



## Ageing well? A cross-country analysis of the way older people are visually represented on websites of organizations for older people

Eugène Loos<sup>1</sup>, Loredana Ivan<sup>2</sup>, Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol<sup>3</sup>, Maria Sourbati<sup>4</sup>,  
Maria Ekström<sup>5</sup>, Monika Wilińska<sup>6</sup>, Simone Carlo<sup>7</sup> and Ioana Schiau<sup>8</sup>

### Abstract

*The ‘ageing well’ discourse advances the idea of making older people responsible for their capability to stay healthy and active. In the context of an increased ageing population, which poses several challenges to countries’ government, this discourse has become dominant in Europe. We explore the way older people are visually represented on websites of organizations for older people in seven European countries (Finland, UK, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Poland and Romania), using an analytical approach based on visual content analysis, inspired by the dimensional model of national cultural differences from the Hofstede model (1991; 2001; 2011). We used two out of the five Hofstede dimensions: Individualism/Collectivism (IDV) and Masculinity/Femininity (MAS). The results demonstrated that in all seven countries older people are mostly visually represented as healthy/active, which reflects a dominant ‘ageing well’ discourse in Europe. The results also demonstrated that in most cases older people tend to be represented together with others, which is not consonant with the dominant ‘ageing well’ discourse in Europe. A last finding was that the visual representation of older people*

<sup>1</sup> Utrecht University School of Governance, The Netherlands, [e.f.loos@uu.nl](mailto:e.f.loos@uu.nl)

<sup>2</sup> National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania, [loredana.ivan@comunicare.ro](mailto:loredana.ivan@comunicare.ro)

<sup>3</sup> Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Catalonia, Spain, [mfernandezar@uoc.edu](mailto:mfernandezar@uoc.edu)

<sup>4</sup> University of Brighton, United Kingdom, [m.sourbati@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:m.sourbati@brighton.ac.uk)

<sup>5</sup> Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland, [maria.ekstrom@laurea.fi](mailto:maria.ekstrom@laurea.fi)

<sup>6</sup> School of Health and Welfare, Jönköping University, Sweden, [monika.wilinska@ju.se](mailto:monika.wilinska@ju.se)

<sup>7</sup> Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, Italy, [simone.carlo@unicatt.it](mailto:simone.carlo@unicatt.it)

<sup>8</sup> National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania, [ioana.schiau@comunicare.ro](mailto:ioana.schiau@comunicare.ro)

*is in about half of the cases in line with these Hofstede dimensions. We discuss the implications of these findings claiming that the 'ageing well' discourse might lead to 'visual ageism'. Organizations could keep this in mind while using pictures for their website or in other media and consider to use various kind of pictures, or to avoid using pictures of older people that stigmatize, marginalize or injure. They could look into the cultural situatedness and intersectional character of age relations and consider alternative strategies of both visibility and invisibility to talk with and about our ageing societies.*

**Keywords**

*Ageing well, Visual representations of older people, Hofstede IDV Index, Hofstede MAS Index*

**Introduction: Dominant 'ageing well' discourse and societal consequences**

In most western countries the number of older people increases rapidly. This trend and the increased risk of having health problems in later life, has lead to a discourse about making older people responsible for their capability to stay healthy and active in later life for which the term 'ageing well' is being used. The discourse of apocalyptic demography reporting on the increasing number of older people in western countries (United Nations, 2017) has dominated the language of governments and companies (e.g. Loos, 2013), and transnational institutions (e.g., Beard & Bloom, 2015; WHO, 2014). Underlined by the neoliberal agenda, this discourse emphasizes individual responsibility for the process of ageing, which is regarded as a project to work on and for the label 'ageing well' is being used. (Chapman, 2005; Loos, 2013; Orpin, Walker & Boyer, 2013). Other similar terms that also used are 'healthy ageing' (<http://www.healthyageing.eu/>), 'active ageing' (WHO, 2002; Riva et al., 2014; 'positive ageing' (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1995) and 'successful ageing' (Baltes & Baltes, 1993; Rowe & Kahn, 1997; Andrews, 2009; Foster & Walker, 2014). 'Ageing well' focuses on 'the quality of the ageing experience' (Orpin, Walker & Boyer, 2013; WHO, 2014) and ultimately makes people responsible for their health and well-being and discipline them into following ideals of perfect and successful life without ageing (Holstein & Minkler, 2003; Katz & Marshall, 2003).

