

**Title:** Young people's lives in university : exploring welfare mixes and inequality of young people's experiences in university in England, Italy and Sweden

**Author:** Antonucci, Lorenza

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### **Abstract**

After the mass expansion of higher education, young people's experiences in university have become crucial in defining the overall characteristics of the current European youth. Despite the relevance of these paths of transitions, the variation of young people's experiences in university remains a relatively overlooked area. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the inequality of young people's lives in university (encompassing financial circumstances, housing, well-being and education). The research employs a theoretical framework in which individual experiences are analysed in relation to structural factors, namely their socio-economic backgrounds and available welfare mixes (sources from the family, the state and the labour market). Welfare sources are conceptualised as structures available to semi-dependent young people to cope with social risks in the context of a privatisation of social risk for young people in university across Europe. Through a comparison of highly different 'welfare mixes' in England, Italy and Sweden, the research clarifies the role of each source of welfare in stratifying young people's experiences in university. The research employed a mixed methodology strategy, combining the use of a quantitative methodology survey with in-depth follow-up interviews. The research identifies five profiles of young people's experiences in university which are explained by the interaction between welfare sources and socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, it identifies three different models of 'semi-dependence' among young people which are linked to the different welfare mixes available in the three countries. The study argues that inequalities in young people's experiences of university arise from the different availability of welfare sources (from the family, state and the labour market), which is related to young people's socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, the thesis points out that the increasing use of private sources of welfare results in an increasing inequality of young people's experiences in university.