8 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The dissertation at hand studies the young olds’ role in welfare states. This role strongly depends on governments’ reaction to the emergence of the young old population. If governments do not react, then the young old might be perceived as a burden on welfare states. This burden can only be carried through welfare state retrenchment, meaning a lowering of the overall level of welfare in a country. If governments do react, then the young old can take on the role of a resource. The young olds’ engagement in productive activities other than paid work can be used to fulfill tasks governments would otherwise have to fulfill themselves. For example, volunteering and informal care-giving in later life can be used to decrease the need for publicly provided social services. This way, governments can utilize ageing populations to find new ways of welfare provision. They can, thus, replace welfare state retrenchment with welfare state restructuring.

To accomplish this change of role, governments need to overcome two kinds of lag. The first one is a lag of perception. Older persons are traditionally perceived as unproductive. This perception is based on the idea that productivity only occurs through paid work among middle-aged persons. Today, however, this perception cannot be upheld. In recent years, researchers and some policy-makers have stressed the productive value of activities other than paid work, in particular volunteering and informal care-giving (e.g. Herzog, Kahn, Morgan, 1989; Pavolini & Ranci, 2008). Both activities can be carried out in later life, even after persons retired from paid work. Older persons, therefore, need to be considered potentially productive. The second lag is structural. Social structures sometimes prevent older persons from realizing their full potential for productivity. This fact is well-known at the labour market, where persons are forced to retire when reaching the mandatory retirement age. This age is currently around 65 years in most European countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006). To overcome the structural lag in the labour market, governments need to either shift the mandatory retirement age to a higher chronological age or to abandon it altogether. To overcome the structural lag in volunteering and informal care-giving, however, governments need to adopt a different strategy. There is no age at which older persons mandatorily have to withdraw from volunteering and informal care-giving. Instead, they might not find sufficient opportunities to engage in those activities or be confronted with ageism, which may drive them to give up these activities. Governments might, therefore, profit from programmes that increase the possibilities for volunteering and informal care-giving for older persons in particular.

The considerations made in this dissertation contribute to several discussions. First, they tie in with gerontological discussions about the situation of today’s older persons and about inequalities among them (e.g. Arber, 2005; Wahl, Tesch-Römer, & Hoff, 2007). Second, they contribute to life-course studies, enhancing our knowledge of the life-phases a person experiences (e.g. Mayer, 2009). Third, they contribute to discussions about welfare state reforms, showing how restructuring
might be a more suitable reform strategy than retrenchment (e.g. Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijck, & Myles, 2002; Pierson, 2006). Finally, they introduce a new perspective into methodological discussions when treating life-phases as a socio-demographic variable for quantitative research (e.g. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik & Wolf, 2003).

In the following pages, I first summarize and discuss the findings of this dissertation. For this purpose I subsequently focus on each section of this dissertation: “the identification of the young old”, “the young old and paid work” and “the young old, volunteering and informal care-giving”. Then, I combine the findings to answer the overarching question of this dissertation: what is the young olds’ role in European welfare states? To account for country-differences in the young olds’ role, I will provide a separate answer for each type of welfare states. Finally, I make suggestions for further research and draw conclusions.

Identifying the young old
The contribution of this study is based on detailed knowledge about the young old it introduces into ongoing discussions. The basis for the collection of this knowledge is laid in the first part of this dissertation, where I explore ways of identifying the young old in quantitative studies. I extend the knowledge on the identification of the young old throughout the remainder of the dissertation by exploring the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of identifying the young old.

The chapter “Identifying the young old: Introducing a socio-demographic variable for cross-country comparisons” demonstrates how different quantitative data sources can be used to identify young old persons. It shows that survey data allows for identifying the young old as healthy retirees without obligations for family care, as suggested by Neugarten (1974) and Laslett (1991). Data from official statistics, on the other hand, only allow for identifying the young old as healthy retirees. However, it provides information for more countries and points of time than surveys do. Future quantitative studies on the young old can use this chapter as a guideline. This way, they might obtain more accurate information than previous studies, which placed the young old on a par with an age bracket.

