinden 2000b: 14-15).

There seemed to be even less contact with the organisational efforts by the ‘unemployed’ than there used to be. The improved societal position of LO t appeared to have enabled them to turn a blind eye to the ‘unemployed’ as members of the unions.

During the 1920s and the 1930s, organisational attempts among the unemployed appeared to have been partly initiated by local sections of the Norwegian Labour Party, trade unions or 'unemployed' within certain trade unions. Rivalry between the Communist Party (*Norges Kommunistiske Parti*) on the one hand and the Norwegian Labour Party and LO on the other, influenced their organisational efforts, particularly as the communists tried to mobilise the unemployed against the latter. There appeared also to have been tensions between the employed and unemployed in the trade unions as to access to the jobs that were available (Grønland 1968, Kaldal 1983). These experiences may also have created subjective path dependencies and influenced the reactions of the social-democratic dominated labour movement in the late 20th century.

Although not systematically focused upon, the findings of Vambheim (1986) appear to support our interpretation. In a case study of an organisation of unemployed in Trondheim during 1983-85, the trade unions appeared to be reluctant to co-operate with and recognise a separate organisation for the 'unemployed' (ibid. 58-59, 105, 114-117).

There was one significant exception from the rejection on the part of the trade unions: Several of the claimants' organisations had a certain level of contact with the FO trade union for social workers. They appeared together in the media and in meetings with the central government (eg. *Dagbladet* 25 February 1998, *Fontene* no. 7 1998). In other cases, representatives of the claimants' organisations wrote in the bulletin of this trade union (*Sosionomen* no. 2 1991, no. 15 and 21 1993, no. 7 1994; *Fontene* no. 8 1994). This may be seen as a paradox, as social workers in certain respects acted as gatekeepers (Lewin 1947) to the social-assistance payments. The social-services offices had the dual objective to provide both income maintenance and professional help to promote self-sufficiency ("help to self-help"). As a controller, the social worker might keep in mind that the 'client' could try to swindle him or her. What might have promoted a coalition was that many social workers have identified with and wanted to work for the benefit of their 'clients'. Social workers and claimants appeared to have joint interests in increasing financial resources and the number of staff in the social-services offices, and more generous and standardised social- assistance benefits. From the claimants' perspective, the latter would facilitate more predictability and certainty about their entitlements. From the perspective of social workers, it would relieve them of the discomfort and negative self-image associated with assessing in detail the

financial circumstances of claimants, and it would also provide better opportunities for more active assistance services and support.

The Fredrikstad Client Action, for instance, argued in the local newspaper that their local social-services office needed a larger budget and more employees to provide better services. Yet, from the claimants' point of view, social workers were easily seen as representatives of the official authorities, that is, as the immediate "oppressor" or "enemy". Claimants were not always interested in the advice, guidance and suggestions from the social workers, which they sometimes experienced as patronising. The ambivalence of the social workers towards the claimants and vice versa may be accounted for by the contradictions inherent in the structural position of the social workers as both gatekeepers to income-maintenance benefits and providers of help and advocacy (Merton 1976: 3-31; Merton, Merton and Barber 1983).

The structural position of social workers in the Norwegian welfare system may explain why it appeared to be easier to find allies among actors outside the social-services administration; staff members and students at the University College for Training in Social Work and the National Association of Social Workers (Andenæs 1992, Seim 1997). Moreover, the Poor House and the Fredrikstad Client Action occasionally sought legal advice and moral support from the Local Ombudsman for Health and Social Affairs in Oslo (eg. annual reports 1997, 1998). These bodies appeared to be able to give more unconditional support compared to the staff in the social-services offices.

### **Discussion: inclusion, subordination or disciplining?**

Philip Selznick (1966 [1949]) outlined an institutional approach to the study of the fate of democratic aspirations in modern society. In a study of administrative organisation, he traced how an attempt to make social planning more democratic turned out in practice. This was a study of the price society pays when the ideology of democracy and local participation becomes a resource in the struggle for power. Administrative leadership tended to weaken democracy and vice versa. This was seen as tension between democracy and bureaucracy as problem solving systems. As he emphasised the structural conditions, this led him to focus on the limitations. The analysis had a pessimistic overtone.

Selznick (ibid.) saw 'co-optation' as the unintended consequences of efforts to maintain existing and merging centres of privileges. Co-optation arises out of a situation in which formal authority is actually or potentially in a state of imbalance with respect to its institutional environments. The actors were seen as committed to specific objectives or modes of working, and this led to specific lines of action. Ideological and organisational commitment to established patterns was likely to be associated with reluctance to make demands that are inconsistent with their accustomed habits and views. The defence mechanisms have social consequences both for the co-opted and co-opting party. It limits the available choices for the leadership or organisation. Co-optation implies changes that are consequential for the character and role of the elements. The parties have to adjust their policy or change the structure of the organisation.

Co-optation refers to tension between the formal authority and actual social power of a group. Formal co-optation is the situation when new elements are absorbed in the leadership or decision-making structure of an organisation to avoid threats to its stability or existence (ibid. 13). The new elements are formally absorbed in the existing and established organisational structures. The parties share the responsibility, but not the power. This is likely to be the case when the dominating group needs to legitimate itself or the administration needs to achieve contact with categories of clients and citizens. Informal co-optation is more likely to emerge as a response to pressure from groups and organisations that are able to enforce their will. The conflict group is more interested in the substance than the form of power. Open capitulation to conflict groups could lower the legitimacy of public authorities and covert efforts to include the elements in the power structures are more likely to occur. Informal co-optation implies actual redistribution of power. It tends to be more undecided whether formal co-optation implies redistribution of power (ibid. 13-16, 259-261).

Gudmund Hernes (1978: 11-60) outlined how the ideal-typical bureaucracy and democracy could be perverted, either by internal development or interaction between the two steering systems of society. When there are internal perversions, the systems may compensate for each other, but not without risks. Ideal-typically, the steering systems are functionally independent. Politicians realise their self-interests by promoting the interests of voters. Employees in bureaucracy use their professional



knowledge to serve the politicians. Using disinterested action and neutrality are the best ways of promoting their own career.

Democratic principles can improve the functioning of bureaucracy. The organisations can be invited to participate in the administration. This can be a functional alternative to the extension of public administration (ibid. 54). The government gains better information about the lived experience of the subject population, relief from work obligations, saves time and resources, achieves more harmony between the parties and better dissemination of information to the subject population. The parties gain inside information through exchanges of staff from the civil service to the interest organisations and vice versa. The organisations grow stronger in a symbiosis with bureaucracy. Functionaries in the welfare state come to see themselves not only as the servants of politicians but representatives of national interests. If we apply a benign view of the welfare state, this can be conceived as a win-win situation. The welfare state provides opportunities for participation in the political system and makes the work of interest organisations easier (cf. H. Hernes 1988).

Steering imperfection may occur when conflict groups become occupants of the government offices. They can come to define much of the agenda of the central administration. Civil servants become tied up with particular values. Their attitudes become equal to those of the full-time employees in the permanent interest organisations. Their value set and problem understanding become one. The government representatives and the organisations come to view the social world in the same way. It develops close informal ties between the parties and a common problem understanding. Their unity emerges at the social expense of excluding those on the margins of the political landscape (ibid. 35).

An interest organisation achieves monopoly on the subject population and becomes the only recognised party in negotiations with the government. At the same time they are ascribed quasi-public tasks and control functions vis-à-vis the members. For the organisations, recognition from the government becomes their most important working condition for achieving their goals and attaining support from the members. At the same time, employed staff and professionals take over the most important representative functions (ibid. 30-31). The organisations invest in full-time employees to gain recognition from the government. The staff accumulates qualifications but the social distance to their members increases. They risk becoming as distant as the

bureaucrats, as perceived by the subject population. The inner life of the organisations diminishes to routines and rituals outlined by full-time employees (ibid. 44)

Hernes appeared to be more concerned about the possible steering problems that could emerge as construed from an administrative perspective. He focused less on issues of autonomy, recognition and liberty of choice on the part of the disadvantaged. Others have expressed more concern about the social costs for the interest organisations. Piven and Cloward (1977) and Mathiesen (1980 [1977]) argued that contact with the government and better-positioned actors may neutralise the potential for social change or disruption represented by claimant organisations. Such contact was seen as leading to disciplining. These scholars presented a picture of weaker-positioned actors as involuntarily, rather than unconsciously or unintentionally, being drawn into the gravitation field of power and hence becoming pacified.

Piven and Cloward (1977: xi-xii) argued that building organisations among ‘the poor’ was not only futile, but also damaging: “... by endeavouring what they cannot do, organizers fail to do what they can do. During those periods in which people are roused to indignation, when they are prepared to defy the authorities to whom ordinarily they defer, during those brief moments when lower-class groups exert some force against the state, those who call themselves leaders do not usually escalate the momentum of the people’s protests. They do not do so because they are preoccupied with trying to build and sustain embryonic formal organizations in the sure conviction that these organizations will enlarge and become powerful”. The efforts at external resource mobilisation were claimed to inexorably draw the organisation participants towards the elites, into the meeting rooms and gradualist discussions and away from rallies and protests. When insurgency swells up, they claimed, the political elites will facilitate resources to the organisations to “dampen” the political threat to the social order represented by the participants. They claimed that the elites have little to fear from the organisations which depend upon them for support.

Piven and Cloward (1977, 1992) asserted that unconventional political actions and the creation of political crises were better sources for influence by the ‘lower-stratum groups’ in society than conventional organisation building. Arguably, Piven and Cloward under-communicated the structural barriers to mass mobilisation from “below”. The development of expert offices (“resource centres”) on the part of the disadvantaged can be functionally equivalent to mass mobilisation and adaptation to

one's structural conditions (cf. Chapters 5-9). The organisations risked that the members and users would remain or become less active. However, the alternative to development of service offices for the users and expert advisers to government might be silence and invisibility in the public sphere.

Mathiesen (1980 [1977]) appeared to be more concerned that insurgent actions and disruption 'without alternative' might result in the action group being defined out of the game and rejected as irrelevant or extreme. But if one suggested reforms and adjusting changes, one risked being enveloped in legislative details and encapsulated in society's established decision-making system. Social mobilisation for change could be drawn or absorbed in the bureaucratic system and the opposition neutralised. Consequently, the main structure would be maintained and cemented. One should not remain within the frame of reference of legislation and the law. Revolutionary standpoints, a boundary-transcending attitude, demand of immediate changes, work for abolition of policy measures and arrangements without reservations or regardless of alternatives were considered necessary supplements rather than alternatives. Crossing boundaries and remaining in movement was considered to be of paramount importance to avoid being encapsulated or neglected by the state. One should not stand still, but remain in the processes of becoming able to transcend the prevailing societal system.

These scholars appeared to ignore the equivocal status of welfare-policy measures as both help and control. It was claimed that the elites only granted support to discipline or pacify the poor and avoid threats to social order. Both support to and neglect of the self-organisational efforts could thus be interpreted as social control. However, the comparison appears to be rather disproportional. Such a view can easily ignore the symbolic status of differences between the member categories and ignore the reasons and considerations, motives or intentions expressed by the relevant elites themselves. The consequences of inclusion and exclusion also appeared to differ substantially for the organisational efforts.

In our cases, the organisational efforts adapted to the game of bureaucracy, although to different degrees. In part, this appeared to be necessary, but not sufficient for achieving a dialogue with the public officials. The organisations sought in some cases to play the game of larger and more established organisations. However, in several respects they appeared to continue presenting immoderate claims after they received financial support from the government. The two organisations that were most

successful in mobilising resources from the state appeared to continue to challenge the state, and continued to act censoriously and as victims when necessary. To the degree that they acted moderately, this appeared not to be the outcome of external pressure, but rather as tactical adaptations to present oneself as ‘serious’ and thereby getting access to necessary resources. This might be interpreted as a sign of self-disciplining, but the organisations did not accept or subordinate themselves to the authority of the elites in all contexts, but ridiculed them. The organisation participants denied the charisma attributed to the elites. This was especially evident among Travellers. These were attempts at self-assertion in other contexts and among peers.

Berlin (1969) would not regard positive freedom as attained if co-operation and influence implied subjection and inferiorisation. The consequences of participation in various member categories should probably be differentiated. Arguably, a high degree of legitimacy may promote collaboration and participation to take on the hues of *relative autonomy* instead of *incorporation* and *co-optation*. This would probably be more so when a member category has access to a ‘History of Pride’ and possibilities for emphasising their own dignity and self-value through the application of cultural resources on the category level. Status can be defined positively, not through “failures”, shortcomings or the absence of qualities. When there is a greater degree of perceived dependence and carefulness to avoid provoking political elites, co-operation may appear as *asymmetrical participation* and *subjugation*.

