

Call for Papers

LICOT-WASO edited Reader "Perspectives on disability and life course in West-African Societies"

Background

The LICOT-WASO project is concerned with the scientific research of life courses of people with disabilities. Guiding questions of life course theory will be used as framework to analyse the situation of people with disabilities in West African societies. As a graduate programme, the project aims at gaining scientific knowledge about the developmental tasks and transitions of people with disabilities between the life phases of childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and old age. Therefore, the project established a social science research group at the University of Ghana / Legon, which closely cooperates with a research group of the Centre for Planning and Evaluation of Social Services (ZPE) at the University of Siegen. The West African research group includes eight PhD researchers from various disciplines (African Studies, Migration Studies, Geography, Adult Education and Human Resource Studies, Population Studies, and Development Studies) from University of Ghana conducting research in various aspects of life course transitions and trajectories of people with disabilities.

Societies around the world are structured according to certain life course patterns that include institutionalised expectations at every stage of life, i.e. expectations about what an individual should do or achieve at a certain stage of life or a certain age. In order to develop their biography, people move from one stage of life to another - from the institutions of early childhood to those of old age. It is well known that such a "path of life" is usually associated with a number of risks for the individual and that not all transitions that form the path are reflected in given expectations. Nevertheless, actively meeting the challenges of a "normal life path" can be seen as a driver of development for individuals to realise their potential and their aspirations for autonomy and self-determination. In this process, most people can rely on role models, informal support structures, professional service provision and a supportive public infrastructure in their living environments.

There are theoretical assumptions about the significance of a life course for personal development of a person which have become an essential foundation of ethnology, developmental psychology, educational and social sciences. For instance at the beginning of the 20th century, the Belgian ethnologist Arnold van Gennep examined the 'rites des passages' in various non-European cultures and found that human biographies are structured by transitions.ⁱ The American psychologist Glen Elder researched the biographies of people born in the United States during the Great Depression. Using key terms such as "trajectory", "transition" and "turning points", Elder developed an ecological perspective to explain the development of biographies in the context of social change processes.ⁱⁱ From a sociological perspective, the German Martin Kohli (1985) undertook important research on the "institutionalization of a three-part life course" with the phases of childhood and education, adulthood and productivity, and aging and retirement as central elements. He identified welfare state arrangements as structuring elements for life courses in Western societies.

In current life course research, transition is a guiding concept. In contrast to the concept of events, Sackmann & Wingers (2001)ⁱⁱⁱ define transitions not only as punctual changes of state, but as processes i.e. as changes in the course of life that can take more or less time. Due to the good operability of the transition concept, the above-mentioned authors refer to current life course research as transition research. From a social science perspective, Walter and Stauber (2007)^{iv} describe transitions as a task of mediation between individual human life and social structure. They propose to examine transitions from both a structural perspective (transition structures) and from the internal view of individuals

(subjective experience of transition). In processes of intensive social modernisation, such as those that have been taking place for some time in West African countries, the structures of transition change. Changed transition structures in turn have an effect on the subjective experience of transition.

The British researcher Mark Priestley (2001)^v transferred the life course approach to the field of support for people with disabilities by assuming a continuous "de-standardisation" and the persistence of traditional patterns. He examined the risks of exclusion from the "normal life course" for people with severe disabilities and found high risks of exclusion when people with disabilities are forced into discriminatory and pathogenic role models such as the "eternal child" or "early retiree". As a result, appropriate roles of competent adults become inaccessible and the personal development of people with disabilities becomes more difficult than for people of the same age without disabilities. Failure to reach the next developmental stages of the "public life course" (Elder) can lead to individual resignation, apathy and depression and to lasting social dependency, especially among people with disabilities.

In their work on inclusive local planning models for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Rohrmann & Schädler (2014)^{vi} from the University of Siegen explicitly referred to the theoretical framework of the life course perspective. According to them, social science findings indicate that although people with disabilities often need specific support in all phases of life, especially situations of transition between life phases create situations of increased vulnerability and risk of exclusion.^{vii} They also have to cope with problems arising from the interaction of individual impairments and various barriers of the social and physical environment. For these reasons, the transition processes in the life courses of people with disabilities are often more challenging than for their peers without disabilities, and it is not uncommon for access to the next phase to remain closed.