The chapter “Age as an indicator for volunteering in later life” takes a closer look at the common practice of defining the young old as an age bracket. It uses volunteering as an example for a productive activity the young old might pursue. It, then, searches for an age pattern in volunteering that is stable across countries and genders. This age pattern reveals when a persons’ engagement in productive activities other than paid work changes due to changes in working hours and health status. The analysis is carried out with a multi-group structural equations model, comparing men and women in Austria, Denmark, Greece and the United States. The results of this analysis show that a rough age-based identification of older volunteers is possible. Between 60 and 79 years of age, the time spent volunteering decreases. This age bracket can, consequently, be used as a rough approximation for the young old. It is particularly useful in situations where young old persons need to be identified with only little information. This can, for example, be the case when voluntary organizations
design programmes that are supposed to motivate in particular older persons to volunteer.

This dissertation as a whole provides an overview of the different ways of identifying the young old. It uses different ways of identification in different chapters, thus revealing their advantages and disadvantages. Each way of identification was chosen in advance, based on the data available and on the topic studied. The data available and the topic of interest are, therefore, the first two factors that make a way of identification preferable over another. In the course of this dissertation, particularly during the qualitative study presented in chapter 7, I realized that most suitable way of identification also depends on whom the study is addressing. Table 8.1 provides an overview of the suitability of the three ways of identification used in this study in regard to the topic studied, the quantitative data source available and the persons addressed by the study. The three ways of identifying the young old used are (a) a healthy retiree without obligations for family care, (b) a healthy retiree and (c) an age-group. Table 8.1 shows that researchers have a free choice of the way of identification, if they use survey data for a life-course study that is solely designed to further the scientific discourse. If the results need to be communicated to different groups of persons and they can only be based on official statistics, then the age-based solution seems advantageous.

Table 8.1: Comparison of the ways of identifying the young old

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification of the young old</th>
<th>Healthy retiree, no family care</th>
<th>Healthy retiree</th>
<th>Age-group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic studied</strong></td>
<td>- Life-course</td>
<td>- Life-course</td>
<td>- Life-course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Activities in old age</td>
<td>- Labour market</td>
<td>- Events around a certain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Gender-differences</td>
<td>- Pension regulations</td>
<td>age, e.g. the mandatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>retirement age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative data sources</strong></td>
<td>- Survey data</td>
<td>- Survey data</td>
<td>- Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Official statistics</td>
<td>- Official statistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persons addressed</strong></td>
<td>- Scientists</td>
<td>- Scientists</td>
<td>- Scientists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Policy-makers</td>
<td>- Policy-makers</td>
<td>- Policy-makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Intermediary organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The young old and paid work

Over the last years, older persons’ workforce participation received ample attention from policy-makers (e.g. OECD, 2006; Schils, 2008). They usually deemed the partic-
ipation rate too low and, in consequence, feared for the sustainability of public pension schemes (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002; Pierson, 2006). As a reaction to those perceptions, they introduced numerous reforms, attempting to strengthen older persons’ workforce participation and to reduce the expenditures of public pension schemes (Myles, 2002; OECD, 2006). Walker (2002; 2006) remarked that the concentration on the workforce overshadows all other attempts to promote productive activities in old age. This makes paid work the main area in which the structural lag created by the emergence of the young old population is tackled. This dissertation explores the possibilities and effects of retirement reforms that were introduced to deal with the emergence of a young old population.

The chapter “the influence of the welfare state on the number of young old persons” studies whether retirement regulations are a suitable means for influencing the number of young old persons. It starts by exploring the possibilities welfare states have to influence the size of the young old population. Those possibilities include not only retirement regulations, but also, inter alia, fertility policies and long-term care regulations. The chapter commences with a calculation of the share of the young old among men and women aged 50 to 90 years in ten European countries. This share is, on average, 45 percent among men and women. It reaches a maximum of 52 percent among Austrian men. The young old, therefore, seem an important topic today because of the sheer size of this population group alone. Finally, I compare the retirement regulations and the share of young old persons in the countries studied. I find that retirement regulations have some explanatory power for the share of young old men. Among women, however, the explanatory power is considerably lower. This suggests that retirement regulations are a suitable instrument for overcoming the structural lag in the labour market. However, the suitability of retirement regulations differs across genders. Among women, reforms of inter alia fertility policies and long-term care regulations also seem necessary. This is probably due to the need of women to balance work with family responsibilities.