If the “real” motive of the government’s granting of financial support was to discipline or control categories of the population perceived as standing outside society or in need of help, one could have assumed that more extensive contact with the organisations of social-security claimants would have been found preferable. Our data suggests that individual contact with the claimants of temporary social-security benefits tended to be conceived as more appropriate. The reciprocation is more equivocal when there is contact between the organisations and the government compared to the individual level. It emerges as more equivocal whether collective forms of co-operation with government representatives implies subordination, co-optation or inclusion compared to individual forms of collaboration with welfare functionaries. The awareness about potentially disciplining effects may also vary among participants in the organisations. In other words, there may be reason to stress the ambiguity of the reciprocation between the organisations and government.

### **Concluding remarks**

The subjective path dependencies of the elites and veto groups contributed to structuring the access to bureaucratic capital on the part of the disadvantaged. This was associated with maintenance of categorical inequalities in the access to financial resources. The subjective path dependencies had objective consequences in maintaining social distance. When the external barriers became smaller, as in the case of Travellers, the internalised barriers became more apparent. The dominated or weaker party had to overcome a victim position to achieve a dialogue with representatives of the greater society and accumulate resources. When they did achieve a dialogue with the public authorities, their autonomy could be at risk. A combination of adjustment and control led to isomorphism between the government agencies and the organisations. But if one regards the reciprocation only as one of two parties, one runs the risk of exaggerating the lack of opportunities for agency and autonomy on the part of the self-organisational efforts. This is the subject I will turn to next.



## **The media as a third party: The relationship between the organisation participants and the mass media**

This chapter asks how the claimants' and Travellers' organisations could receive so much media attention in spite of the limited number of members. Second, we ask how access to the media as a form of capital affected their opportunities for autonomy and influence vis-à-vis the welfare state. I will trace how the media as a third party interacted with the self-organisation and social-mobilisation efforts. How did the organisations use the media and vice versa? So far I have largely focused on the binary relations between the organisational efforts and their users, how their relationship to the government was reflected in their "internal" relations, and their direct relations to the elites. We have seen the social-mobilisation processes as structured by binary relations. The binary conceptualisation is, however, insufficient to grasp certain qualities and effects of the self-organisation efforts and social mobilisation. As demonstrated by Simmel in his *Soziologie* (1964b [1950]: 135-69), a relationship changes as one introduces a new party. Change from a dyad to a triad opens up possibilities for new alliances and oppositions.

### **The mass media as actor and resource in the welfare-policy field**

The mass media can be construed as both a social institution and a structural property. From an institutional perspective, the media can be viewed as a party interacting with others estates of the political-administrative system. Together with other political institutions, they are part of the institutional structure of the polity. The mass media consists of actors with their own agenda and interests. From this perspective, the relative power of the parties is focused upon. From an interactional perspective, access to the mass media can be regarded as a form of capital that affects the possibility of influencing the official welfare policy and public opinion. Access to the mass media can be a resource for those who wish to promote or maintain their interests vis-à-vis greater

society (Street 2001: 231-249). An important question is then how access to the mass media is structured. This most likely depends on the *modus operandi* of the mass media. The mass media interacts with bureaucracy, but the social logic of the media is quite different. Nevertheless, this emerges as an important type of capital for understanding the interaction between disadvantaged sections of the population and the greater society.

The media are both part of the political system and the cultural sector as well as business. While accountability, predictability and control emerge as decisive to the civil service, market competition emerges as highly influential on the work and orientation of the mass media, especially the daily press. ‘The bureaucracy’ and the mass media have different rhythms and time-horizons for their activity. The bureaucracy is involved in long-term planning and needs to balance different societal goals. The media are more here-and-now oriented and focus on single cases. They have daily deadlines that structure the rhythm of their work. Many of them will be influenced by requirements to “think fast”. Their success is to a considerable degree measured according to the size of their circulation and viewer rating. Their advertising revenue depends on the number of readers or viewers. This intensifies the competition for the attention of the general public, publishing the latest developments on the political agenda and being the first out with exclusives. Their relation to the cultural sector is symbolised by their annual awards for the best feature article, photography and so on, granted by their peers. Here, the emphasis is on individual creativity and individual achievements. In this regard, they have similarities with artists and researchers. This stands in opposition to the market demands journalists and their editors otherwise must relate to. Partly the commodification of information is modified by state financial support to ensure diversity and a large number of voices (*NOU* 1995:3).

Based on a content analysis of all social-policy reports in three newspapers (*VG*, *Dagbladet* and *Bergen Arbeiderblad*), Puijk, Østby and Øyen (1984) examined forty-six cases where individual claimants had presented unaccepted claims against government in the press. By interviewing the claimants, journalists and bureaucrats in the welfare bureaucracy, they tried to trace what had happened to the case after the media coverage. It appeared that as opposed to several other Western European countries, Norwegian mass media at that time focused to a greater extent on the unsatisfied needs rather than alleged abuse of the social-security system. The media wrote about social-policy cases where the government ignored or rejected the claims from the weaker party. There was



no tendency where the information was used against the claimants. The focus was rather on the exercise of power by welfare bureaucrats and politicians, and the consequences this had for the disadvantaged. The press emerged as the *defenders of the weak and the welfare state*. The journalists tried to demonstrate the needs for expansion of the social-policy legislation and the inclusion of new categories in the welfare state. The success stories were few and far between.

Social-policy reports are often used as front-page stories. The legitimacy of the social-policy reports rests with the assumption that they benefit the disadvantaged. The social-policy association gives the press legitimacy to sell the publication and present the weak and poor to the general public. The media as a 'fourth estate' should compensate for or balance the power represented by other institutions in the political system. The press claims that it serves to assist disadvantaged groups. At the same time, the reports are assumed to increase the sales rate.

There were many individual stories. Each had a separate argument, but it was difficult to find a pattern or an overarching social-policy message across the stories. The cases were rarely selected to illustrate more general problems. It was not the typical cases that were focused upon, rather unique stories were the ones to be presented. Together, this contributed to *individualise social problems*. The "counterparts" were often construed as if they represented norms that differed from those in the rest of society. In reality, it could often be a question of more diffuse and inconsistent norms, eg. disagreement about what was an acceptable minimum standard of living. The kind of social-policy reports discussed by Puijk *et al.* (ibid.) appeared to be less common in the local press. According to these authors, the local press was more likely to present local government as part of "our people". The criticism of the system was likely to be weaker.

A main finding was that the reports had a much lesser direct effect than the newspapers believed and the informants had hoped. There were small and few changes in the cases that were focused upon. The press had the opportunity to keep a case on the agenda, but did not use this opportunity very often. They abstained from using their power, as they were afraid that the readers would be bored. Assumptions about the interests of the readers determined whether the case was followed up. The value of social-policy reports was time limited. The press limited how much they involved themselves. They took little initiative themselves, and had few routines to find and

select social-policy issues on their own. To a great extent, it was the *claimants* who contacted the press or a third party that acted as an intermediary.

On the one hand, journalists and editors appeared to have an interest in producing information and taking a public responsibility. On the other hand, one of their aims of their media coverage of individual social-policy cases was to increase their financial profit. The assumed interests of the readers are of much concern, while the intention to help those with unsolved problems is given less priority. In such cases, one could argue that the financial interests of the mass media emerged as the more important motive. I would argue that the ambiguity of their motives can be connected to their equivocal social position as belonging both to the political system, the cultural sector *and* the business sector. In practice, the financial criteria are likely to dominate.

In a quantitative content analysis of all newspaper clippings during a period of nine weeks in 1988, Sæbø (1990) found large media coverage of social assistance in Norway; a total of 303 clippings. The main issues were budget overruns, abuse of the system and lack of control of the recipients. The findings appeared to reflect a common feature of Norwegian social policy: Social assistance receives a great deal of attention despite constituting a small proportion of the total spending on social-security benefits in Norway. As argued by Hvinden (1988), social assistance is a reminder that the other welfare services, state responsibilities, have failed. It is an issue of conflict between the central and local governments. Central government places strict boundaries on municipal budgets. This gives little space for manoeuvring on the part of local governments, and gives rise to complaints. Expenses related to social assistance are also more difficult to defend *vis-à-vis* public opinion. It is commonly suspected that the recipients abuse the system.

By and large, the newspapers produced the reports themselves. According to Sæbø's (*ibid.*) findings, the press contributed to a little extent to production of myths about social-policy reality. All in all, the information was not biased, but simplified and polemical. He did not ask questions about the individualisation of social problems, but evaluated whether the information was in accordance with the state of the art in social-policy research. Welfare bureaucrats and politicians were the most common actors. The press reports often focused on the 'clients' of the system but the claimants were to a little extent actors in the media coverage. He found a *low number of complaints* about

unreasonable demands, unfavourable decisions or lack of social rights. However, social workers often focused on the situation of their ‘clients’ and acted as their solicitors.

At first appearance, the findings of Puijk *et al.* (1984) and Sæbø (1990) seemed to contradict each other on the issue of whether claimants contacted the mass media or not, and whether the media coverage of social-policy issues qualified to be labelled as “social pornography”. This was in part related to the more limited research objectives in Sæbø. He did not consider the question of whether it was the mass media and society at large or the claimants who benefited from the press coverage. In part, this can be related to differences in approach and sample criteria. Sæbø used ‘social assistance’ (*sosialhjelp*) or ‘social-assistance expenses’ (*sosialutgifter*) as key words to select the newspaper clippings. These were narrower sample criteria than in Puijk *et al.* Other types of perspectives and self-presentations may be more prevalent among social-assistance claimants. It could also be that other categories of claimants would be more likely to appear as actors in the media.

It has commonly been assumed that those who have a weak standing in the ‘corporate channel’ also have the lowest access to mass media. The interest organisations of those in strong social positions have acquired more competence in mastering interaction with the mass media to their own advantage. As I have already indicated in previous chapters, there are needs of differentiation between categories of social-security claimants and other categories of disadvantaged people. This was also likely to be the case in interaction with and use of the mass media on the part of the disadvantaged. The findings related to social-assistance recipients will probably have limited validity for other categories of disadvantaged people.

### **Appearance of the innocent victim in the media**

*Travellers* were to a considerable extent perceived as having become extinct or at least invisible in Norwegian society, except for their coverage in the media. The public attention expressed in the media was fairly extensive during the 1990s. The way Travellers were presented and presented themselves gave others an opportunity to distance themselves from the former policy. Among others, *Verdens Gang* (conservative tabloid with the largest circulation of all papers in Norway, 1994), *Dag og Tid* (liberal/left-wing weekly, 1996) and *Dagbladet* (liberal tabloid, 1997, 1998) all ran

separate series of articles about the former policy against Travellers and its consequences for people of Traveller origin. *Aftenposten* (the major conservative daily) and *Vårt Land* (Christian-Democratic daily) focused on the issue of the apology from the Church of Norway (1998-2000) and the internal divide in the state church on this issue. These and other papers published interviews with people of Traveller origin in connection with their settlement of the past. The attentiveness to Travellers' histories can be understood on the background of the spontaneous interplay between Travellers as objects of the former policy and the journalists distancing themselves from this. Moreover, these stories were well suited for constructing the roles of villains and heroes, as well as the journalists' favourite approach to social issues; personalisation through individual portraits. Journalists' emphasis on and distancing of themselves from the past corresponded to a considerable extent to Travellers' self-criticism and emphasis on the past as the "true" Travellers' culture and mode of life.

To a certain extent, this opened for alliances, and the possibility to frame collective identities and in this respect make the category visible to other category members and the greater society. Travellers were interviewed, had sent press releases or wrote letters to the editor in 65 per cent of the newspaper clippings we had collected. One or more of the Travellers' organisations were mentioned in 46 per cent of the clippings. However, Travellers experienced that there were limits to the attentiveness from and possibilities for alliances with journalists. There tended to be a lack of continuity in each journalist's coverage of this area. The Romani People's National Association experienced that it was difficult to build up expertise on their situation in the mass media. Attempts in 1998, 1999 (Oslo) and 2000 (Hamar) to arrange press seminars attracted few participants from the press and more people from local and central government.

Moreover, the organisation participants experienced that the media tended to maintain a history of misery. During a group interview, a board member of the Romani People's National Association commented on how journalists worked:

"They know nothing about what they're writing about. Like the fates of human that are behind there, the people who are scared to death and hiding. They don't give a damn. They walk over dead bodies to get it printed in the papers. It's goodies. They have a feast on it. Then they're sterilised, lobotomised, abused in public childcare institutions... They love writing about all this. Money, money, money. That's the way it is, isn't it? When did you read about Travellers' culture, about Travellers' craft in the media? Never, I believe. I've never read about it. Journalists are special. You know it yourself. They're so pushy, 'come on', 'come on'. In the end

you've turned your soul inside out for them. Why couldn't that journalist have respected that Traveller and said that 'I would be interested in writing something for the weekly about your craft, culture and background and history'. I haven't read a single word about that" (from group interview, May 1997).