On the one hand, the promotion of optimistic ideas associated with well-being in later life may have positive consequences, such as the adoption of an active lifestyle, maintaining functional health and enhancement of the capacities, as the individual responsibility and civic engagement result in the reduction of older people's dependability on public system provision (Neilson, 2006). On the other hand, there are numerous negative consequences which are largely debated in the current literature (Coupland, 2009; Calasanti & King, 2007; Neilson, 2006), such as the marginalization of the process of growing old and the societal exclusion of older people. This applies

particularly to older people in the so called ‘fourth age’<sup>9</sup> who are not able to meet the obligation imposed on them by the dominant ageing well discourse. Loos (2013: pp. 26-27) gives the example of such a discourse in the Netherlands where the following argumentation is followed:

‘Our increased life expectancy means that we will spend a long time in the ‘third age’, the period of retirement, while the ‘fourth age’ will be reduced to a short, painful descent into decay. It is striking that in the Netherlands especially public authorities make use of the concept of the ‘third age’. The ‘third age’ receives ample mention in policy memorandums, while the ‘fourth age’ is quietly ignored.’

The ‘ageing well’ discourse is produced by a consumerist marketing manoeuvre to make seniors consumers treating ageing as a controllable disease, rather than a natural universal process (see also Loos and Ekström, 2014). The ‘anti-ageing’ trend (Vincent et al., 2008) is one expression of this approach that forces consumers to take the responsibility for their well-being, to take control of their bodies and avoid social exclusion. The anti-ageing industry and advertisements are profitable and continuously growing in resonance with the cultural ‘anti-ageing’ trend. The industry comprises various products and services and according to Mehlman et al. (2004: p. 305) there are categories that became clearly associated with anti-ageing ‘battle’: (1) cosmetic treatments and surgery; (2) exercise and therapy; (3) food and beverages; (4) vitamins, minerals, and supplements; (5) cosmetics and so called cosmeceuticals (this term is a combination of pharmaceutical and cosmetic). In the light of that, consumers face only two options: to continuously attempt to control age-related ‘problems’ or to refuse to incorporate consumerist choices in their life as part of their well-being (Ylänne, Williams & Wadleigh, 2010).

The main criticism of the ‘ageing well’ discourse (labelled as ‘successful ageing’ by Andrews, 2009) are: (1) the prejudicial association of ageing with social withdrawal, that might cause self-denial and low self-esteem, and (2) the ‘false dualism’ between public self that is presented agelessness and the private self, when admitting the inevitable age. This refers to the population at large and older people themselves. For example, a study conducted among University of Third Age (U3A) in Poland demonstrates the ways in which older members of U3A become the harshest critics of ageing and old age (Wilińska, 2012). Seduced by the discourse of agelessness (Andrews, 1999), they engage and promote activities that would stave off the process of ageing. Furthermore, the ‘ageing well’ discourse risks reinforcing practices of ageism operating at the intersection with other inequalities, such as male sexual performance and dominance as opposed to woman beauty. The ‘ageing well’ discourse is also criticized for its cultural blindness (Liang & Luo, 2012: p.329). The concept has been based upon Western and North-American values, that is dominated by success, independence, efficiency, sociability and wealth (Tornstam, 2005) and has become a dominant discourse in Europe for the past 10 to 15 years (Foster & Walker, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> See Laslett (1991) for the notions of ‘third age’ and ‘fourth age’ and Higgs & Gilleard (2015) for a critical discussion of ‘fourth age’.

Baudrillard (2004: pp 129-130) makes the point that “if you don’t make your bodily devotions, if you sin by omission, you will be punished. Everything that ails you comes from being culpably irresponsible towards yourself (your own salvation)’ and ‘its omnipresence (...) in advertising, fashion and mass culture; the hygienic, dietetic, therapeutic cult which surrounds it, the obsession with youth, elegance, virility/femininity, treatments and regimes, and the sacrificial practices attaching to it all bear witness to the fact that the body has today become an object of salvation.”