The chapter “Paid work between age 60 and 70 years in Europe: A matter of socio-economic status?” addresses the common perception that persons often withdraw on paid work before the mandatory retirement age. It does this by studying the time Europeans aged 60 to 70 years spend on paid work. This age bracket covers the years directly below and directly above the mandatory retirement age in most European countries (OECD, 2006). Those years are most susceptible to early retirement trends and to reforms increasing the mandatory retirement age. I analyze the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on older persons' working time. SES is measured as wealth, educational level and occupational prestige. I, moreover, study whether the share of public versus private and occupational pensions in a country modifies the effect of SES. The analysis is carried out in a multilevel model, using survey data from eleven European countries. Men and women are analyzed separately, to account for the fact that women need to balance work with family responsibilities. This gender-difference is reflected in older persons’ workforce participation: the participation rate is 24 percent among men and 14 percent among women; the average
working time is 9 hours per week among men and 4 hours per week among women. These numbers show that paid work still occurs between age 60 and 70, even though it does so at a low level. The perception that paid work ceases long before the mandatory retirement age can, therefore, not be upheld. Moreover, this study showed that older persons’ workforce participation varies with SES. Wealthy and highly educated older Europeans spend particularly much time working. Governments would, therefore, have to focus on persons with little wealth and education, if they wanted to overcome the structural lag in the labour market. Also, this study showed that a low share of public pensions increases the effect of occupational prestige. The influence of occupational prestige, however, differs between genders. This suggests that pension reforms trying to reduce the expenditures of public pension schemes interfere with social inequalities. They might not simply reduce the burden ageing populations place on pension schemes. As a side-effect, they might also change who is affected by the structural lag. Consequently, governments need to account for social inequalities across genders and SES-levels when considering the structural lag in the labour market and when planning an intervention.

The young old, volunteering and informal care-giving
The young old engage in many activities that scientists consider productive, for example volunteering, informal care-giving, do-it-yourself and household chores (Burr, Mutchler, & Caro, 2007; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, & Sherraden, 2001). The definition of productivity is based on the fact that those activities produce goods or services (Herzog, Kahn, & Morgan, 1989). Governments will only consider the young old a resource when they pay attention to these activities and consider them productive. Subsequently, they would need to consider whether they can steer the young olds’ engagement in those activities (Minkler & Holstein, 2008).

Until now, governments paid only limited attention to older persons’ productivity through activities other than paid work. The chapter “The young old and the political economy of ageing” presents conceptual considerations on how policy-makers’ line of thinking would change if they were to recognize the productive value of activities other than paid work. First, it develops ideal types of older persons, one of them being the typical young old persons. Then, it uses the ideal types to determine the young olds’ relevance for welfare states. This relevance is threefold. First, the young old can contribute to welfare states, for example through volunteering and informal care-giving. Second, the young old create the need for new welfare state activities, which help them to remain active and socially included. Third, welfare states might have to adapt their ‘modus operandi’ to give civic participation a bigger role. This would increase the young olds’ possibilities to engage in meaningful activities and accommodate their interest in autonomy. However, there also are several factors that hold welfare states back from recognizing the young olds’ relevance. Those factors are, for example, passed down perceptions of later life and established ways of addressing older persons. If those factors could be overcome, welfare states could react to the emergence
of the young old population more effectively. Consequently, the lag in perception as well as the structural lag would decrease.

The chapter “Volunteering and informal care-giving in later life as policy problems” investigates why governments find it challenging to react to the emergence of the young old population. For this purpose, it studies governmental support for volunteering and informal care-giving in later life in Germany and Italy. A qualitative content analysis of policy documents and expert interviews is carried out. The results show that hard facts such the emergence of the young old population or the young olds’ involvement in volunteering and informal care-giving do not guarantee governmental support. The way those facts are interpreted depends, inter alia, on passed down perceptions of later life and of the role of the state. Those results have two implications. First, they underline the importance of the lag in perception. Strong passed down perception of old age as a burden on welfare states can prevent governments from supporting productive activities in later life, even when those activities are common among the young old. If the young old seek to change their role in welfare states, they might, thus, profit most from raising awareness about their capabilities. Such a strategy might be even more effective than changing their actual activities. Second, the results suggest that welfare regimes might be a suitable framework for capturing country-differences in the young olds’ role in welfare states. Welfare regimes are ideal types of welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Just like perceptions about the young old, welfare regimes are also tied to the role of the state. I will, therefore, use the concept of welfare regimes to describe the young olds’ role in welfare states across Europe in the following pages.