Especially, Travellers tended to be depicted as victims of sterilisation and castration. As mentioned above, institutionalisation of public child custody had been a more crucial and long-term assimilation strategy on the part of the government in the past, but this appeared to be less focused on in the media. About 1500 children of Traveller origin had been placed in public custody (Pettersen 2000). In comparison, one has been able to find 127 cases of sterilisation and castration (Haave 2000b). The media focus on the latter was probably associated with the more clear-cut victim position and "innocence" in these cases. The reasons why people had been objects of public child custody could appear as more complex, and there would be uncertainty about the circumstances. It seemed more difficult to judge whether this had been morally wrong or appropriate in each individual case, while sterilisation and castration could be univocally condemned as violence against individual autonomy, breach of physical integrity and denial of rights to reproduction and sexuality.

'The innocent victim' and appeals to the victim status appeared to be particularly well suited as objects of journalism and attracted attention from journalists. In this respect, public attention seemed to support or even reinforce the victim capital of Travellers. People presenting themselves as victims of circumstances have sought public attention and told their individual life story to achieve sympathy and be recognised as worth listening to. People with particular claims against the welfare state may have good reasons for trying to get their personal story published in the media. A self-understanding as a victim of unjust policies and circumstances outside of one's control can lead individuals to spend a great deal of time and energy on seeking attention from journalists ("a cry for help"). Perhaps in particular those with a newly discovered prehistory achieved recognition of their claimed self-identity. Seeking media coverage could function as a self-affirmative or self-committing action as belonging to the category. Then there will be no uncertainty about who one "really" is (Becker (1973 [1963]: 19-39). This way they can also break with a long period of silence and concealment, achieve compassion and respect. The media contribute to the construction of the public agenda and what is considered an urgent issue, facilitate public attention

and contribute to the reallocation of responsibility for why someone has become significantly worse off than others.

This type of media use is probably a significant element in the dynamic between the providers and recipients, clients or claimants of welfare-policy measures. The phenomenon appears to be rather prevalent (Puijk, Østbye and Øyen 1984). Appeals through media could be construed as a functional alternative to appeals within the bureaucratic system of public administration. If you do not trust public authorities, there are no (further) formal opportunities “inside” the system, or you experience that others turn a blind eye to you, you may seek alliances with the mass media as a third party to achieve moral support against one’s adversary. The media may be more easily accessible or easier to seek contact with than bureaucracy, and one does not need bureaucratic capital (“competence”), i.e. knowledge about the formal and institutionalised opportunities to appeal, skills in formulating oneself in writing and competence in complying with the formal requirements when appealing decisions.

We found a similar use of media among claimants. Participants and users of the claimants’ organisations appeared in the media as “evidence” of poverty and social exclusion in Norway, and as illustrations of the failures and shortcomings of the welfare state. Claimants were interviewed, wrote themselves, or had taken the initiative for the press release in 72 per cent of the newspaper clippings we received or were able to collect. This included interviews with and press releases from the Secretary General of the Losers’ Association. The claimants’ organisations were referred to in 82 per cent of the clippings, with almost half of them about the Losers’ Association.

The Secretary General of the *Losers’ Association* successfully sought a high media profile, eg. by presenting figures about the number of ‘losers’ in different counties and municipalities, as estimated by the organisation. The organisation also presented new demands, exposed unsatisfied needs, negligence and wrongful treatment by the welfare state. For instance: “Increasing number of losers: more people on disability benefit against their will” (*Adresseavisen* 3 January 1997). Or “Terrible years at special school” (*Dagbladet* 23 September 1994). This also included features in weekly magazines about ‘losers’ who had become ‘winners’: “Finally I have shed the label stupid” (*Hjemmet* no. 11 1995). On the one hand, this can be interpreted as breaking the silence. On the other, it can be interpreted as entertainment for *others*.

Some of the better-positioned supporters were worried that the organisation sought media attention too uncritically. These advisors seemed to prefer to work more away from the limelight. What was preferable as self-presentation in the media could contradict the demands in the bureaucratic channel. Interviews with employees in and written documents from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs indicated that the organisation sometimes was perceived as a nuisance, sought to develop too personal and too close contact with the political leaders of the ministry, and represented noise in the system. The emphasis on drama and intensification, along with the emphasis on sensationalism, conflicts and controversies, contradicted the demands for presenting oneself as non-controversial and one's case in a detached manner.

This was an issue of disagreement between the Secretary General and the others. They were especially concerned about the figures they presented. The Secretary General had a background as a journalist and adjusted easily to the demands of the media to obtain press coverage. He had accumulated first-hand experience and interest in using the media channel. We may call this *the media capital* of the organisation. Individuals and organisations accumulate competence in interacting with journalists, learn to avoid or achieve their attention, take strategic initiatives through press releases and personal contacts in the media, and have their story presented as close as possible to their own preferences and interests. In the case of the Losers' Association, the Secretary General followed his practical skills developed through long-term experience inside the media. The organisation used the media coverage to document their work to the public authorities. The media coverage was used as an indicator of their support in public opinion. When the case was established in the media, the organisation could take the issue further in the bureaucratic channel. Media coverage of meetings with politicians and successful applicants for compensation was also used as documentation of success in their newsletter.

Several of the other organisations also referred to media coverage as a success criterion:

Participants in the *Job-seekers' Interest Organisation* referred to this as evidence of their success in the past, but complained that it had become harder to achieve media coverage after the official unemployment rate had decreased during the 1990s. Allegedly, it had become more difficult to get sympathy and understanding from journalists because 'unemployment' was a societal problem and the public authorities

and not themselves were to blame for their disadvantaged position. This could also be related to differences in *intensity* and *drama* in their work. It appeared that the organisation experienced two waves of media attention during the period we studied them.

The organisation received a great deal of attention in the initial phase in 1992-93, when many people out of work participated and they introduced several initiatives against the public authorities. The organisation worked in Nord-Trøndelag, a rural county in the centre of Norway, and especially received attention in the local press (*Namdal Arbeiderblad* 9 May 1992, 21 September 1992, 10 March 1993). In 1997, there was a second wave of press coverage. The key activists had taken the initiative to set up the umbrella organisation “The Welfare Action Enough is Enough” in connection with the national election campaign that year. In meetings I attended, the organisation representatives spent a great deal of time and energy on discussing their media strategy. They tended to agree that the national election campaigns and the time just before Christmas were particularly well-suited to achieve media-attention. In the first case, it was possible to play on opposition and rivalry between the political parties. The claimants’ organisations could present demands to the parties and the political parties would try to avoid negative press coverage during the campaign. In the second case, it was possible to achieve compassion, present their own living conditions as unreasonable and demand extra financial support from the social-services offices. The bureaucrats in the social-services offices could be seen as unreasonable and deviating from the values of the rest of the population. In both cases, the organisations sought to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the welfare state by seeking support from the mass media.

During the election campaign, they sought to target and achieve meetings with the political parties, and built a “Poor House” on a main street in Oslo to dramatise the conditions for people out of work. This resulted in several reports both in national newspapers and on television. For instance: “The Welfare Action Enough Is Enough will be keeping a close eye on the politicians during the election campaign” (*Aftenposten* 26 July 1997) (also *Adresseavisen* 27 July. 1997, 6 September 1997; *Bergens Tidende* 26 July 1997, *NTB* 25 July 1997, *Trønderavisa* 25 July 1997). Such waves of media attention appeared to be connected to the waves of protests the organisational efforts went through. We found similar heavy media attention during



short time spells in other claimants' organisations; the Oslo Client Action in 1992 and the Association of Job-seekers in 1994-95.

The *Fredrikstad Client Action* had a large proportion of their press coverage in the local press. The main activist wrote many letters to the editor and sent press releases to express discontent with the local authorities, especially when it came to social assistance (eg. *Demokraten* 3 November 1993, *Fredrikstad Blad* 7 September 1996). The national press appeared to be more interested when the actions took place in Oslo or the central government was involved as a counterpart.

In comparison, participants in the *Poor House* more often expressed that the journalists contacted them than vice versa. Some of those who appeared in the media said that they tried to avoid using their own life story and refer to others in need instead. Others expressed that they had been uncomfortable when the press contacted them. Nevertheless, the newspaper clippings were copied and distributed to the other participants and more passive users in their newsletter. In other words, the ambivalence about organising on the basis of 'Otherness' affected their relationship to the mass media (cf. Chapter 7).

The three clearest examples of participants in the Poor House taking the initiative to achieve press coverage was in the early phase in 1994-95, when those who had more 'resources' in relation to the labour market or who were activist-minded were involved: In the first case the participants appealed decisions taken by the municipality of Oslo to the office of the state representative in the county (*fylkesmannen* – county governor). They encouraged social-assistance recipients to appeal the decision of the municipality to withhold their tax rebates from the last year as compensation for social assistance they had received (*Aftenposten* 15 July 1994). In the second case, the Poor House and the Fredrikstad Client Action encouraged social-assistance recipients to apply for additional support for Christmas (*Aftenposten* 9 and 13 December 1994, *Demokraten* 8 December 1994, *Fredrikstad Blad* 3, 7 and 8 December 1994). The activists in the two organisations overlapped. The third case where they sought media attention themselves was a sit-in at a social-service office. The participants were dressed in garbage bags and protested against how they were treated by the welfare bureaucrats, low benefits and slow processing of cases (*Aftenposten* and *Dagbladet* 20 April 1995).

In other cases, the initiative rested with the journalists. Here again the mass media emerged as the defender of the weak and the welfare state. Or the journalists

presented their report as a reference about conflicting parties without expressing value judgements. This included both foci on individual claimants and on the organisations.

In the first kind of practice, the journalist presented a critique of the welfare state and defended the weak. This agreed with the findings of Puijk *et al.* (1984). The special events were more focused on than the general outlook of the social-security system. This included presentation of people whose demands had been rejected by welfare bureaucrats and lived below acceptable living standards, as presented by the journalists. Social-assistance claimants could be presented as victims of unreasonable treatment, negligence and demands from welfare functionaries. On several occasions, the journalists recruited participants from the Poor House (*Aftenposten* 24 April 1997, *Dagbladet* 21 February 1998, *VG* 5 September 1995 and 19 October 1996). The organisation was located close to the offices of the major national newspapers. In such cases, the individual cases were more in focus than the organisation.

In other cases, the claimant organisations as such emerged as part of a broader critique of the welfare state. The activists were mobilised to give voice to critical comments on the welfare state. For instance, in a series of articles, *Dagbladet* focused on growing social inequality in Norway: “Worse than in the 1930s.” The journalist claimed that the Labour Party had contributed to larger social differences. In one of the articles, they presented cases of the rich and interviewed a recipient of a single-parent allowance. As the duration of the allowance was now being cut down, she was worried that she would have to rely on social assistance. The Fredrikstad Client Action was also interviewed. The main activist complained about how claimants were treated in the social-services offices, and demanded a national standard for social assistance (*Dagbladet* 14 May 1996).

Participants in the Poor House were featured in a similar series of articles on poverty in Norway: “The poor houses return” (*Dagbladet* 16 July 1996). The Poor House was also interviewed in a number of reports in connection to the release of a white paper on the distribution of income and life chances in Norway (*St.meld.* no. 50 1998-99): “Inequality increases the most in Norway – The poor demand action” (*Dagsavisen* 23 June 1999) (also *Avis 1* 25 June 1999, *Dagsavisen* 26 June 1999, *Akershus Romerike Blad* 27 June 1999). The existing claimant organisations could also be presented as news in themselves. They were indicators of something rotten in the

welfare state (*Aftenposten* 3 March 1995, *Dagbladet* 2 March and 23 August 1994, *Fredrikstad Blad* 26 August 1995).

The second kind of practice was that the journalists referred conflicts or meetings between the disadvantaged and the elites. In these cases, the conflicts were more focused upon than the critique of the welfare bureaucrats or the political elites. In the local press this could be presented as a relationship between the socio-geographic centre and periphery: “Victory in parliament. Client Action listened to by the parliamentary committee” (*Demokraten* 7 March 1997). Even the Client Action could be presented as representatives of the local community in relationship to central government. The social construction of counterparts could be presented as the reference of ‘facts’. The press covered meetings with the public authorities and protests against decisions by the local or central government: “Slaughter budget cuts. Illegal, says the Client Action” (*Demokraten* 24 April 1996). In such cases, the press was able to present two conflicting parties. At the same time, the organisations gained attention for the issues that concerned them. For instance, the Fredrikstad Client Action was asked to comment on a research report that demonstrated disagreement between the state, counties and municipalities about the level of social assistance (*Aftenposten* 7 October 1994). The conflict could appear as ‘news’ in itself, although disagreement about social assistance has been a long-standing issue in Norwegian social policy (Terum 1996). In a similar vein the Poor House was asked to give their comments to a research report that suggested ‘workfare’ in return for social assistance (*Aftenposten* 13 July 2000), cuts in local social-assistance standards (*Aftenposten* 25 September 1997) and the national budget (*Aftenposten* 18 November 1997).

