Call for papers: "Welfare states, policies and the life course: regulating risks and shaping trajectories"

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Submit your abstract by 14 April 2023 through: https://espanet-warsaw2023.org/submission/

The relationship between welfare states and individual life courses is central to many social policy debates. Welfare states played an essential role in generating institutionalized life courses and establishing their structure in the first place. By means of transfers, rights and social services, modern welfare states are aiming to get life courses or employment trajectories 'back on track', i.e. to remedy disadvantageous states such as illness or poverty, or to prevent risks and disadvantageous transitions in the first place (e.g. through preventative healthcare, education or supporting continuous employment). The life course dimension of welfare states is constantly re-negotiated, with 'new' life course-relevant risks being 'discovered' (such as family-related employment interruptions or long-term care) and long-existing policies being reshaped (such as unemployment protection).

Links between welfare states and life courses have been studied from different angles. Welfare state research has focused on the construction of risks and on how social policies address risks and needs. These risks and needs are often specific to certain life phases or connected to specific life course transitions. Life course research has often studied (patterns of) longer individual trajectories in education, work or family, and their interrelationships with welfare states. While concepts such as "normal biographies" describe how welfare states promote certain normative models of the life course, the detailed and complex resulting patterns are also analyzed in this line of research. Although the potential of social policies to intervene in or disrupt trajectories of cumulative disadvantage is often postulated, studies on the relationship between specific policies and their effects on trajectories are less common, not least because of the high demands on data and methods for addressing such questions. Longer-term effects of welfare state regulation on life courses can be studied in almost all policy areas, including education, labour market policies, reproduction policies, family policies, health policies, and pensions.

The stream aims at examining the individual-level long-term goals and effects of welfare regulation more closely, while also considering how political discourse, different actors and welfare regulation relate to (actual or assumed) trajectories. We welcome papers dealing with but not limited to the following questions:

- How do welfare states contribute to the creation of typical life course trajectories, e.g. in the realm of family trajectories or employment careers?
- How do welfare state measures influence life course trajectories or longer life course sequences? Under which circumstances do they have beneficial effects in the sense of disrupting chains of negative events (i.e. "vicious circles") or preventing such chains (social investment)?
- Which assumptions and ideas about long-term formation and consequences of life course risks are contained in risk management institutions of welfare states?
- Acknowledging that life courses are always shaped by a whole set of policies at the same time: How do different policies interact to shape trajectories? How do the aims of different policies relate to each other – are they consistent or conflicting?