The young old in Europe – burden on or resource to the welfare state?

What is the young olds’ role in welfare states? The analyses carried out in this dissertation show that there is no universal answer to this question. The number of young old persons, their activities and the perception of their activities vary within and between countries. I will, therefore, give a differentiated answer to this question. This dissertation suggested that the number of young old persons and perceptions about the young old are connected to welfare regimes. We, moreover, know from previous research that activities in old age and gender roles can also be captures with welfare regimes (Hank & Erlinghagen, 2010; Sainsbury, 1999b). I will, therefore, use the concept of welfare regimes as a framework for my response.

Welfare regimes are ideal types of welfare states. They are identified by the preferred approach for solving social problems, the kind of social inequality created and the independence from paid work provided to citizens (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The original concept differentiates three types of welfare regimes: a social-democratic, a liberal and a conservative one (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Later studies, however, have discussed whether a fourth type should be added. Some consider the “rudimentary welfare regime” a separate type that is characterized by governments being comparatively inactive in welfare policies. Others assume that the rudimentary nature of
Summary and discussion

this welfare regime is due to the late development of the welfare states and that a system similar to the conservative one will develop over time (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Ferrera, 1996; Leibfried, 1992). I treat the rudimentary regime as its own type in order to capture as many country-differences as possible.

Table 8.2 provides an overview of the young olds' role in the different welfare regimes. It does this mainly based on perceptions of the young olds' activities because this dissertation found perceptions to be the key determinant for the young olds' role. Some information on the size of the young old population is also displayed, because it indicates how big an issue the young old are in the welfare regimes. The information presented stems from this dissertation as well as from other studies. It is abstracted to a level where it describes ideal types of welfare states, the welfare regimes, instead of actual countries. The individual countries correspond to these ideal types more or less, with some countries also being in between ideal types (for example Italy and the Netherlands; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996). Differences within countries are mentioned where this seems relevant for the question at hand.

The young olds' role in conservative welfare states

The conservative type of welfare state can be found in many Continental European countries, such as Germany, Austria and France. It is characterized by a shared responsibility for the welfare in a country. Citizens take the primary responsibility for solving their social problems, for example through neighbourhood help, volunteering and informal care-giving. Governments intervene when their citizens' own efforts fail. This approach is called the principle of subsidiarity (Sundström et al., 2008). One result of this principle is that care-giving mainly takes place within families, where it is usually carried out by women (Bussemaker & Van Kersbergen, 1999). This activity by women is often considered natural and self-regulating, therefore governments rarely intervene (chapter 7; Philip, 2001; Sundström et al., 2008). Besides its "deficiency guarantee" in issues such as care-giving, governments also take on the responsibility for some tasks. For example, they regulate retirement though a mandatory retirement age and public pension schemes. Those pension schemes are usually designed in a way that maintains occupational differences (Esping-Andersen, 1990; OECD, 2006).

In welfare states of the conservative type, the young olds' role is defined by a lack of workforce participation and by engagement in volunteering and informal care-giving (chapter 7). In welfare states of this type, there are a comparatively high number of young old persons. This is due to two reasons. First, women often abstain from paid work before the mandatory retirement age in order to provide care for their kin (chapter 4; Bussemaker & Van Kersbergen, 1999). Second, early retirement was often promoted in order to balance structural unemployment (OECD, 2006). The high number of young old persons is usually considered problematic, because public pension schemes in those countries are often financed through pay-as-you-go regulations (OECD, 2006). These regulations entail that the contributions of the current generation of middle-aged persons are used to pay the benefits of the current generation of
### Table 8.2: The young olds’ role in European welfare states, per welfare regime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welfare regimes</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Rudimentary</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Social-Democratic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples for countries¹</td>
<td>Germany, France, (Italy), (Netherlands)</td>
<td>Spain, Greece, Portugal, (Italy)</td>
<td>United Kingdom, Switzerland</td>
<td>Sweden, (Netherlands)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The extent of the phenomenon