For all cases, we could ask whether the media used the organisations or the organisations used the media. Often, it appeared to be more accurate to characterise the reciprocation as one of symbiosis between the organisations and the media. Different from the cross-section data of Puijk *et al.* (1984) and Sæbø (1990), our process data suggested that the media coverage could occur in waves. The coverage did not only depend on the inner life of the organisations, but also the interests and *modus operandi* of the mass media itself. This included how the media used the organisations for their own purposes. The organisations could communicate contact with individual claimants or people of Traveller origin.

To a certain extent, drama and intensification appeared to compensate for the lack of victim capital to achieve media attention. The development of routines of co-operation between the government and the organisation was rarely if ever focused upon. To be conceived as controversial, causing a stir, or representing an exceptional or sensational case could be an advantage when one sought media coverage. Even the claimants' organisations with low victim capital were able to attract fairly extensive public attention. They managed to adjust to the demands of the media channel. But this did not in itself lead to access in the bureaucratic channel. What we have previously called a locked victim position was consonant with seeking attention from mass media, but a disadvantage if one sought co-operation, inclusion and influence in the administrative system. When there was low victim capital, shame by association impeded voluntary appearance in mass media. In such cases, the interests of the mass media could contribute to more media coverage of the organisations than the organisation participants would have sought by themselves.

### **Virtual organisations?**

Several of the organisational efforts successfully sought a high media profile. In other respects, they had large organisational difficulties and few and passive members. It appeared to be easier to seek coverage in the mass media than to recruit members and participants. The mass media appeared to be less interested in the number of people the organisational efforts represented, something that was of much greater concern to the government. Through appearance in the media, the organisation participants managed to make unsolved issues visible in public and contributed to raising new needs and demands on the welfare-policy agenda. The organisation representatives produced and advocated alternative interpretations of reality and redefinition of social problems, and provided new examples and material to the media. In practice, some of the organisational efforts assumed the characteristics of what one might term "virtual organisations". It was only in the mass media that they emerged as organisations.

The individualised projects and claims directed towards the state from many Travellers and claimants appeared to correspond well with the journalists' desire and need for individuals to illustrate and "personify" their case. Moreover, the mass media has its own interest in presenting social conflicts, deficiencies and disagreement as severely as possible (the scandalous, extraordinary, spectacular), as the media compete

for attention from the readers and viewers. The 'ordinary' and 'regular' attract less attention and do not qualify as 'news' or 'relevance' (Bourdieu 1998b [1996], Franklin (Ed.) 1999, Mathiesen 1993, Puijk *et al.* 1984). The 'innocent victim' provides a good case in this regard.

The mass media did not only draw advantages from an existing conflict between the disadvantaged and government or create a conflict between two existing opponents, acting as a *tertius gaudens* (Simmel 1964b [1950]: 154ff.). In a sense the media also contributed to creating the opponent by presenting the organisational efforts as if they were representative voices of *all* category members. This is not to say that journalists fabricated their evidence or "faked stories", even if they contributed to creating the reality they sometimes claim that they are only describing (Champagne 1999 [1993]).

The third party may use the interaction that takes place between the other two parties as a means for his or her own purposes. When the media stand outside the conflict, they assume an advantaged position. Equally unconnected with both parties, the mass media as the third party may seize upon the chances the conflict provides to pursue egoistic interests. Simmel pointed to two ideal types of relevance here: The adversary parties are conflicting because they are competing for attention from the *tertius* and therefore become hostile to each other. Or they are hostile to each other and therefore compete for support from the third party. In the first case, continued hostility will be meaningless when the third party has made his or her choice. In the second case, the achievement of media attention on the part of one of the adversary parties represents the real beginning of the conflict.

I would argue that in practice, we are likely to find combinations of the ideal types. It can be hard to distinguish the motives from each other, or difficult to argue that one appeared before the other. What started as a limited conflict about media attention may develop into broader and substantial hostility and in itself become a reason for competition. In other cases, there can be displacement from the substantial conflict to rivalry about media coverage, which becomes a conflict in itself. The advantage of the media accrues from their equally independent relation to the other parties. They can enjoy without risk of loss. They remain unaffected by the turbulence between the other two parties. This advantage disappears when the conflicting parties unite. That is, when the triad changes to a dyad.

When media play a more active and interfering role, the situation of the three is more like *divide et impera* (Simmel *ibid.*). The third party enjoys by interfering. The *tertius* impedes the unification of elements which do not yet try to unite, but which could do so in the future. This could be the quasi group that is impeded from developing into a conflict group, or when the potential co-operation between government and organisations among the disadvantaged will be counteracted by the mass media's interference. The interaction of the three will in such cases often be conservative. The adversary parties do not necessarily seek to destroy each other, but remain divided. The media can nourish the will to fight by symbolic means such as flattering, smearing and giving innuendo. The media play the parties against each other; the vehemence of the first party provokes the second. The third party thus contributes to the intensification of the conflict. Consequently, an entirely unstable interaction may result between the adversary parties.

In our cases, the media did not only present, but also actively contributed to the construction of claims and complaints about the welfare state, for instance, when journalists set up meetings between the public authorities and participants in the Poor House, or asked the organisation participants for comments on the government policy. Social-security claimants appeared in the media as "evidence" of poverty and social exclusion in Norway, and failures of the welfare state. Through their staging of conflicts, the media contributed to questioning the legitimacy of the political elites and welfare policy, and contributed to constructing the social problems or conflicts. Hence, the mass media contributed to structuring the issues to be given attention by convincing the general public ('voters', 'public opinion') and the political elites which issues were the most important (McCombs and Shaw 1972, Rokkan 1989 [1966]).

The media have actively contributed to constructing the welfare-policy agenda. Stein Rokkan (1989 [1966]: 99-100) argues that individual citizens have three channels for influencing the political system; the corporative channel (interest organisations, consultative mechanisms and institutionalised negotiations), the numeric-democratic channel (elections) and the mass media. The strength of the corporative channel and the mass media moderates the influence of the numerical-democratic channel. In Norway, the Labour Party has never managed to challenge the liberal and conservative dominance in the press. The press was established before the Labour Party became part of the political system in the 20th century. In spite of having the largest proportion of

the votes, the efforts to establish a labour press have never challenged the dominance of the other factions. In a similar vein, the corporative structure moderated the impact of the numerical-democratic channel.

Gudmund Hernes (1978: 181-195) has argued that how the media contribute to redistribution of power in society must be understood in terms of the rise of the information society. There has been an increase in information sources. The press, radio, film, television and the Internet have accelerated the speed of the information. The 'news' is only news for a short time. We also face a large number of non-homogenous representations. Competition between information sources is a structural precondition for media or the information society. The large amount of available information and competing representations makes it necessary to compete for the attention of the readers and viewers. This affects the selection and presentation of cases.

Hernes (1978: 181-195; 1984) identified several techniques of media presentations for drawing public attention; presenting polemic, simplification, polarisation, intensification, focusing on concrete events and personification. The practices can be construed as emerging from honourable efforts on the part of the media; one has to prioritise. They do not have space for everything. You do not need to inform people about things that everybody is assumed to know. You should not use a language that people do not understand. You must take profit for the company into consideration and not use space on information that does not interest people. Media as a fourth estate should protect democracy, prevent abuse of power and corruption. In practice, the mass media could prevent the political institutions from fulfilling their functions. As I have already indicated, we may construe of this as differences in logic between the mass media and the bureaucracy.

The mass media can assume the role of the opposition and establish issues on the political agenda. But the structurally conditioned *modus operandi* of the mass media tends to lead them to focus on demands of ad hoc solutions in individual cases. The media force politicians to address questions in the parliament or city council and demand answers and action from the ministers or mayors. Politicians must demonstrate the ability to take action now. As viewed from the perspective of the democratic institutions and public administration, one could raise the concern that the mass media weakens the opportunities for a holistic welfare policy and reinforce a tendency towards fragmentation. The *modus operandi* of the mass media and the bureaucracy potentially

contradicts each other. The mass media may represent not only a nuisance to politicians and the routine work of public administration, it may also risk distorting the architecture of a long-term welfare-policy strategy. At the same time, the media can also represent a resource for the disadvantaged. The techniques of media construction of social reality are consonant with demands of self-expression, particularity among the disadvantaged.

In our cases, the organisations were not only used by the media. Several of the organisations also used the media. The organisations contacted the media to strengthen their position prior to meetings with the government. The agenda setting function of the mass media represented a source for greater influence on the part of the disadvantaged vis-à-vis the welfare state. The Losers' Association presented demands for compensation and moral redress through the media channel, in addition to the written applications and communication through the bureaucratic channel, before the case had been processed by the public authorities (eg. *Aftenposten* 19 February 1996 and 20 November 2000, *Dagbladet* 26 January 1996, *Moss Dagblad* 18 August 1994). The organisation also announced demands for economic support to the organisation and moral redress for categories of the disadvantaged prior to meetings with the political and religious elites (*Oppland Arbeiderblad* 18 January 1994, *Østnytt*, *NRK 1* 30 October 1997, *Vårt Land* 19 March 1999, *VG* 1 March 1995, *Samhold* 17 April 1997). In this manner, they sought to strengthen their position before the application was going to be processed or before meetings with the public authorities.

They appeared to assume that the other party would be more concerned about seek solutions that could be accepted by the weaker party if they had sought support from the mass media. It could be an advantage to maximise the conflict beforehand, as perceived by the disadvantaged. When there was high media coverage, there would be higher social costs for the elites if they declined the demands of the disadvantaged. Alternatively we could have interpreted this as their expressing the assumption that the outcome was given in advance. If this interpretation was correct, the use of the mass media could be seen as an expression of fatalism. However, the association expressed demands that had been presented to the public authorities or were later pursued in meetings with the elites.

The Losers' Association had more meetings with the local government, the parliament and the government ministries than the other organisations. We only found the same strategy in the Romani People's National Association to a lesser extent. The



organisation presented demands for moral redress and recognition just before the issue was going to be addressed by the parliament (*Glåmdalen* 25 November 1996), demanded inspection of anonymous graves to find out how many Travellers were victims of incarceration in mental hospitals (*Glåmdalen* 18 July 1997) and presented the news that they had been promised financial support by the central government to make sure that they would keep their promise (*Glåmdalen* 18 October 1997). In a similar vein, another organisational effort among Travellers suggested establishing a centre of culture through the media channel before they had discussed this with the local government (*Adresseavisen* 6 December 1996). The organisations contacted the media to speed up the case processing and increase its priority on the political agenda. All in all, it appeared that the Romani People's National Association was reluctant to pursue this strategy, as they needed to avoid opposition from other Travellers. This made them more ambivalent about seeking media attention. It was less certain whether media coverage was an advantage or if it would be preferable to work away from the limelight.

To a lesser extent, the organisations contacted the media only to complain about lack of support from the government after the decisions had been made: With few exceptions, the Losers' Association appeared not only to express complaints about the decline of their demands for support (see *Arbeiderbladet* 3 April 1997), but more often, they presented demands. The protests were connected to efforts to pursue the claims further. When the ministries did not accept the claims, the claims could be presented in the mass media and then pursued further in the parliament. In the next instance, support from members of parliament could affect the decisions by the ministries. In a similar vein, the organisation could contact the local press when they faced reluctance from the municipal authorities. In the next instance, they could seek support from local politicians or the authorities on the county level of the public administration. In the case of Travellers, others more often protested in the media about decisions on their behalf and assisted in efforts to follow up the issue in the political system.

By and large, the Job-seekers' Interest Organisation, the Fredrikstad Client Action and the Poor House had less contact with the public authorities. The many protests expressed by the Fredrikstad Client Action were often not followed up in the political system. In such cases, the protests appeared to have larger symbolic than practical significance. They managed to express resistance and discontent, but lacked the organisational capacity to change the routine affairs of the public authorities. Not

only did the journalists not control the further development of the case after it was raised, it could not be expected that the journalists would follow up the case. There had to be other actors who could pursue the issue further in the system after it was raised on the public agenda.

### **The risks of seeking media attention**

The mass media could be seen as both strengthening and weakening the social mobilisation efforts. Media coverage works as a form of capital to make the claims and the member category of the organisational efforts visible to the political elite and the greater society. This may strengthen the victim capital of the disadvantaged. Moral support in the media could put pressure on the perceived counterpart and put the demands and claims from the self-organisation efforts and social movements higher on the government's agenda. Conversely, when the media turned against the self-organisational efforts and a critical focus was persistent and massive, their early accumulation of resources and achievements could more easily break down (Klandermans and Goslinga 1996). Massive negative media coverage could undermine and impede social mobilisation and self-organisation, especially during an early and unsettled phase.