The role of media in promoting and spreading the ideas of ‘ageing well’ is immense. Both online and offline outlets support anti-ageing industry in its attack on ageing and old age in particular. The rise of internet and online media is important here. ‘Ageing well’ signs on websites used by anti-ageing industry, could lead to the pressure not to appear old and arm you in the fight against ageing. Practically anyone is involved in the anti-ageing controlling process, transforming the ageing itself from a cohort natural phenomenon to an apparently individual rational choice: ‘Ageing is about me and me alone’ (Gullette, 2004: p.7). In an explorative study, Loos (2013) shows that in the Netherlands the three organizations for older people all use mainly photographs of healthy/active older persons at their websites: they represent the eternally youthful seniors. The meaning of such practices is profound as the visual representation is one important aspect of everyday meaning making: ‘it is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate meaningfully to others.’ (Hall 1997: p.23) and ‘... *full participation* by all members of a group, socially, culturally, economically and affectively in that community’s affairs is a *sine qua non* for that group to flourish. That includes a commitment to values regarded as central for maintaining social cohesion. That in turn requires full access to semiotic, cultural, social and economic resources.’ Kress (2010: p.18)

### **Aim**

The ‘aging well’ discourse, based upon Western and North-American values (Tornstam, 2005), became a dominant discourse inside European Union for the past 10 to 15 years (Foster & Walker, 2014). In this paper, we explore national cultural differences and similarities in the ways older people are visually represented on websites of organizations for older people. Our aim is to capture the multifaceted nature of the ‘ageing well’ discourse by giving up a normative construction in favour of a more inclusive discourse, acknowledging the role of national cultural factors in the way ‘ageing well’ is represented. First, we count the number of photographs in which older people are visually represented as healthy/active, which would be consonant with the ‘ageing well’ discourse and in line with the results of the mentioned above explorative study conducted in the Netherlands by Loos (2013). Second, we investigate if older people are visually represented alone or together with others as the ‘ageing well’ discourse clearly focusses on the individual. Third, we study the extent to which older people are visually

represented as individualistic and masculine, which are also important characteristics of the 'ageing well' discourse.

### **A cross-cultural analysis**

*We conducted a cross-country qualitative explorative study of the website of organizations for older people in a Scandinavian country (Finland), European Anglo-Saxon countries (UK), a north-western European country (the Netherlands), a south European country (Spain and Italy), and an east and south-east European country (Poland and Romania) to examine reveal the visual representation of older people on these websites.*

### **Hofstede's cultural dimensions**

Our study draws on cultural differences related to the importance of success, independence, efficiency, sociability and wealth (Tornstam, 2005) and the individualistic versus collectivistic construction of self in later life (Waid & Leslie, 2003) in order to examine how ageing well discourse positions are adopted in different European countries today. Cultural differences in the importance of success, independence, efficiency, sociability and wealth (Tornstam, 2005) and an individualistic versus collectivistic construction of self in later age (Waid & Leslie, 2003) could play a role in the meanings of 'ageing well' in different countries. For our cross-country qualitative explorative study to reveal national cultural differences and similarities of the ways older people are visually represented on websites of organizations for older people we created a photograph code book (see Appendix) inspired by the analytical framework developed by De Mooij (2014) who analyzed cross-cultural differences in advertising appeal.

De Mooij (2014) based her analytical framework on Hofstede's (1991; 2001; 2011) dimensional model of national cultural differences. The model has been previously used to explain differences in self and social identity (Bochner, 1994; Fang, 2010), as well as differences in strategies of self-presentation and self-categorization using mediated communication (Merkin, 2006; De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). The Hofstede model analyses cultural differences along five dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation and refers to national cultures, helping to understand basic values differences. The dimensions are measured on a scale from 0 to 100 (Index). These scores indicate the relative differences between cultures. Country scores are available for 85 countries<sup>10</sup>, including the ones we investigated for this paper. The model is appreciated by its simplicity and compatibility with other models on cultural differences (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> See <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>

As argued by De Mooij and Hofstede (2010: p.88), “sometimes a configuration of two dimensions explains differences in product usage or other consumption-related phenomena even better.”. Mueller (2004) has underlined the positive correlation, between Individualism and Masculinity. Though one could discuss if this interplay should be considered as a correlation, we decided to investigate if there is an interplay between Individualism and Masculinity. We used the Individualism/Collectivism and Masculinity/Femininity dimensions from the Hofstede model to see if national cultural differences and similarities in the way older people are visually represented can be revealed.