| Number young old persons² | + | + | - | - |

#### Perceptions about the young olds’ activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paid work³</th>
<th>structural unemployment keeps many inactive; critical because of PAYG pension schemes</th>
<th>few work; pensioners provide income for their entire family</th>
<th>persons who can afford it retire early, strong role of private pensions</th>
<th>employment in old age is common</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal care⁴</td>
<td>women care for family, make up for weakly developed social services</td>
<td>women care for family, make up for weakly developed social services</td>
<td>necessary among persons who cannot afford care services</td>
<td>not necessary: extensive welfare state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering⁵</td>
<td>citizens try to solve own problems (subsidiarity principle)</td>
<td>citizens try to solve own problems (subsidiarity principle)</td>
<td>citizens shape their society</td>
<td>not necessary: extensive welfare state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Resulting role

| (considerable) burden with function for welfare states | (considerable) resource to the family | burden or resource to themselves | (light) burden on welfare states |

#### Notes:

1 Countries in brackets represent several welfare regimes; sources: Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Leibfried, 1992
2 ‘+’ marks countries with a comparatively high, ‘-’ marks countries with a comparatively low share of young old persons; the young old are defined as healthy retirees without care obligations; source: Chapter 3.1
3 ‘PAYG’ = Pay-as-you-go; Sources: Angelini, Brugiavini, & Weber, 2009; Bussemaker & Van Kersbergen, 1999; Chapter 3.2; OECD, 2006; Schils, 2008; Trifiletti, 1999
4 Sources: Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996; Chapter 4.2; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Philip, 2001; Sundström et al., 2008
5 Sources: Chapter 4.2; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Gilbert, 2002; Hank & Erlinghagen, 2010; Sundström et al. 2008
older persons (Myles, 2002). In ageing populations, those regulations quickly reach their limit of sustainability. Consequently, governments in conservative welfare states usually seek to decrease the number of young old persons by delaying retirement, mainly by preventing early retirement and raising the mandatory retirement age (OECD, 2006).

Governmental attempts to reduce the number of young old persons in conservative welfare states might have undesirable consequences. On the one hand, they can be ineffective if the economy is not re-structured to overcome structural unemployment. On the other hand, they might reduce the overall potential for volunteering and informal care-giving in the population. Governments might have to provide more social services to balance this reduced potential. All in all, the young old can be seen as a considerable burden on conservative welfare states. However, they play the role of a burden that fulfils essential functions in the welfare state.

The young olds' role in rudimentary welfare states

Rudimentary welfare states are common in Mediterranean countries, in particular in Spain, Greece and Portugal. Italy, however, is considered to lie in between this type and the conservative type (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Leibfried, 1992). The rudimentary type of welfare state resembles the conservative type in its emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity. It relies on the citizens’ capabilities to solve their own problems, in particular through collaboration within families. Families are the primary location of welfare production in welfare states of the rudimentary type. First, they are the location where most social support is provided, primarily by women. Second, they are also the location where finances are re-distributed, within and between generations (chapter 7; Ferrera, 1996; Sundström et al., 2008; Trifiletti, 1999). Governments themselves play a smaller role in welfare provision in these countries than in the ones of the conservative type. The public pension schemes are fragmented, covering only part of the population. They are only generous among former public servants (OECD, 2006; Trifiletti, 1999). Retirees of other occupations often rely on transfers within the family.

The young olds’ role in rudimentary welfare states is determined by their role within the family, because of the family’s role as the primary locus of social solidarity. Within the family, the young olds’ contributions are obvious. They provide care for spouses and look after grandchildren. The latter task becomes increasingly important because women increasingly take up paid work, but do not have sufficient access to child care services (chapter 7). A second contribution of the young old is that they often receive pension benefits, which can be redistributed within the family. The young olds’ role in the rudimentary welfare regime, therefore, is the one of a resource to the family.
The young olds’ role in liberal welfare states

Welfare states of the liberal type can be found in most Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. In Europe, this type is moreover represented by Switzerland. Its main characteristic is the reliance on market mechanisms for welfare production. Citizens are supposed to sell their manpower at the labour market in exchange for income. Their income, then, allows them to purchase goods at the market that increase their welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990). For example, private pensions are more popular goods in this type of welfare state than in any other type (Korpi & Palme, 1998; Schils, 2008). Persons without sufficient income have to try to reach a certain level of welfare through self-help or through support within the family. If all those attempts fail, then the state becomes active through means-tested measures. Those measures are supposed to help persons get into a situation where they can help themselves again (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Gilbert, 2002). This approach makes welfare an individual issue that is regulated by market mechanisms. Besides taking control of their own welfare, citizens in liberal welfare regimes are also expected to take control of their society. They can do this, for example, through neighbourly help and volunteering (Gilbert, 2002).

