

International Interdisciplinary Conference Work, Age, Health and Employment - Evidence from Longitudinal Studies 19 - 21 September 2016 University of Wuppertal, Germany

Opening Presentation – Abstract

Globalisation and occupational life courses

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Since the early 1990s, the globalization process has had a strong impact on the development of employment and career patterns and the associated structure of social inequalities in modern societies. There are two competing hypotheses about the effects of globalization on their development: Individualisation theorists (such as Beck or Giddens) claim that globalization has led to a rise in uncertainties that has had a 'leveling effect' all individuals are more or less similarly affected by these new risks, irrespective of their social and economic positions and resources. The competing hypothesis contends that processes of globalization lead to a selective re-commodification of already disadvantaged labor market groups and, therefore, rather increases already existing social inequalities. Bringing together evidence from three major research projects that had all focused on the consequences of globalization and flexibilization for individual life courses, the presentation will provide an overview on the various ways in which globalisation has impacted on individual life course and employment by looking at different pivotal life course transitions, spanning from early career to late employment life. It will be argued that globalization triggers a strengthening of existing social inequality structures, particularly with regard to social class and education.

The presentation will pay particular attention to the phase of late career and retirement. It will identify linkages between globalization and the long-term trend of labour force shedding among the older workforce that has remained persistent in European countries until the turn of the millennium. Subsequently, it will discuss how the recent trend reversal from early retirement to active ageing may be explained using the globalization approach, and how this recent shift may affect social inequality structures among today's elderly.