*Hofstede’s Individualism/Collectivism* dimension distinguishes cultures where people look after themselves and their immediate family only (individualism) or where people belong to in-groups who look after them in exchange for loyalty (collectivism). In individualistic cultures, people develop a unique identity and independence is important, in collectivistic cultures, identity is based in the social network to which one belongs. In individualistic cultures there is more explicit, verbal communication; in collectivistic cultures communication is more implicit and indirect because of needs for harmony. About 70% of the world population scores collectivistic. Across Europe the differences are mostly between the North/West and the South/East. From the countries involved in our study the UK and the Netherlands are most individualistic and Romania and Spain are most collectivistic.

Individualism/Collectivism is a well-researched cultural construct in several models that counted for cultural differences (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001). Several authors argue that Collectivism is a fundamental dimension regarding all societies (Hofstede, 2011; Oyserman, Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2002). In the Hofstede model (2011) the Individualism Index (IDV) is listed for 76 countries. Higher values of this Index prevail in Western countries, whereas Eastern countries are mostly described as collectivistic ones. Individualism and Collectivism are presented as opposite poles of a continuum and several aspects are typically used to describe those opposing poles (see for example Hofstede, 2011: p.11, Table 3). For this index the following conclusions can be made:

- (1) individualistic cultures are characterized by losing the social ties and looking after yourself and the closest family members, whereas in collectivistic cultures, people are integrated into large in-groups linked through loyalty and each other protection;
- (2) individualism is depicted as a strong *I* consciousness, whereas collectivism has developed a *We* consciousness;
- (3) the importance of privacy and privacy issues prevailed in the individualistic cultures, whereas the importance of belonging and group appurtenances is stressed in the collectivistic ones;
- (4) the importance of having personal opinions and speaking up your mind, as opposed to the importance of reducing conflict, keeping the harmony in interpersonal relations and preserving the social norms, also described as ‘forbearance’ (Yeh, Arora & Wu, 2007) opposes individualism to collectivism;

- (5) fatalism is also seen as a collectivistic feature, as opposed to individualism, referring to the acceptance of luck and fate and also the tendency to believe that control may lay in the external or contextual forces;
- (6) respect for older people and for the authority figures is also considered as a more collectivistic feature, found in cross-cultural studies (Yeh, Arora & Wu, 2007), in connection to group pressure for the individual to give up some personal goals in order to be accepted. Thus seeking help from parents or older members of the group to cope with difficulties and parents' willingness to sacrifice their goals for the sake of children is a more common feature for the collectivistic cultures than for the individualistic ones;
- (7) importance of task, versus the importance of relationships are distinctive features of the Individualism-Collectivism poles as well.

Most cross-cultural studies on Individualism and Collectivism have been conducted on adolescents or students, but Triandis (1995) and Westerhof, Dittmann-Kohli & Katzko (2000) focused on generations and found an age cohort difference: in some cultures older people tend to be less individualistic compared to young people. The differences between older and younger people in the way they construct and represent their self-identity in individualistic or collectivistic terms could be explained by differences in life contexts and experiences, as well.

De Mooij states that: "In individualistic culture, the public tends to be addressed in a direct and personalized way" (2014: p. 278). In individualistic cultures people are depicted as independent, adventurous and self-supportive. In collectivistic cultures they are presented as interdependent with others (family or same-age groups), while in individualistic cultures older people want to look younger (personal communication with De Mooij, 2015).

*Hofstede's Masculinity/Femininity* dimension measures the degree of assertiveness, performance or achievement orientation versus quality of life and care as well as the degree of role differentiation versus overlapping roles of males and females. It explains status needs to show one's success as well as differences in household roles like cleaning, child care, cooking, and shopping. From the countries involved in our study the UK and Poland score highest and the Netherlands and Finland score lowest.

The *Masculinity/Femininity* dimension from the Hofstede model refers to traditional assigned gender roles: men are expected to be assertive, competitive, tough and powerful, whereas women to be preoccupied with house and children, oriented to others, warm and tender. So, Hofstede (2001) depicts high feminine cultures as those in which the traditional gender role overlap, whereas the masculine ones are maintaining the traditional gender role distinction.