The young old play a comparatively small role in the liberal welfare regime because of their comparatively low number in such welfare states (chapter 4). The role they play varies according to wealth. Wealthy young old persons do not need to generate additional income and can, therefore, withdraw from paid work early. Their contribution to welfare mainly consists of purchases at the market, which benefit the economy and create jobs. Young old persons with little wealth, on the other hand, have to create income and, therefore, stay in the workforce until a later age. However, they have fewer possibilities to increase welfare through purchases in the market (chapter 5). Taken together, the young olds’ role in liberal welfare states varies with wealth. They can take on the role of a burden or the one of a resource. However, as the final responsibility for welfare lies with the individual in this type of welfare state, the young old can only be a burden on or resource to themselves.

The young olds’ role in social-democratic welfare states

Social-democratic welfare states can typically be found in Scandinavian countries, for example Sweden and Finland. They are characterized as extensive welfare states that take on tasks which would otherwise be delegated to families or voluntary organizations (Esping-Andersen, 1990). For example, social services are more widely available in this type of welfare state than in any other type (Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996; Jensen, 2008). This largely frees women from unpaid caring tasks within the family and gives them the opportunity to participate in the labour force. The tasks they carry out in their work, however, often comprise care provision, which they would otherwise have carried out without payment within their family (Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Sainsbury, 1999a). As a result, men and women in the social-democratic welfare regime have comparatively high workforce participation rates, even in old age (Bolin, Lindgren, & Lundborg, 2007; Sainsbury, 1999a). The activity of welfare states of this type helps to
diminish gender-differences as well as other kinds of social inequalities (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The number of young old persons is comparatively low in the social-democratic welfare regime, due to the high labour force participation rates (chapter 4). The young old persons in this welfare regime have limited possibilities to be productive because the welfare state takes on all productive functions. When young old persons volunteer or provide informal care, they, therefore, do not primarily solve social problems. Instead, they engage in activities that can increase their own well-being and give themselves a sense of meaning. Taken together, persons in social-democratic welfare states lose most of their opportunities for productivity when they retire. The young old can, therefore, only take on the role of a burden (chapter 6). Due to the comparatively low number of young old persons, however, they are a comparatively light burden on welfare states.

**Conclusion: The young old and welfare regimes**
The young olds’ role differs between welfare regimes. In the conservative and the social-democratic regime, the young old play the role of a burden on the welfare state. In the rudimentary regime, they play the role of a resource to the family. In the liberal regime, finally, they are either a burden on or a resource to themselves. This range of roles has two implications. First, it underlines that one cannot generalize about the effect of ageing populations on welfare states. Second, it shows that the young old are still perceived as a burden when the state takes the main responsibility for the welfare in a country. The young old only take on the role of a resource when the main responsibility for the welfare in a country lies with families or individuals. This illustrates that the assessment of the young olds’ role varies across actors. Governmental reforms striving to unburden welfare states by lowering the number of young old persons might, therefore, have negative effects on actors other than the state. They might, for example, negatively affect families in that they reduce the possibility for intergenerational support.

A comparison of the young olds’ role across welfare regimes points once again to the dominance of perceptions over facts. For example, the young old take on the role of a burden on the welfare state in one regime type with a comparatively high (conservative regime) and in one with a comparatively low (social-democratic regime) number of young old persons. Likewise, they can take on the role of a resource in one regime type with a comparatively high (rudimentary regime) and in one type with a comparatively low (liberal regime) number of young old persons. Another example, the intensity of the discussion about the burden of ageing populations varies across welfare regimes. It was particularly intense in the liberal welfare regime, mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom (Johnson, Conrad, & Thomson, 1989; Walker, 2000). In this regime type, however, the number of young old persons is comparatively low and the young old can take on the role of a resource.

Besides broadening our knowledge about the young olds’ role, this dissertation also expands our knowledge about welfare regimes. Previous studies already
showed that welfare regimes can capture country-differences beyond the ones included in the original concept. For example, they can give an indication about the level of social services in a country, about gender roles and about social capital (Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996; Kääriäinen & Lehtonen, 2006; Sainsbury, 1999b). This dissertation showed that they are moreover related to the number of young old persons (chapter 4). Additionally, it discusses country-differences in the young olds’ role in welfare states across welfare regimes (this chapter).