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Objectives and contributions

For the societies of the Global North, a relatively broad spectrum of scientific literature is available about experiences with socially-normalized transitions in life courses, which also includes the situation of people with disabilities.^{viii} This is not the case for Ghana and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. So far, there is only scattered research on the life courses and transition experiences between certain stages of life of people with disabilities in the Global South.^{ix}

Against this background, this edited reader aims to provide insights into existing social norms in Ghana and other West African countries and how they affect life courses from early childhood to old age. It further aims to explore, how these social norms are constructed and what significance institutionalized life course patterns have for people with disabilities in different phases and areas of life. This includes the dynamics of change with which social modernization processes influence the construction of life courses. Of particular interest are questions of accessibility of socially prescribed life course patterns, i.e. the 'normal' institutions of the life course for people with disabilities. Furthermore, the effects of social and material context factors on the success or failure of biographical transition processes of people with disabilities in the respective African societies are of interest. In all phases of life this also includes the consideration of the interplay of informal support from family, neighbourhood, self-help and charity organisations with the formal (government-organised) social protection and service systems.

Contributions within the above thematic framework are requested both from LICOT-WASO team members and further interested authors.

Scope and timeline

- Abstract: about 300 words, deadline 15.01.2022

- Contributions: about 10.000 words plus literature and notes, deadline 30.09.2022
- Editorial feedback on contributions: 15.11.2022
- Revision of contributions: 31.12.2022
- Publishing: 15.02.2023, Publisher t.b.d.

Contact

Efua Esaaba Mantey Agyire-Tettey (University of Ghana), eemantey@ug.edu.gh

Lars Wissenbach (University of Siegen), Lars.Wissenbach@uni-siegen.de

www.licot-waso.com

ⁱ Gennep, A. van (2005). *Übergangsriten*. 3. erw. Auflage. Frankfurt / New York: Campus.

ⁱⁱ Elder, Glen H. (1974). *The children of the Great depression: Social Change in life experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; see also: Elder, Glen H. (1995): *The Life course paradigm: Social change and individual development*. In Moen, Phyllis et al. (eds.) (1995) *Examining lives in context. Perspectives on the ecology of human development*, Washington DC: APA, pp.: 101 – 140.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sackmann, R. & Wingens, M. (2001). *Strukturen des Lebenslaufs. Übergang - Sequenz – Verlauf*. Weinheim: Juventa

^{iv} Walther, A. & Stauber, B. (2007): *Übergänge in Lebenslauf und Biographie. Vergesellschaftung und Modernisierung aus subjektorientierter Perspektive*. In: Stauber, Pohl & Walther (Hrsg.). *Subjektorientierte Übergangsforschung. Rekonstruktion und Unterstützung biografischer Übergänge junger Erwachsener*. Weinheim: Juventa.; See also: Corsten, M. (2020). *Lebenslauf und Sozialisation*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

^v Priestley, M. (Ed.) (2001). *Disability: A Life Course Approach*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

^{vi} Rohrmann, A. & Schädler, J. (2014). *Inklusive Gemeinwesen Planen. Eine Arbeitshilfe*. Hg. v. Ministerium für Arbeit, Integration und Soziales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (MAIS). Düsseldorf

^{vii} For example: Priestley, M. (Ed.) (2001). *Disability: A Life Course Approach*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Lempp R. (2001). *Geistige Behinderung im Lebenslauf*. In: Deutsches Zentrum für Altersfragen (eds.). *Versorgung und Förderung älterer Menschen mit geistiger Behinderung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan & Ruth (Eds.). (2005). *On your own without a net: The transition to adulthood for vulnerable populations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.; Haveman & Stöppler (2010). *Altern mit geistiger Behinderung. Grundlagen und Perspektiven für Begleitung, Bildung und Rehabilitation*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer; Shandra (2011). *Life-course transitions among adolescents with and without disabilities: A longitudinal examination of expectations and outcomes*. *International Journal of Sociology*, 41 (1), 67–86.; Stewart, Law, Young, Forhan, Healy, Burke-Gaffney & Freeman (2014). *Complexities during transitions to adulthood for youth with disabilities: Person-environment interactions*. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 36(23), 1998–2004; Welti & Herfert (Eds.) (2017). *Übergänge im Lebenslauf von Menschen mit Behinderungen: Hochschulzugang und Berufszugang mit Behinderung*. Kassel University Press.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} See for example: Groce (1999): *An overview of young people living with disabilities: Their rights and their needs*, New York: United Nations Children's Fund; Groce (2004). *Adolescents and youth with disability: Issues and challenges*, *Asia Pacific Rehabilitation Journal*, 15(2), pp. 13–32; Gregorius, S. (2014). *Transitions to adulthood: the experiences of youth with disabilities in Accra, Ghana*. Loughborough University Press.