In the Hofstede model the Masculinity Index (MAS) is listed for 76 countries. In Europe, this Index lists Eastern countries and German speaking countries are listed as high masculine cultures, whereas Nordic countries and The Netherlands are listed as high feminine cultures (Hofstede, 2011).

Most studies that implemented Hofstede's *Masculinity/Femininity* dimension have been conducted to depict gender role portraits in advertising (e.g. An & Kim, 2007; De

Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). De Mooij (2014: p.283) states that: ‘Winning and achievement, characteristics of masculine cultures, are frequently used in US advertising. In particular, the combination of Individualism and Masculinity (in Anglo-German cultures) leads to the strong need to win, to be successful and show it, combined with the wish to dominate.’ Other studies have turned their attention to business, decision making and organizational behaviors (Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006; Tavakoli, Keena & Cranjak-Karanovic, 2003; Vitell, Nwachukwu & Barnes, 1993). These studies mostly confirm the way Hofstede grouped the countries around Masculinity/Femininity scores.

### **Using individualism/collectivism and masculinity/femininity to analyze older people’s visual representation in cross-cultural contexts**

In past research studies, self-reported measures of Individualism and Collectivism and also of Masculinity and Femininity were used (Hofstede, 2001). Many authors (e.g., Brewer & Chen, 2007; Chen & West, 2008) have argued that the dimension works differently at the individual level of analysis (within culture) versus at the country level of analysis (between countries). Furthermore, most of the between-cultures level of analysis is based on aggregated data over individuals in different countries. Instead, authors such as Morling & Lamoreaux (2008) argue that analyzing cultural products, ‘publicly accessible’ to members of a particular culture, even products which are created by a small number of individuals (as websites), could be a better way to operationalize a between-cultural level of analysis. De Mooij (2014) applied the Hofstede model to analyze cross cultural differences in advertising appeals.

For our study, we got inspired by the research studies conducted by Marcus & Gould (2000) and Robbins & Stylianou (2002), who used Hofstede’s dimensions to analyze cultural differences related to the way global corporations communicate through their websites, and also by the work of Zahir et al. (2002), who did the same for full service national web portals. Still, to our knowledge no cross-cultural study has been conducted to gain insight into cultural differences and similarities in the way older people are visually represented in national websites of organizations for older people.

We therefore aim to address the following *research questions*:

- RQ1. Are older people visually represented rather as healthy/active than as frail/passive, consonant with the ‘ageing well’ discourse and in line with the results of the explorative study conducted in the Netherlands by Loos (2013)?
- RQ2. Are older people represented alone, consonant with the ‘ageing well’ discourse, or together with others?
- RQ3. To which extent is the visual representation of older people in the different countries in line with the Hofstede country Individualism and Collectivism and Masculinity-Femininity scores?

In order to answer the research questions formulated for each of the seven countries (the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, UK, Finland, Poland, and Italy), we developed and followed a research design by using an axial coding process conducted on



the photographs posted on the website of the organization for older people in each of the selected countries.

## Research design

### Data collection

As a first step, the first seven authors of the paper served as local informants for each country and provided information regarding the organization for older people (the first author in The Netherlands; the second author in Romania; the third author in Spain; the fourth author in the UK; the fifth author in Finland; the sixth author in Poland and the seventh author - in Italy). As a second step, each author downloaded, saved and archived photographs from the website of the selected organization that were visible on the website between December 2016 and February 2017. Photographs were selected provided that they represent older people in a concrete or abstract manner, in explicit or implicit visual messages (see Appendix). Photographs conveying messages related with not only later life but also including other aspects of the daily life were also selected. Each of the authors was instructed about the selection criteria and had the final decision about the corpus in their own country. As the selected sample of photographs in each country varied from 20 (in the Netherlands) to 250 in UK, as the third step of the project we decided to limit the sample size to 50 photographs in each country. So, for those countries having more than 50 photographs, we included the ones at the home page of the website and then continued with other pages moving from left to right until photograph 50. The total sample size was  $N= 294$  photographs. Table 1 presents the sample size for each organization and the websites' links.