Both the Romani People's National Association and the National Association Justice for the Losers of Society experienced for brief periods of time that the media turned against them when there were internal conflicts and opposition. In the case of the National Association Justice for the Losers of Society, there were also critical voices and scepticism against what the organisation managed to achieve compared to the fees they demanded for assisting people (*Dagbladet* 29 December 1998). The organisation representatives were confronted with critical voices and reviews of the organisation's work. Especially in the case of Travellers, critical depictions in the media could easily be taken as harmful for you and your family's social standing and honour. Not only was the organisation highly dependent on the continued efforts of the chairperson, the Traveller status was also associated with the construction of kinship.

*The Losers' Association:* On one occasion, the association sought to arrange an open meeting for Sami people who wanted to apply for financial compensation for lack of primary education, especially during the Second World War. The association planned to charge NOK 50 in entrance fees to cover some of the travel expenses. The Secretary

General anticipated that as many as 200-300 people would attend. A mayor and a well-known spokesperson for the cultural rights of the Sami people were interviewed as the counterpart. They expressed scepticism to having the Sami people and the local community as a whole associated with 'losers'. The journalists questioned what kind of assistance people would receive in return for the NOK 50. The day after, it was reported that only ten people had turned up, out of which seven had paid the entrance fee. Eight journalists had been present to cover the event (*Aftenposten* 19 and 24 September 1996, *Dagbladet* 23 September 1996). The journalists also followed up when press releases from the Losers' Association led to protests from the local authorities against being labelled as a municipality of many 'losers'. The journalists could 'reveal' that there in 'reality' was a much lower number of losers in the local community. They claimed that the association had registered everyone who had grown up in the community in that municipality, while few of them lived there now (*Dagbladet* 29 July 2000, *Bergens Tidende* 21 and 28 August 2000).

*The Romani People's National Association:* Although the mass media to a great extent was supportive of and expressed sympathy for the self-organisational efforts among Travellers, they also turned against these efforts when there was internal opposition and conflicts. In 1997-98, a counter-movement to the efforts to be recognised as a national minority emerged. To a large extent this was part of an opposition to the Romani People's National Association. On one occasion, about two hundred people of Traveller origin gathered to sign a petition. The local press covered the event: "Rebellion against Traveller Organisation." The criticism of the organisation was covered together with an interview with the chairperson of the Romani People's National Association as a counterpart. Later, there was a follow-up interview with both a spokesman for the opposition and the chairperson of the Romani People's National Association (*Hamar Arbeiderblad* 31 December 1997, 26 February 1998). Other papers interviewed individual Travellers who voiced similar objections against the self-organisational efforts: "Wrong of our people to demand compensation. (NN) is against the Romani People's National Association" (*Glåmdalen* 11 June 1999).

The hesitation from parts of the Church of Norway to grant an unconditional apology to Travellers intensified the disagreement between the participants in the Romani People's National Association. The accusations a former board member made against the chairperson were given large coverage. The organisation did not *really* work

for the interests of Travellers, but only maintained their personal interests and finances. It was claimed that the number of members was much smaller than stated by the organisation, and that the number of participants was declining. The journalist supported the demands for a public investigation of the finances in the organisation (*Aftenposten* 21 April, 5 and 6 May 1999). The chairperson experienced this as a personal attack and hesitated to respond to the criticism (*Haugesunds Avis* 19 April 1999). On other occasions, the disagreement about recognition as a national minority was more focused upon the criticism against the organisation as such: “Travellers disagree about registration as national minority” (*NTB* 11 February 1998) (also *Adresseavisen* 12 February 1998).

The media appeared not to take any responsibility for the possible consequences of exposing and dramatising the internal conflicts and disagreement in the general public. Rather, they claimed it to be their obligation to ‘uncover truth’ and call attention to reprehensible dimensions in the organisations. Biased and one-sided sources, exaggerations and the possible detrimental consequences of this for the disadvantaged appeared to be less of a concern. However, the organisations could not expect only positive and supportive media coverage without also accepting critical eyes on their work. The organisations had to be prepared that the media could turn against them when they sought public attention and placed themselves at the centre of the media’s attention.

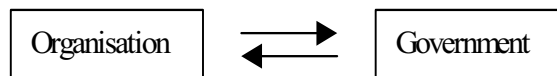
### **Concluding discussion**

Simmel (1964b [1950]) demonstrated that there is a qualitative shift in social interaction when the number of parties increases from two to three. Social transformation and change will more easily occur when a third element is introduced. The dyad represents the first social unity and opposition. The triad represents transformation, conciliation and abandonment of absolute contrasts. It opens up the opportunities for making new alliances and seeking support outside the dyad. Indirect relations come in addition to the direct relations. Points that cannot be contacted by a straight line can now be contacted via a third element. This may disturb or strengthen the routine interaction between the other two. An increase in the number of elements beyond three would not in the same way correspondingly modify the interaction any further. It does not transform the

formal types of relations. Instead, a larger number of elements can be construed as variations of dyads and triads.

The three are less likely to find a really uniform mood of interaction compared to the sociological logic of the situation of two. The parties may have different interests and experiences in common. A has x in common with B and y in common with C. B and C have z in common. They may also have different ways of relating to each other and reasons for interacting. Party formation is suggested instead of dependency relations or solidarity. In relation to power or authority relations, in a dyad the subordinated party suffers from a lack of individualisation due to suppressive paternalism or levelling forces such as *divide et impera*. When the relationship is voluntary, the weaker party may choose not to join (ibid. 137-38, 141). In line with this kind of reasoning, we may argue that when the relationship between organisations of the disadvantaged and the government is construed as a dyad, this demands considerable strength and autonomy on the part of the disadvantaged to avoid co-optation.

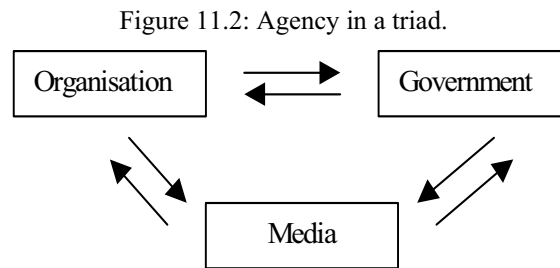
Figure 11.1: Agency in a dyad.



In the dyad, issues of autonomy or co-optation of the disadvantaged party will be more pressing. In the case of weak moral authority on the part of the disadvantaged, the organisation may become part of the government, be overruled by the government, or avoid contact with the government. When the organisation depends on financial support from the government this has been claimed to be synonymous with subordination and discipline. The organisations risk being transformed into quasi-public elements in the administrative system. The dyad can change into a monad. But when the organisation can seek support from a third party, the dependency relation changes its characteristics. The sociological situation of the disadvantaged is changed when a third party is introduced.

This can be regarded as an elaboration on the argument I presented in the previous chapter. In Chapter 10, I argued that victim capital was likely to affect the relative autonomy on the part of the self-organisations among the disadvantaged. There

are further advantages connected to this that we have touched on in prior chapters. The disadvantaged can more easily seek support from a third party when they have more victim capital. This can include public opinion, the mass media, and educational and religious elites against the political elites. The relationship between the organisations and the media can thus be considered as a special case of the more general possibility of seeking alliances with a third party.



The organisations interact differently with journalists than with representatives of the government. The reasons and social conditions for interaction are different. The requirements for succeeding in the bureaucratic channel and the mass media are different. The distribution of media capital contributes together with victim capital and bureaucratic capital to structure the conditions for participation in the welfare-policy field. The disadvantaged may seek alliances in outside supporters among social elites other than the political elites. In other cases, they can seek alliances among parts of the elites when they are divided. In yet other cases, the disadvantaged may seek support from ‘public opinion’ through the mass media. The mass media can function as opponents to the political system and an indicator of what are the commonly accepted values (goals) and norms (rules about the accepted means to achieve the goals) in the majority population (‘public opinion’). This applies not only to the government, but to other kinds of authority relations as well. This was the case when Travellers sought alliances with the mass media against the reluctant part of the Church of Norway. The mass media was used to influence the supportive part of the state church fighting against the reluctant part of the church.

The organisations and the mass media have separate agendas. Organisations could achieve public attention when their interests corresponded with and served the interests of the media. The organisational efforts and the journalists could constitute

alliances as long as the journalists did not turn against the organisations. This represented an extra possibility for appeal outside the bureaucratic channel. The disadvantaged could seek media coverage because it was more easily accessible or one assumed that one would more easily be taken seriously by public authorities if the case had been covered by the press in advance. The media coverage could affect the possibilities of reversing the decision in individual cases and be a starting point for change in public-welfare policy. This presupposed that there were other actors who could pursue the issue further after it had been raised in the media. Otherwise, the case was likely to end with the media coverage.

The significance of the media representations should, however, not be underestimated in the information society. The mass media has provided the production of symbols and is likely to colour people's understanding of contemporary social problems and what are the dominant features and qualities of 'Norway' and 'Norwegians' in the present. It has the possibility of constructing or 'framing' categorical identities and in this respect to make the category visible to other category members and the greater society. What the greater society learns about Travellers and claimants is probably to a greater extent mediated through the mass media than through direct interaction. The media filter and condense information, but also impose biases. Media constructions or images of the Travellers and claimants have presented images of not only 'the disadvantaged', but also Norwegian society and the welfare state.

Puijk *et al.* (1984) were concerned that media coverage that does not lead to practical changes would only serve as entertainment or "social pornography" for others. They argued that the media can be an information source and an influential factor; given that the case has broader relevance, and the journalist actively seeks information and follows up the case after the first press coverage. Biased selection of cases means that the media give a misleading image of who the clients of the welfare state are, the difficulties they face and the attitudes one finds among the public authorities. Individualisation of social problems, passive communication of the viewpoints of only one of the adversary parties and lack of follow up of the cases makes the media less relevant as a party in the social policy debate.

I would argue that the media coverage is more equivocal. The media reports may serve as images the readers can compare themselves with. Following Merton's (1968: 335-440) terminology, we could construe this as negative reference groups. At the same

time, alliances with journalists have represented possibilities for self-assertion, protests, influencing the policy agenda, and breaking silences and the former acceptance of a marginalized position in the greater society. In our cases, visibility and voice were possibly the most obvious achievements on the part of the self-organisational efforts.

The victim capital, possibilities of personification and intensification of conflicts provided opportunities for uneasy alliances with journalists. More often, the media coverage depended on the journalist's account of the issue. The disadvantaged risked that journalists performed symbolic violence on their identity and self-presentation, presented a more victimised image than they would have preferred themselves, or turned against the self-organisational efforts. Low accumulation of media capital among the disadvantaged and lack of continuity among journalists who covered the welfare-policy issues made it more difficult to control the outcome of the alliances on the part of the disadvantaged.



## **Part V**

### **Conclusions and implications**



## **Marginal citizenship and agency reconsidered**

The aim of this chapter is to draw together the key findings of the preceding analysis and relate them to the research questions presented in Chapter 1. We will summarise how the cultural and social opportunity structures affected the self-organisational efforts among claimants and Travellers. Finally, we will discuss some implications of our findings for sociological theory and welfare policy.

### **The main findings**

This dissertation has focused on Norway as a case for the study and development of analytical generalisations about the reciprocation between the social categories conceived as the socially excluded and greater society, especially the political elites and mass media. More specifically, it has reported from a parallel analysis of two sets of authority relations of historical significance for the welfare state and that have been substantially connected in the welfare-policy field. Through an empirical and qualitative process analysis, we have traced the development patterns of the organisational efforts among able-bodied social-security claimants and Travellers. This made it possible to explore how the organisation participants adjusted to and were able to influence their structural conditions for self-organisation over time. Travellers and claimants emerged as clear contrasts to the employed wage earner as the prototypical social-democratic citizen. By exploring the self-organisational efforts in their context, we have traced the degree of flexibility in the social-democratic citizenship regime in relation to our two categories of disadvantaged people.

By doing this, we have been able to oppose or nuances several of the more ideographic accounts that have been suggested earlier. Rather than attributing organisational difficulties to their culture, we have argued that this should among others be understood against the backdrop of their vulnerability in the greater society. Differences in social cosmology between the dominant actors and the dominated actors

should not be accounted for by referring to Travellers' culture but to their social standing. Such factors emerged as more important. Indirectly, the category comparison also indicated the *longue durée* of the dominating model of society as a whole, the way this was expressed by the relevant social and political elites in Norway.

Some might argue that our inferences about agency among the disadvantaged were drawing excessively upon the exceptional cases of collective action or social-movement mobilisation among the disadvantaged. Due to the design of our research project, we have not sought to draw conclusions about the relative frequency of the various coping and resistance strategies. Rather, we have accounted for the transitions from individual to organisational agency, and vice versa, among the disadvantaged, and considered the continuity between the two poles in degrees of co-ordination.

