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*Abstract for the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference of the International Working Party on Labour Market Segmentation (IWPLMS) from 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July 2010 in Valencia (Spain)*

**Age-employment-cultures: A missing construct to understand the age-work relationship in different member states of the European Union?**

The prospective impacts of the ongoing demographic change are well known and concern almost all member states of the EU. With regard to the labour market, there is widely consensus (e.g. the Stockholm-criteria of 2001/the Barcelona-target of 2002) that an increase in the participation rate of older people is one of the most essential measures to cushion the anticipated outcomes of the demographic change (e.g. the predicted collapse of the social security system). However, an analysis of the actual labour market participation of the people aged 55 and older in Europe still shows a large variance (Sweden almost 70 percent; Belgium 34.5 percent; Poland 31.6 percent).

Against this background the main aim of the presented paper is to explain the mentioned variances by broadening the set of possible explanations by a cultural construct, namely the specific “age-employment culture” of a country. The hypothesis is that besides differences in the particular institutional arrangements as well as differences in the labour market performances, a country-specific “age-employment culture” is a further, so far missing, construct to explain the labour market participation of older people.

To display “age-employment cultures”, predominant societal values and norms concerning the labour market participation of older people as well as particular age stereotypes in three member states of the EU (Belgium, Germany and Sweden) and its coincidence with the respective employment rates of older people will be analysed. The quantitative analyses are mainly based on the European Social Survey (ESS)-data from both the third (2006) and the fourth (2009) round.

A better knowledge of the cultural conceptions concerning the transition to retirement and the labour market participation of older people could be beneficial for the sustainability of future political reforms in these areas.