**Table1. Included websites in this study**

Organizations' name	Website	Country	Number of selected photographs
Age UK	<a href="http://www.ageuk.org.uk/">http://www.ageuk.org.uk/</a>	UK	50
ANBO Dé belangenorganisatie voor senioren [ <i>Dutch organization for older people</i> ]	<a href="http://www.anbo.nl">www.anbo.nl</a>	The Netherlands	20
Svenska pensionärsförbundet [ <i>The Swedish Pensioners' Federation</i> ] Eläkeliitto [ <i>Federation of retirement</i> ]	<a href="http://www.spfpension.fi/startside/">http://www.spfpension.fi/startside/</a>	Finland	24
Senior [ <i>Senior</i> ]	<a href="http://www.senior.pl">www.senior.pl</a>	Poland	50
ANPR- Asociatia Nationala a Pensionarilor din Romania [ <i>National Association of Pensioners in Romania</i> ]	<a href="http://www.anpr.org.ro/">http://www.anpr.org.ro/</a>	Romania	50
UDP - Unión Democrática de Pensionistas y Jubilados de España [ <i>Democratic Union of Pensioners and Retirees of Spain</i> ]	<a href="http://www.mayoresudp.org/">http://www.mayoresudp.org/</a>	Spain	50
AUSER – Associazione per l'invecchiamento attivo [ <i>Association for active ageing</i> ]	<a href="http://www1.auser.it/">http://www1.auser.it/</a>	Italy	50

### ***Content categories coding process and reliability***

We employed a content analysis approach using an 8-category coding scheme derived from the literature review, that consisted of non-exclusive categories and each photograph had to be coded using a photograph codebook (see the Appendix), while recording '0' – 'absent content relative to X category' or '1' 'present content relative to X category' for each of the N=294 photographs, using a matrix format. Coding photographs in categories is especially challenging, because images often convey much richer features than text. Besides the non-exclusive categorization, we define the following strategy to overcome the challenges of classifying the images in the corpus: (1) we opted for a non-exclusive category scheme, meaning that each item could have been coded in more categories in the same time; (2) we used two independent coders (one native speaker) to code the corpus for each country. A third independent coder (author 8 of this paper) was asked to solve the discrepancies between the two coders so that each photograph would be assigned in the most appropriate category; (3) we calculated the inter-coders reliability using Krippendorff's alpha (1970, 2004), which is a standard reliability statistic for content analysis, highly recommended for nominal measures and for pairs of non-exclusive categories. Plus, Krippendorff's alpha is not affected by the number of recorded units. The initial Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  was 0.78 and ranges from 0.76 to 0.94 for the photographs coded in each of the seven countries, which is an accepted level of reliability for nominal data (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

### ***Coders training***

Training was provided to all coders in a face to face meeting and we discussed potential biases and example of photographs assigned in each category. During the training, a brief overview of the main concepts was presented ('ageing well'; Hofstede's Masculinity/Femininity dimension; Hofstede's Individualism/Collectivism dimension) as well as the outline of our study. The training purpose was to get coders familiarized with the coding scheme, initiate them in manual coding and stressing the importance of disregarding personal assumptions and not to hypothesize on the motivation of the organization in posting the photographs.

### **Results**

We started with RQ1 to investigate whether the dominant 'ageing well' discourse could be found in the visual representations of older people on the websites of older people organizations and to which extent the healthy/active visual representation prevail to the frail/passive ones. Table 2 shows that in all seven countries older people are visually represented as healthy/active which is consonant with the 'ageing well' discourse and in line with the results of the explorative study conducted in the Netherlands by Loos (2013); while the instances in which the photograph content represents older people as frail/passive are fewer. Still, on the websites of the selected organizations in Romania, Poland and UK we found more visual content (30%) accounting for frailty/passivity

associated with later life than in Finland, the Netherlands, Spain or Italy. This corroborates with the idea that the ‘ageing well’ discourse might be to a lesser extent dominant in some societies within the European context, as for example the East European countries. Also, the visual content presenting frailty/passivity at later life varies from 4% in Finland to 30% in the other countries, suggesting that cross-cultural differences might play a role in the way in the way society reflects the ‘ageing well’ discourse.