We have been concerned with the mechanisms that affected the construction of a community system because this had practical significance for whether the disadvantaged managed to achieve fuller citizenship. We distinguished between three factors that were likely to affect the social construction of community systems among the disadvantaged; legitimacy of the claims, identification with others in a similar situation and time-perspective on the life situation. The factors were interrelated and mutually reinforced each other. The experience of welfare-state provisions emerged as the primary problem condition for self-organisation. How the disadvantaged perceived the welfare state and its provisions was decisive for the success and failures of the organisational efforts. The welfare state both made the social mobilisation more necessary and more difficult, both promoted and impeded the self-organisational efforts.

*Between the organisations:* Travellers had better opportunities for presenting alternative images of themselves than social-security claimants had. The former policy appeared to have weakened their independent symbol system. This represented a clear challenge to their efforts of presenting alternative images of themselves in the public. It appeared that Foucault-oriented interpretations have tended to ignore the possible autonomy on the part of the disadvantaged. Travellers represented the clearest instance of this. They had access to a 'History of Pride' and cultural tools available to stage their self-presentation as an oppressed minority rather than a dependent client category (Chapter 5).

*Inside the organisations:* It is only on a superficial level that the self-organisational efforts and social movements can be viewed as the aggregate of

individual actors pursuing their goals and considering the social costs lower than the potential future benefits, sometimes depicted as a curvilinear relationship of rising demands when the chances for success improve and decline when reforms are easily achieved (Tilly 1993, Kriesi *et al.* 1995). The chapters above have indicated how their relationship to greater society, especially the political elites, affected their "internal" relations:

The disappointments and vulnerability experienced in interaction with greater society had substantial consequences for the relations between the organisations' participants. They often emerged as unsuccessful in presenting themselves as a team to the outside world. The participants voluntarily or involuntarily played out internal divisions. When two parties feel inferior and weak in relation to a powerful third party, this may result in the two becoming divided against each other. Internal tensions emerged as a displacement of conflict with the central government, their local representatives (the Mission, public childcare authorities, social-services offices, labour-exchange offices and so on), and the greater society. It was perceived as preferable to avoid conflicts with the elites. Such conflicts were perceived as impossible to handle, involving high risks and unforeseeable consequences. This was associated with a low-trust relationship to the greater society.

Both claimants and Travellers had experienced prosecution and disparagement from others. These were real disappointments to bear in mind. They did not become that disappointed if they assumed that everybody sought to maximise their self-interests. This could thus help them to justify a strategic relationship to others. Adjustments to the perceived societal conditions brought about coping strategies that were also used against others in a similar situation. The low-trust relationship to the greater society was reflected in distrust among peers. It was perceived as involving lower social costs to confront others in a similar situation than to confront the greater society (Chapter 6).

It was sometimes easier to mobilise outside supporters than people belonging to the category. Experiences of vulnerability appeared to make it easier to mobilise outside supporters to the organisational efforts. Intellectuals and academics risk little by expressing their support. On the contrary, they could be rewarded by positive self-esteem and achieving recognition from the elites in the politico-administrative system, the mass media or academia. The problem of the category members was the resource of outside supporters. The status as helpers was more easily compatible with other

statuses. Among the disadvantaged, *shame by association* affected the ability to accomplish their goals. We have identified three development paths and adaptation strategies; (i) exhaustion and resignation, (ii) involvement of outside supporters, and (iii) combination of category members and outside supporters.

Disadvantaged individuals acted on the dilemma of seeking recognition at the price of being fixed as different or 'the Other', *versus* maintaining flexibility through invisibility and detachment. Faced with this dilemma, many were likely to fluctuate between the two strategies. However, as the social and symbolic costs associated with the Traveller status were on the decrease, more people of Traveller origin considered seeking community with other Travellers. The shame and disrepute previously associated with belonging to the category and the perceived risk associated with seeking recognition was on the decrease. Shame and disrepute emerged as a greater obstacle to claimants of temporary social-security benefits. Nevertheless, *status-complexity* facilitated opportunities for agency even in these cases. We have identified three coping strategies; status denial, status avoidance and audience segregation (Chapter 7).

Both in the case of Travellers and claimants it was to a large extent as objects of other people's concern, help and control that they tentatively sought to come together. Travellers and claimants could be seen as clear contrasts in their opportunities for boundary drawing and maintenance. Travellers appeared as the more united group against the government. They had better opportunities for visualising their difference from others, and the category emerged as more clear-cut. The problem conditions were also more similar compared to claimants. The opportunities for construction of group boundaries were modified by the fact that there was a great deal of work to do to revitalise Travellers' culture and define what it would imply to be a Traveller today. This meant that they mainly recruited those who directly or indirectly had been affected by the former assimilation policy. It appeared to be more difficult to recruit those who claimed to have "made it on their own" or who did not have any specific charges against the state.

The requirements presented to social-security claimants served both to unite and to divide them against each other. On the one hand, experiences of *paternalism, surveillance and unpredictability* helped to unite them. On the other hand, there were problems of boundary-drawing. 'Clients', 'poor', 'job-seekers' and 'losers' appeared as amorphous categories: They benefited from different combinations of social security.

They were in different phases of the case processing and efforts to remedy their problem. They had different attachment to and experience with the labour market. The system relied on individual case processing and the exercise of discretion. This represented a power bias in the relationship between welfare bureaucrats and the people making claims. As they were highly dependent on the system, the claimants were token on demonstrating that it was not their fault that they remained out of work. They became more inclined to present their case as unique in negotiations with the system.

The power bias inscribed in the delivery system (social-opportunity structures) and the absence of authorised accounts and symbolic tools to present themselves as clear-cut categories (cultural-opportunity structures) made their community system weaker as compared to Travellers. They tended to agree among themselves that more rule-based and standardised services would be preferable. This would have made them more equal in relation to the system. But this conflicted with demands of *particularistic and expressive response* to their life situation. On the one hand, one could achieve larger predictability and decrease the dependency on the welfare bureaucrats. On the other hand, individual needs would to a lesser extent be taken into consideration. In practice, claimants preferred to pursue their individual interests against the welfare state (Chapter 8).

As a large number of people received social-security benefits during the year, one could have assumed that this would have resulted in large interest organisations. But many of the recipients only received cash transfers for limited time spells. Actual and expected upward mobility weakened the sense of community among claimants of temporary social-security benefits. The participants did not only become passive consumers of the services offered by the organisations, they also often developed a short-term and instrumental relationship to the organisation. Especially in cases where it was considered that the status should be temporary, it was important to ensure legitimacy of the organisations' activity by developing activities and services which could help change the status of the users and reduce their dependency on public assistance. This contributed to limiting the participants' involvement in the organisations. In the next instance, this weakened the recruitment of more active participants and made the organisations more vulnerable to exhaustion.

At the first appearance, Travellers emerged as a striking contrast to the able-bodied claimants. Among Travellers, the idea of permanent membership helped to

strengthen the community system. One was considered born into the status. In practice, self-definition and recognition assumed greater significance for recruitment to the community system. The significance attributed to biology sometimes stood in temporal tension to how long they had known about their origin. Thus, it was open for tensions and efforts to construct links between the two temporal reference points. Different from what we could have assumed from Lysgaard (1985 [1961]), there was no clear relationship between the temporality of the status and organisation attachment. The organisations worked as temporary arenas for pursuing one's agenda, problems, interests and needs, even in cases of a perceived permanent status. However, organisations based on permanent statuses had more paying members and the participants more often tended to remain passive members. This assumed similarities with charity, but also with investment in their future (Chapter 9).

*Between the organisations and the greater society:* The parallel analysis of two sets of authority relations discovered categorical differences in the access to the social and political elites. The organisation participants tended to fluctuate between seeking and avoiding contact with the government. Ambiguity of the welfare policy as both help and control amplified ambivalence to contact with the government. This was not only their subjective feeling, but also built into their social position. If they became involved in the decision-making process, they could only to a lesser extent present themselves as victims of circumstances outside their control. However, this ambivalence appeared to diminish when they achieved a relationship of trust and developed a more gradualist perception of the elites.

Distrust and social distance to public authorities emerged as self-reinforcing mechanisms. Low victim capital appeared to be associated with great social distance to the political and administrative elites. In such cases, the disadvantaged were not recognised as autonomous subjects. This made the relation between the organisation participants and the welfare state more similar to that of an adversary relationship. In the next instance, lack of proximity to the elites prevented accumulation of bureaucratic capital. This was associated with continued cleavages in society. Conversely, as Travellers obtained more victim capital, the possibilities for proximity and acquisition of bureaucratic capital became greater.

When the external barriers to social mobilisation were removed, the internal barriers became more apparent. The disadvantaged had to overcome an entrenched



victim position to be able to accumulate resources and expand their activities. We have identified almost ideal-typical contrasts in development patterns between some of the Travellers' organisations in this regard. This emerged as vicious and virtuous circles in organisational development.

Isomorphism between the organisations and the government in problem understanding and modes of interaction emerged as the outcome of adjustments, informal interaction, formal requirements and control. As the organisation leadership accumulated bureaucratic capital, they became increasingly different from their regular members and users. The organisation leadership was under pressure to switch between modes of interaction. This switching was partly facilitated through physical separation of interaction contexts. It was equivocal whether the co-operation implied inclusion or incorporation and co-optation. In our cases the accumulation of bureaucratic capital appeared not to prevent the organisation leaders from acting censoriously and as a victim when necessary. Larger cultural resources were likely to provide for more autonomy and resistance to subjugation on the part of organisation representatives (Chapter 10).

The mass media emerged as a third party that could ensure larger space for agency and autonomy on the part of the organisations. The disadvantaged could seek moral support against their adversary. When the case was established in the media, the organisation could take the issue further in the bureaucratic channel: The organisations sometimes sought support from media before meetings with public authorities. They assumed that they then would hold a stronger position and would more likely be listened to. The media coverage could affect the possibilities to correct the decision in individual cases and serve as a starting point for change in public-welfare policy. In other cases, the protests were not followed up in the political system. In such cases, the protests appeared to have greater symbolic than practical significance.

The reciprocation often emerged as a situation of symbiosis between the disadvantaged and the media. The 'innocent victim' emerged as a particularly well-suited object for the mass media. Together with the possibilities of personification and intensification of conflicts, this provided opportunities for uneasy alliances with journalists. The media used Travellers and claimants in a more general critique of the welfare state. The media benefited from an existing conflict, created a conflict between two existing opponents or even contributed to creating the opponents. Media coverage

could strengthen the victim capital of the disadvantaged. The disadvantaged could move higher up on the political agenda, present their own problem understanding and proposals. In the next instance, the organisation participants could use their media capital or competence in interacting with the mass media to achieve more substantial resources.

However, the organisations had to be prepared for the possibility that the media could turn against them when they sought public attention and placed themselves at the centre of media attention. The participants also risked that journalists could present a more victimised and unequivocal image than they would have preferred themselves. Low accumulation of media capital among the organisation participants and lack of continuity among journalists who covered welfare-policy issues made it more difficult to control the outcome of the alliances on the part of the disadvantaged (Chapter 11).

### **Inside and outside the political system**

There is a fairly wide gap from receiving support and sympathy from outsiders to becoming a veto group, a force to be reckoned with or more moderately being attributed substantial citizenship rights. Travellers increasingly became part of the political system. The Romani People's National Association was *inside* the system, as they received financial support for the organisation from the late 1990s. They were still *outside* the system in the sense that they to a lesser extent participated in deliberative processes about new policy measures. Travellers were *inside* society as objects of compassion. But they remained *outside* society qua Travellers in the sense that there were fewer initiatives to support revitalisation of their culture and protect them against discrimination in the present.

Claimants of temporary social-security benefits appeared to a larger extent to remain at the *outside* of the political system. They were *inside* the system as objects of assistance, control and the concern for others. When they managed to present their own views, they emerged as subjects *inside* the system. The Losers' Association managed to be included in the system as recipients of considerable financial support from the central government. They were *inside* the system as communicators of applications for individual compensation from the state. In other respects, they were to a great extent *outside* the system.

Boundaries the centre drew around itself, maintenance and promulgation of its culture, represented obstacles to increased social inclusion. Culturally dependent mental schemes and reproduction of capital types of importance to succeed in the welfare-policy field contributed to creating and maintaining social distance. Accustomed modes of thinking about the social world appeared to prevent consideration of alternative measures of activation and social inclusion. The elites tended to be cut off or cut themselves off from information about the welfare state as experienced at the bottom tier of the system.

