Ageing populations have long been considered a burden on welfare states, due to increased pension claims and increased need for social and health care services. Neo-liberal scholars argued that this burden can only be carried through welfare state retrenchment, meaning a lower level of welfare-oriented activities of the state. This dissertation objects that ageing populations can also be a resource to welfare states, due to the increasing number of young old persons. The young old are healthy retirees after the child-rearing years. They are physically capable of engaging in productive activities such as paid work, volunteering and informal care-giving. This engagement fulfills functions that the welfare state might otherwise have to fulfill, for example through an increased provision of social services. This dissertation studies governmental attempts to handle the young old population. It studies governmental efforts to decrease the size of the young old population through retirement reforms and to strengthen volunteering and informal care-giving in later life. The main finding is that young old persons are often considered a burden on welfare states despite their engagement in productive activities. This perception is based on stereotypes of older persons and a lack of attention given to productive activities other than paid work. Discussions about the young olds’ role in welfare states might, therefore, depend more strongly on perceptions than on the young olds’ actual activities.

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