**Table2. Visual representations of older people on the websites of organizations for older people. Comparisons between countries (N = 294 photographs)**

	UK	Nether-lands	Finland	Poland	Romania	Spain	Italy
Older people frail/passive	30%	15%	4%	30%	30%	24%	16%
Older people healthy/active	70%	60%	96%	68%	74%	65%	82%
Older people alone	40%	30%	26%	52%	16%	29%	28%
Older people together with others	60%	75%	74%	46%	90%	71%	72%

Next, we addressed RQ2. As shown in Table 2, in all countries except for Poland, older people were merely represented together with others in the photographs from the organizations for older people. The percentage of visual content coded as “older people together with others” varies from 90% in Romania to 46% in Poland. This is not in line with the dominant ‘ageing well’ discourse in Europe. We refer to the discussion for a possible explanation.

We finally explored RQ3a/b by analyzing the relationship between each country’s score at in the Hofstede index on Individualism/Collectivism (IDV) and Masculinity/Femininity dimensions, (MAS) and the way these concepts are found in visual representations of older people on the websites we have analyzed. In order to do that we proceeded to an analysis of correspondence of ranks.

We ranked the seven analyzed countries taking into account their level of individualistic representation in the coded photographs (relative to collectivistic representation). In Table 3 ranks are presented from ‘1’ - the country with the highest individualistic representation (UK) to ‘7’ – the country with the highest collectivistic representation in the photographs (Romania). Table 3 demonstrates that 6 out of 7 countries had a more collectivistic than individualistic representation of older people in the photographs. Then, we extracted each country Hofstede’s score on IDV dimension (using the study he conducted on 78 countries around the world – see Hofstede, 2011). We compared the ranks obtained from each country after coding the photographs on the IDV dimension with the ranks derived from the Hofstede score. That is, we compared whether the seven countries of interest keep the same ordered position in both cases.

**Table 3. Ranks of the country on Hofstede's\* dimensions (IDV and MAS) and the correspondence with the presence of such content in the photographs (ranks obtained from the coding scheme using the same dimensions) (N = 294)**

	UK	Nether-lands	Finland	Poland	Romania	Spain	Italy
Older people represented in an individualistic way	68%	30%	30%	16%	13%	14%	20%
Older people represented in a collectivistic way	16%	65%	65%	38%	75%	44%	74%
Difference between individualistic and collectivistic content	52 (rank1)	-35 (rank 4)	-35 (rank 4)	-22 (rank2)	-62 (rank 7)	-30 (rank 3)	-54 (rank 6)
**Hofstede values of IDV/ Rank out of 78 countries analysed by Hofstede	89 / rank 3	80 / rank 6	63 / rank 24	60 / rank 25	30 / rank 51	51 / rank 34	76 / rank 9
Correspondence between individualistic visual content and Hofstede country score?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
Older people represented in a masculine way	16%	30%	39%	18%	24%	36%	32%
Older people represented in an feminine way	84%	60%	13%	8%	28%	31%	42%
Difference between masculine and feminine content	-68 (rank 7)	-30 (rank 6)	26 (rank 1)	10 (rank 2)	-4 (rank 3)	-5 (rank 4)	-10 (rank5)
**Hofstede values of MAS/ Rank out of 78 countries analysed by Hofstede	66 / rank 34	14 / rank 75	26 / rank 70	60 / rank 17	42 / rank 54	42/ rank 54	70/ rank 7
Correspondence between masculine visual content and Hofstede country score?	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>

\*Hofstede IDV and MAS Index varies from 0 to 100 (the highest individualist countries; respectively masculine countries - closer to 100) and ranks are offered for each country according to the Index values

\*\* To create a correspondence of ranks, Hofstede's ranks have been reconverted for our study. For example, UK, ranks 3 at IDV and it would be the most individualist country from all our 7 analyzed countries (we ranked it 1), while Romania, ranks 51 at IDV and it would be the least individualist country from all our 7 analyzed countries (we ranked it 7). We proceeded in similar way with converting Hofstede's ranks for our 7 countries sample.