The societal elites the organisations related to reflected their relational identity and interest claims, the demands of redress and recognition. The Church of Norway defined itself as significant in defining who the Travellers were and in attributing recognition. Thus, the Church of Norway maintained their significance to Travellers, but were also maintained by Travellers themselves as significant even after the Mission was formally closed down and no longer reproduced the Travellers as a client category. Parallel to this, claimants' organisations addressed the institutionalised part of the Labour Movement, especially the LO, the confederation of trade unions.

From the perspective of the public officials, support for self-organisation can be seen as symbolically important to demonstrate sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable member categories, especially when the member category is attributed a large degree to victim capital. In such cases, support for self-organisation among the disadvantaged could underline the charisma of the corresponding or relevant elites. In the case of Travellers, support for the international trend towards 'multiculturalism' appeared to be perceived as having few consequences for the elites and the greater society.

As identity management has generally been less taken-for-granted for larger sections of the population, the former demands of conformity in Norwegian society have come to be perceived as oppressive and unreasonable. One cannot easily claim that "this is how things are done here" or otherwise refer to a monopolistic tradition or culture. Expansion in information about other cultures and societies from "outside", experiences from an increased number of differentiated social worlds and geographic mobility are aspects of modern life which have made the cultural points of reference less stable. Modes of living can no longer be taken for granted, and it has therefore become more important to actively choose values and who one wants to be. Questions about 'authenticity' have become more urgent to more people.

At the same time, the new tolerance has not included outsiders considered too many in numbers or considered to break too much with the conventional mode of life and expectations. In the case of Travellers, support of the international trend towards “multiculturalism” appeared to be perceived as having few consequences for the elites and the society at large. It could seem as if the central government in Norway was able to support differences in modes of life in areas where this has been assumed not to have extensive consequences for the organisation of society at large.

### **Agency among the disadvantaged**

It is hardly surprising to find that the organisational efforts faced several and in part demanding challenges in co-ordinating and articulating their viewpoints collectively in the public sphere. From prior theorisation of what it has implied to be in a marginal or vulnerable position, one could have assumed that the possibilities to assert their own views and interests were univocally determined by structural factors and the decisions of actors in the politico-administrative system ("top down"). The Sociology of Marginality appears, however, to have exaggerated a one-dimensional focus on the negative and problematic aspects of the lives of vulnerable categories of people. The disadvantaged have often been depicted as passive victims and objects of other people's concern, assistance, control and surveillance rather than active citizens and subjects. This may have given a too deterministic and one-sided picture of marginalisation.

The dissertation has indicated that the relationship between government, outside supporters and the respective cases of Travellers and claimants can be analysed as a dynamic interplay of reactions and counter-reactions. There are reasons to emphasise that the organisation participants through their reactions and initiatives, actions and non-actions, contributed to creating the conditions for their own activities themselves. These conditions were not exclusively created by others. In other words, it was not a prior given which organisational efforts would succeed in building viable organisations. The social and cultural opportunity structures for social mobilisation changed over time. By active identity management, using different labels about oneself and fluctuating between whether they emphasised their resources or lack of such in different contexts, the organisation participants were able to mobilise resources, support and sympathy, and/or achieve a better position for dialogue and negotiation with the government.

At the same time, it is decisive that there were objective categorical differences in the available cultural tools or resources and possibilities to convert the resources. In this respect, Travellers enjoyed a relative advantage compared to several of the claimants' organisations. The combination of a victim status and signs of cultural difference emerged as powerful symbols during a period of change ("unsettled period", Swidler 1986). Increasing legitimacy made it easier for Travellers to have accepted their self-presentation as victims of circumstances outside their control. This decreased the social costs of being associated with other Travellers, and increased the possibility of collective presentation and co-ordination of claims against the state. In the next instance, the social movement contributed to development of new welfare-policy measures, public attention and information. Through this, Norwegian Travellers have achieved greater respect. The counter-reactions were, however, more often individualised than collective, and this was also characteristic of the new social movement in the 1990s. The social movement was not univocal. It was rather characterised by fluctuating and weakly co-ordinated protests, more or less individual initiatives and internal tensions.

The initiatives of single individuals and the media focus on isolated cases probably contributed to providing a more complex and broader picture of Travellers' experience. But the focus on individual cases has in certain respects also contributed to individualisation of their experiences. Focus on individuals among Travellers appeared to impede more holistic and balanced considerations. The tendency of fragmentation of the consequences of the former assimilation policy may also have made representatives of the greater society more uncertain about how they should encounter and respond to the demands from the Travellers. This could even be the case with representatives who from the outset were sympathetic and supportive: It becomes unclear how the welfare-policy measures have been experienced from "below", as seen from the perspective of the beneficiaries and recipients. Hence, there could also be more doubt about the consequences of the former policy. When the experience of a disadvantaged category is fragmented and individualised, it is also more difficult for outsiders to identify and get in touch with people who could be said to speak on behalf of the entire category of people. There was consequently a risk that representatives of official Norway were pacified by contradictory opinions and competing versions of their experiences. It is still too early to determine whether this means that the government will abstain from

implementing policy measures that could have given more substantial content to the official recognition as national minority.<sup>8</sup>

Organised Travellers demanded particular policy measures on the basis of claims of cultural differences and the special targeted measures they had been exposed to rather than being particularly in need of help. The particularities have become a basis for promoting demands for change in the normative foundation of the welfare policy and model of the integrated society. The initiatives towards the greater society – addressed to politicians and the civil service as representatives of the greater society and administrators of the dominant mode of viewing the social world – were based on claims of being different from other citizens. Mobilisation on the basis of cultural differences was connected to demands for change and expansion of citizenship rights. The organisation representatives emphasised that Travellers did not trust arrangements that were organized by others, and therefore needed particular arrangements operated or controlled by themselves. For instance, they presented claims for a separate ombudsman, separate administrative offices, teams of health professions and solicitors who knew their history and particular needs, but also possibilities for developing arenas for self-reflection and identity development among Travellers ("centres of culture"). Parallel to and fluctuating with this, the activists also emphasised that they wanted to be treated as on an equal footing with other Norwegian citizens.

Although there were categorical differences in cultural-opportunity structures, *claimants* did not remain passive in relation to the welfare-policy measures and their life chances. But their self-activation, coping strategies and considerations were not always in accordance with the interests and goals as construed by the elites. In these cases, the relations emerged as adversary relationships.

When we compare the most and least viable claimant organisations included in our study, a striking feature was how resources aggregated in line with the so-called Mathew Effect (Merton 1988): "Whoever has will be given more, and he will have in an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (St. Matthew 13:12). The difference in resource mobilisation can be interpreted as an accumulation effect. Those who had many resources were likely to increase their

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<sup>8</sup> However, the white paper on the follow-up on the national minority convention suggested that the government so far has avoided committing itself to more specific and substantial measures than financial support to a cultural centre. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs suggested collecting and documenting Travellers' culture

advantages and vice versa. Presence of one resource type appeared to increase the likelihood of other resources being present. Accumulation of victim capital, financial capital, human capital, media capital and bureaucratic capital appeared to be associated with each other. *The Fredrikstad Client Action* had low legitimacy for their cause, moral and financial support was few and far between, the participants remained at a great social distance from the politico-administrative system and they suffered from resignation and exhaustion. 'Take-up campaigns' and efforts to modify the social-security system emerged as a nuisance and as disregard of legitimate authority and authorised values and associated with difficult and uncooperative 'clients'. Almost as an ideal-typical contrast to this, *the Losers' Association* managed to achieve increasing moral and financial support from local and central government, employed staff in their office and recruited expert advisers, attracted a fairly large number of users or "customers", and managed to justify the advocacy of unsatisfied needs and demands in the population, connected to the failures and shortcomings of the welfare state. We may construe this as self-reinforcing spiral effects in society.

This appeared to be associated with maintenance of categorical inequality in whether those conceived as 'socially excluded' were able to take a subject position and become actors of their own lives rather than objects acted upon by others. Self-organisation emerged as more easily accomplished when the participants had a high legitimacy of their cause, the status was permanent and there were large resources for staging their unity and distinctiveness from others. Conversely, low legitimacy of their cause, a perceived temporary status and vague boundaries impeded social mobilisation. A lower degree of unity or higher degree of amorphousness probably makes it inappropriate to characterise the initiatives among our cases of claimants as a social movement. It is perhaps more pertinent to talk about the totality as a fluidity of intermittent counter-reactions, coping strategies and moves from below, often of temporary duration, representing a counter-current to that of the official welfare policy flowing from the top of society.

Representations of clients and claimants of welfare-state services and measures as passive recipients who need to be activated by others appear to be based on flawed theoretical assumptions and insufficient empirical support. It might be more consonant

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and history, but had no suggestions for how one more actively could maintain, develop and strengthen the Travellers' way of life, language and culture in the present (*St. meld.* no. 15 2000-2001).

with our findings to assume that people who for periods of their lives have to seek financial assistance, medical treatment and so on to a great extent seek to *continue* their own individual life projects and endeavour to make the best out of their situation as they perceive it. Some of the formulated goals in the pursuit of 'active citizenship' may turn out to be flawed in this regard. The issue is not necessarily to make passive people active. It may rather be to (i) canalise existing self-activity in directions that are considered useful or suitable when taking into consideration the larger societal needs as perceived by the political and administrative elites, and/or (ii) support and facilitate different forms of self-organised activities that have emerged more or less spontaneously, thanks to entrepreneurs among the disadvantaged and without public support or initiative.

### **Categorical differences in opportunity structures**

All in all, we were able to differentiate the general hypothesis, presented by Charles Tilly (1993, 1998: 212-17), that successful achievement of recognition on the part of social movements depends on whether the supporters are successful in transmitting the message that they are worthy, unified, numerous and committed. Our study indicated that worthiness was the more important factor. In our context, a relatively small number of users or followers appeared not to prevent public authorities from granting moral and financial support when the organisation participants were considered worthy and having a good cause, rather the contrary. Different from previous observations on the distinction between the deserving and undeserving in need, we have developed this as a more general analytical tool. Distribution and achievement of victim capital emerged as important for the structuration of the welfare-policy field. We have suggested seeing the symbolic worthiness attributed and achieved on the part of the participants as a resource that contributed to structuring the welfare policy as well as the subjectivity of members of the subject populations, but that it also could be converted into more substantial types of capital in efforts to change the policy.

When there was a lack of unity but a high degree of victim capital, financial compensation appeared more often to be granted individually. This was the case with individual moral redress without recognition of a collective fate. The people who contacted the Loser Association to achieve assistance in their individual cases



represented the clearest instance of this. When the category of claimants with high legitimacy emerged as amorphous, mobilisation of sympathetic outside supporters appeared to be easier. Again the Loser Association emerged as the clearest example of this. It seems that the self-organisation among the disadvantaged has tended to be more particularistic, specialised and narrow, at least the last two decades, while the large voluntary associations and charity organisations have sought to include broader categories of people (Seip 1994b, Selle and Øymyr 1995). From the point of view of the disadvantaged, they have more easily been perceived as dissimilar. The better-positioned supporters have seen *others* in need as *contrasts* to themselves. It seems that categories at a large social distance from oneself have more easily been perceived in less differentiated terms. Finally, to outside supporters, the classifications have been operative tools for practical policy initiatives rather than bases for identification.

As objects of other people's concern and sympathy, solidarity or compassion, claimants and Travellers could in slightly different ways serve as a mirror image for the greater society or the elites; what were the accepted values and modes of life, what was characteristic of modern society, in short who "we" were. The tendency to reject and mis-recognise the claimants' organisations with low victim capital appeared to be connected to dominant values in Norwegian society. These values were especially expressed and maintained by the Norwegian Labour Party and the dominant social-democratic section of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions. In comparison support to self-organisation among Travellers could support the charisma of the corresponding elites, including the politicians, staff in the central administration and representatives of the Church of Norway. From the perspective of public officials, support for self-organisation could be seen as symbolically important to demonstrate sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable member categories. In part, the paradox we presented in Chapter 1 may be accounted for by such reasons.

All in all, Foucault-inspired interpretations have had a tendency to give too one-sided attention to techniques of normalisation and discipline. They have tended to overlook the unintended alliance, symbiosis or collaboration between the disadvantaged and the elites in the maintenance of social and cultural dominance (Halvorsen 1999, Swaan 1990). The self-criticism of Travellers and their emphasis on the past as the "true" and original Traveller culture corresponded well with the journalists' and elites' distancing themselves from the assimilation policy in the distant past. Representatives

of official Norway appeared to have attained a target group for expressions of sympathy, excuses and bad consciousness. In this way, Travellers appeared in new ways to serve as a mirror for the greater society.

Organisation viability has sometimes been accounted for by reference to the personal circumstances of individual category members. For instance, the financial resources, education level or mental health of the individual category members have been referred to (eg. Bleiklie *et al.* 1989 [1979]). However, this line of argument has tended to ignore the impact of characteristics on the category level for social mobilisation. The symbolic resources possible to mobilise by invoking a categorical identity and the possible symbolic poverty of the category members were likely to influence both the response from the social and political elites and the potential recruitment of participants to the organisation. As the statuses were associated with different cultural opportunity structures, it was not only been a matter of time in development of new organisations. Some statuses were less likely to represent a successful basis for self-organisation than others.

