

Do entrepreneurs retire differently?

The life courses of aging entrepreneurs

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Destandardisation tendencies of the tri-parted life course have been analysed for some decades and their effects are indisputable, even though not as strong as predicted. The prospect of the transition into retirement still provides a strong orientation for biographical planning. Yet, with formal and structural changes of the transitions into retirement by political measures, the chronological age as point of orientation in the life course has lost its impact. At the same time, we can observe that age norms and imaginations have become pluralised and less powerful. However, these changes bound to employment do not affect all social groups to the same degree: Especially entrepreneurs have long been called to integrate such a larger potential of self-determination into their life drafts.

In our presentation, we will focus on aging entrepreneurs and their life course patterns at the end of the active working period drawing on the results of the research project 'From Generation to Generation'. The analysis of narrative-biographical interviews with entrepreneurs illustrates a concept of aging largely oriented on performance: The notion of a 'retirement phase' and a chronological age limit hardly exists. Rather physical and mental ability as well as a direct coordination with the life drafts of other family members determine this status passage.

These impressions and hypothesis gained via qualitative methods are tested using SOEP data. Utilizing the retrospective biographical information of respondents' professional careers (pbiospe), we can summarize the main dissimilarities between life-courses of entrepreneurs and employed people. We choose the period between 50 to 65 years in order to grasp the full variety of work-to-retirement transitions. We apply sequential analyses and optimal matching procedures in order to generate distinct types of life-courses. In the last step, these finally are the dependent variables in multivariate models that aim at exploring which characteristics and factors actually determine an entrepreneurial biography.

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