While the comparison of the young olds’ role across welfare regimes generates unique insight, is still needs to be treated with some caution. This seems advisable, because the comparison across welfare regimes is based on the results of this dissertation and on previous studies. The use of previous studies was necessary, because this dissertation could not study all countries in all chapters. Instead, it had to select the most relevant countries for each topic studied. This means that exact information for different aspects of the young olds’ role is available for different sets of countries. Information from previous studies fills the gaps in knowledge about the countries not studied in the specific chapters. However, it only fills those gaps in knowledge in an imprecise way, because only few previous studies explicitly focussed on the young old. Instead, they usually focussed on older persons in general. I have, therefore, had to deduce statements about the young old from those general studies. Future research can provide us with a better founded description of the young olds’ role in welfare states, if it replicates the studies of this dissertation in additional countries.

Suggestions for further research
The dissertation at hand furthered the scientific discourse in several areas, among them gerontology, welfare state research and social science methodology. At the same time, however, it also revealed gaps in knowledge that need to be filled in future studies. Besides the need for a larger country-sample voiced above, there are also two other major gaps in knowledge I would like to mention. Those gaps concern the level of analysis and the aspects of the young olds’ role focused on. I will discuss them subsequently.

The first gap in knowledge concerns the level of analysis. All chapters seek to answer questions at the macro-level, i.e. the country-level. Some chapter of this dissertation approach the macro-level questions at the macro-level only (for example the chapters 4 and 6). Other chapters answer the questions through a connection of the macro- and the micro-level, such as chapter 5 with included a multilevel analysis. Coleman (1990) underlined that connections between macro-level phenomena can be described, but not explained at the macro-level. These connections result from the activity of individuals and can, therefore, only be explained at the individual level. According to this argument, the precision of the explanations offered in this dissertation varies across chapters. However, this variation does not take away from the conclusions of the dissertation at hand. The conclusions are based on a joint consideration of the information collected in all chapters of this dissertation. They were, moreo-
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However, supplemented with information collected in other studies when answering the overarching research question: What is the young olds’ role in welfare states? This approach can partly counteract the concentration on the macro-level found in some of the chapters. It nevertheless seems desirable that future studies focus on the connection between the macro- and the micro-level in determining the young olds’ role in welfare states. When doing so, they could additionally study the role of meso-level units such as families and local governments in this connection. After all, this dissertation repeatedly observed that families have an influence on older persons’ activities and that voluntary associations and local governments can have an influence on the perception of the young olds’ activities.

The second gap in knowledge concerns the aspects of the young olds’ role in welfare states focussed on. In its quest to determine the young olds’ role, this dissertation focused on paid work, volunteering and informal care-giving. It considered the young olds’ actual involvement in those activities and the perception of these activities. The main result of the analyses are that productive activities other than paid work receive little attention and that the amount of attention received strongly depends on perceptions of these activities. I would, therefore, suggest that future research explores the perceptions of volunteering and informal care-giving in later life. The explorations could initially take on the form of a mapping of the perceptions and, then, focus on possibilities for intervention. Having knowledge about intervention would be important for older persons and voluntary associations, which try to draw the policy-makers’ attention to their activities. It would, moreover, be important for policy-makers who have to justify their possible support for volunteering and informal care-giving in later life to their voters. When exploring perceptions, future studies could draw upon the generational differences in values and life-styles pointed out by Gilleard and Higgs (2002).

Conclusion

The young old often play the role of a burden on European welfare states. This role, however, is more strongly based on passed down perceptions than on the young olds' actual activities. The young olds' contributions to their families, society and the welfare state, therefore, often go unrecognized. Consequently, it is not the young olds' activity level that needs to be changed if the young old are to become a resource to welfare states. Instead, governments would need to recognize the productive value of activities other than paid work, such as volunteering and informal care-giving. Moreover, they would need to review their passed down perceptions and stereotypes. Such a rethinking would not only help the young old positively define their social role. It would also help governments recognize the opportunities associated with population ageing. It would, thus, show how welfare state retrenchment could be replaced with welfare state restructuring.
References


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