Independence from the personal circumstances of individual category members appeared to be moderated by the degree of dependence on individual representatives in the organisational efforts. A high degree of dependence on individual participants was associated with small and volatile organisations. In our cases, the activities declined when the core activists became sick or employed in short-term jobs, participated in education or labour market courses, or simply were exhausted and resigned. In comparison, other organisations develop a larger degree of independence from the individual organisation participants. Institutionalisation and bureaucratisation render the organisational efforts less vulnerable. The degree of bureaucratisation and institutionalisation should, however, be accounted for by reference to structural conditions on the category level.

It has sometimes been suggested that professionals can be of help to the organisation participants in co-ordinating and ensuring continuity, improving communication with the government, and by gathering documentation and thereby strengthening the profile and direction of the work aimed at the public authorities (Cohen and Rushton 1982: 17, 33; Fimister 1986: 19, 127). More generally, it has been suggested that voluntary associations, self-organisations and professional social workers could benefit from collaboration (Habermann 1992 [1987]). Such statements have

tended to ignore or under-communicate the structural barriers to co-operation (Merton, Merton and Barber 1983)

Arguably, the social conditions for social mobilisation could have been construed in terms of the network of interacting individuals who constitute the social situation. From an interactionist perspective, the structural properties could be understood in terms of individuals and their social relations. The past has been considered as having an impact on the present through the actions and interpretations of other living individuals (King 1999). The main focus has been on the interactional context and the institutional order has remained in the background or been construed as having few consequences for the interpretation. Presumably, society could change if only everybody agreed. This would have demanded bracketing of all distributional differences, interests, needs and wants that were active in the welfare-policy field. This is too cognitive and voluntaristic an image of society. Everyone may agree that changes are necessary. Meanwhile, social and cultural differences are reproduced. Even if many of both the Travellers and the elites wanted change, both subjective and objective path dependencies continued to facilitate reproduction of inequalities. Travellers continued to follow their habitual coping strategies, and many of the difficulties in revitalisation of Travellers' culture remained.

We would argue that a more institutional approach emphasising the opportunity structures for social mobilisation and self-organisation is more fruitful. Epistemologically, the interactionist approach appears to make it difficult to model how the past, the historical course of events and symbolic struggles, imposes constraints upon and facilitates opportunities for the actors' choices and practices today. It seems in my opinion preferable to keep structural and agential effects analytically apart, and attribute temporal priority to the structural properties (Archer 1995, 2000).

In the previous chapters we have pursued a process-oriented perspective on the self-organisational efforts. We have tried to account for how the actions and non-actions of the organisation participants were influenced by the institutional environments they sought to operate in, and how the participants could influence on their future opportunities. We have construed the processes of mobilisation as open chains of events where success and failures in previous steps affected the likelihood of success and failure in the next steps, thus modifying the conditions for mobilisation in an incremental way. The types of capital we have identified as important to succeed in the

welfare-policy field can be construed as structural properties (Time 1) that the participants use quasi-automatically or strategically in efforts to maintain their interests as perceived by themselves. In the next instance, the practices and tactics affect their opportunity structures for future actions (Time 2). The conditions for mobilisation changed over time and it was not given in advance which organising efforts will succeed in building viable organisations. Neither was it given that those who are successful will continue to succeed in the future.

### **Do small and short-term organisations matter?**

One should not exaggerate the differences between the experiences we found in our cases and those in the greater population. Mechanisms that are prevalent in organisations and the greater society can emerge as more easily identifiable in our cases, as they have been objects of extensive moral concern, assistance and control by others. We can explore the experiences with the welfare state in a more elaborated form among the disadvantaged sections of the population. These are experiences we can also find in the rest of society.

Even large voluntary organisations with high legitimacy have problems with decreasing numbers of members and passive members (Selle and Øymyr 1995; Selle and Strømsnes 1997; Wollebæk, Selle and Lorentzen 2000). There can also be co-operation problems in other organisations. Fewer people participate actively in political parties, interest organisations and voluntary associations (Heidar and Svåsand [Eds.] 1994). We may learn more about society through indirect sources than through participation in core areas for production and decision making (Hernes 1978: 181-195). Fewer people participate in the inner circles. The rest of us watch them and express our views in opinion polls and elections.

In Norway, the voluntary sector expanded the most in the same period as the welfare state was developed; during the 1960s and 1970s. Norway has emerged as a state-friendly society built on close relations between the state and voluntary associations. Different from many other Western European nation states, the national organisations have had strong connections to local branches of active members. Selle (1996, 1998) has argued that more emphasis on market mechanisms and the value of individual choice have changed both public welfare policy and the voluntary sector: The

organisations have become more professionalised, more oriented towards efficiency and seek to lesser extent to build local branches. They have an increasing number of paid staff, and have increasingly become more similar to non-profit organisations without members, including charities. For its part, the central government has sought to a greater extent to outsource public services. More financial support has been granted to specific projects rather than general support to administration of the organisation.

The contracting out of services implies more formalisation of the relationship. Arguably, it can give the organisations more autonomy as the welfare-state ideology seems to have become weaker and more emphasis has been attributed to individual choice. But it can also be associated with more control of the content of the organisation activities on the part of the government (Selle 1996, 1998). This differs from a situation of financial support to provide the possibilities for value pluralism, participation in decision-making processes, information exchange and meaning production in society.

All in all, this indicates that the challenges connected to passive members are not unique to the organisational efforts of those perceived as socially excluded. Concern that lack of participation from the members represents a weakening of democracy has been voiced, but if we emphasise the external role of the organisations, we could argue that questions of participation from the members become less decisive. Arguably, perhaps it is sufficient for the members if their opinions are represented by others in a similar situation (Selle and Strømsnes 1997).

It has sometimes been suggested that small, local and short-lived organisations and networks are of little importance. In such cases, change in public policy and distributional structures have been used as success criteria (Alcock 1994: 149). But participation in larger organisations is not necessarily better or more meaningful as viewed from the individual user's or member's point of view. Attainment of assistance and advice, support and information exchange between people with similar experiences is likely to be perceived as more relevant. Tendencies of centralisation in larger and older organisations can make these organisation systems less able to provide services for their subject population (Hernes 1978: 11-60, Øymyr and Selle 1995). The symbolic meanings can also be equally as significant or more significant than the practical achievements. The temporary organisation systems may express opposition and discontent.

## **Self-organisation and the pursuit of fuller citizenship**

As will be recalled, in our cases of self-organisation, the participants had achieved significant breakthroughs vis-à-vis the greater society (cf. Fig. 1.1.). Visibility and a voice in the mass media were their most easily identifiable successes. Change in public policy emerged as the success measure where they had achieved the fewest scores. But this was an unfinished story. Even in the case of large and more permanent organisations, the symbolic aspects can sometimes be the more important: The organisations become recognised as parties in negotiations with the political system, as having the right to receive information and express their opinion, give voice to the subject population and keep the category visible in the public sphere. What substantial or tangible result the organisations achieve may vary and also change over time.

In the ideal-typical temporary system, everyone enters and leaves at the same time. Our cases of self-organisational efforts can be regarded as an impure type of temporary system (Miles 1964). The participants entered and left at different times. In some cases, the core activists had more long-term vested interests in the organisation, while other participants assumed a more short-term and instrumental relationship. From the individual participant's point of view, the organisations offered resources and arenas to pursue their interests and projects. The core activists were more or less permanent, while their "clientele" was changing. That is, the organisations may be construed as semi-permanent systems that were temporary for the more peripheral and passive participants. They left when they did not need the organisation anymore, as defined by themselves.

One could have argued that the "internal" organisational difficulties make self-organisation futile on the part of the disadvantaged. At least two kinds of objection can be raised against this line of argument:

First, weak organisations and individualistic initiatives may be considered better than no organisations or initiatives at all. The alternative appeared to be the absence of voice and invisibility in the public sphere. This would mean a society of fewer voices and initiatives. From the point of view of the disadvantaged, they may represent resistance to administrated forms of participation and efforts at secession from a dominated position in an authority relation. Emergence of self-organisation, new social movements and voluntary associations can be viewed as a sign of commitment and community, or as a sign of conflict and less deference to the existing authority relations.

We may argue that if people act out of concern for their respectability and reputation in the greater society, then their integration in the greater society is involved. If we assume a zero-sum conception of authority, we may argue that recognition and maintenance of existing authority relations are irreconcilable.

One could have argued that in such cases, active citizenry endangers basic consensus about values in society. It has sometimes been assumed that the integrated society is one without conflicts (Shils 1982 [1972]). This assumption appears to have been connected to the idea of individuals submitted to the principle of a society or nation-state united through common values, norms or morality rather than society submitted to the principle of individual self-assertion. In other cases, there have been ideals of a future society without conflicting interests.

However, self-organisation efforts can also be seen as a vital part of democracy: The social-mobilisation efforts may nourish a more vital civil society and active citizenry. Lack of confidence in government or deference to traditional politics is not necessarily a sign of distrust in democratic institutions. This may generate more responsive governments and compensate for lack of participation in traditional politics (Tarrow 2000). Arguably, an active civil society depends on the ability and will of every collective and individual actor to take responsibility, contribute to an improved life quality and inclusion of larger sections of the population. This depends on whether one manages to motivate and facilitate conditions for participation in public life, prevent indifference, promote active participation in policy-making processes and opinion formation. Self-determination, processes of will formation among peers and participation could be a guarantee against domination by one group and antidemocratic ideologies and movements (Cohen and Arato 1995 [1992]). This would be a polyphone society; a society of many voices.

Our concept of status-complexity is of relevance in this regard. If one is marginalized along one dimension but not others, this could be associated with plurality and ambiguity. Integration and conflict might exist simultaneously in the conduct of the same person. The parties may disagree without being antagonistic with respect to every end they seek and every action in which they engage (Dahrendorf 1959). When one is excluded or dominated along one dimension and not others, the particular conflicts will be confined to the individual in one of his or her many statuses. This will concern only the part of the individual's personality that went into this status. Status-complexity

provides for heterogeneity in culture and plural lines of interest conflicts. But when there is a tendency to overlap and have contact between the elites an aggregate of different forms of privileges, authority relations emerge closer to dualism in society and polarisation of conflicting interests. When the disadvantages accumulate, marginalized citizenship will be associated with duality rather than multidimensionality in society.

Second, it is also possible to think in terms of counterfactuals. The claimants' organisations could have been more viable, at least as "resource centres" or ombudsman's offices, if the problem conditions were different. It has been considered undesirable for claimants of temporary social-security benefits to become locked in a position as welfare recipients. Financial support to organisations among job-seekers, poor and social assistance claimants may at first appearance seem to contradict official welfare-policy objectives of increased labour-market participation. At the same time, government agencies may find it preferable to have more stable spokespersons so they can obtain the best possible feedback from and communication with the user groups. Arguably, it may be preferable to allow for some contradiction in the immediate measures of goal achievement. If a process-oriented perspective is applied, this may open for a less mechanical mode of grasping issues of social inclusion.

The organisations could complement the perspectives on the welfare policy that the government otherwise manages to achieve. They could provide user perspectives on the welfare state and complement the problem understanding of the politicians and staff in public administration. They could contribute to a higher self-esteem, dignity and self-confidence for those who depend on public financial and other forms of assistance in shorter or longer periods of their lives. The organisation participants could contribute to improved contact and co-operation between representatives of the disadvantaged and politicians, more pertinent welfare-policy measures, increased use of self-help groups and other self-initiated activities among the disadvantaged.

If implementation of welfare-policy measures is going to be effective, this probably depends on what politicians manage to accomplish in terms of co-operation and mobilisation of the recipients of the welfare-state services to get them to pull in the same direction rather than resisting, and to delegate much of the implementation to the individual recipients. Attribution of symmetrical participation or real user involvement rules out the possibility of regarding public authorities as a counterpart one has a moral right to resist. In this way, one can achieve more committed forms of participation



and/or autonomous initiatives on the part of the disadvantaged. The integrated society would then be accomplished when the citizens are not reduced to consumers of public services or market goods, but instead actively pursue their life goals. This involves the active efforts of those perceived as socially excluded to become actors in their own lives.

We leave to future research to analyse more systematically how attribution of citizenship rights and obligations may affect what types of activation and participation one is likely to achieve from the recipients and targets of the welfare state. We have sought to account for the paradox we presented in Chapter 1 by identifying a number of different and combinatorial mechanisms. To what extent the concepts and analytic generalisations we have developed have validity beyond our cases of claimants and Travellers, should be tested against other cases and other national contexts in future research.



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