Similarly, we ranked the seven analyzed countries taking into account their level of masculine representation in the coded photographs (relative to feminine representation (MAS dimension)). In Table 3 ranks are presented from '1' - the country with the highest masculine representation (Finland) to '7' - the country with the highest feminine representation in the photographs (UK). We noticed that 5 out of 7 countries had a more feminine than masculine representation of older people in the photographs. Then, we extracted each country Hofstede score on MAS dimension. We compare the ranks obtained from each country after coding the photographs on MAS dimension with the

ranks deriving from the Hofstede score (MAS). Table 3 shows that we have a correspondence of ranks of ranks in 4 out of 7 countries (Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Spain). For the rest, the Hofstede country rank on MAS dimension does not correspond to the rank obtained after coding the photographs. Table 3 shows that we have a correspondence of ranks in 3 out of 7 countries (UK, Finland and Romania). For the rest, the Hofstede country rank on the IDV dimension does not correspond to the rank obtained after coding the photographs.

## Discussion

The ‘ageing well’ discourse reinforces western and North American values, dominated by success independence, efficiency, sociability and wealth. It has become a dominant discourse in Europe for the past 10 to 15 years (Foster & Walker, 2014). The concept is criticized by its cultural blindness. Still, inside Europe, there are important differences in the extent to which societies share and reflect such values. The starting point of our study lays in the exploratory study conducted by Loos (2013) showing that, in the Netherlands, the organizations for older people use photographs on their websites representing eternally youthful seniors. Furthermore, we underpinned the fact that visually representations of older people matters for the process of everyday sense making and that stereotypical images of ageing reinforce societal practices that Loos and Ivan (2018 [forthcoming]) refer to as ‘visual ageism’.

In this paper we explored the way older people are visually represented at websites of organizations for older people in seven European countries using an analytical approach based on visual content analysis. We aimed to reveal the characteristics of the ‘ageing well’ discourse in the visual representations of older people and were interested in examining the extent to which older people are represented as healthy/active and alone. In order to explore cultural differences in the way ‘ageing well’ values might be shared in a particular country, we used insights from Hofstede (1991; 2001; 2011), related to cross-cultural differences in advertising appeals (De Mooij, 2014). There are studies using the Hofstede model to analyze cultural differences related to the way different organizations use their websites to communicate (Marcus & Gould; 2000; Robbins & Stylianou 2002; Zahir et al., 2002), but to our knowledge, there is no study using the Hofstede model to reveal national cultural differences and similarities in the way older people are visually represented on the websites of organizations for older people.

We used two out of five Hofstede dimensions to analyze cultural differences: Individualism/Collectivism (IDV) and Masculinity/Femininity (MAS). We used the model to understand the extent to which the dimensions are to be found in the visual representation of the old people on the websites and also if there is any correspondence between Hofstede’s country scores on MAS and IDV and the visual content we coded for each organization, in each of the countries.

The results of our study demonstrate that in all seven countries older people are mostly visually represented as healthy/active; while the instances in which the

photograph content represents older people as frail/passive are fewer, which is consonant with the 'ageing well' discourse and in line with the results of the explorative study conducted in the Netherlands by Loos (2013) (RQ1). This reflects a dominant 'ageing well' in Europe. Still there are percentage differences between the countries in the visual content we found accounting for frailty/passivity in later life. Particularly on the websites from UK, Poland and Romania we found more visual content (30%) accounting for frailty/passivity than on the website from Finland with the lowest rate (4%), consistent with idea expressed in the beginning of this article on cultural differences in the way societies take up 'the ageing well' discourse.

Our data also showed that in most cases older people tend to be represented together with others in the photographs from the organizations for older people (RQ2). This is not consonant with the 'ageing well' discourse, as this clearly focusses on the individual. We presume that the visual representation is consistent with the mission of the organization – to bring people together – and that such findings are intuitive to some extent. Still, the percentage of visual content coded as 'older people together with others' varies a lot from country to country. We noticed that Romania, a country had also the highest percentage (90%) of visual content presenting older people together, while Poland had the lowest percentage (46%) of visual content presenting older people together.

Finally, regarding RQ3 to which extent the visual representation of older people in the different countries is in line with the Hofstede country scores, we got a correspondence of ranks in 3 out of 7 countries (UK, Finland and Romania) between Hofstede IDV Index and the rank of the country for Individualism/Collectivism category after coding the photographs. Similarly, we obtained correspondence of ranks in 4 out of 7 countries (Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain) between Hofstede MAS Index and the rank of the country for Masculinity/ Femininity category after coding the photographs. The findings are consistent with the idea that values might play an important role in the way older people are visually represented, regarding the dominant 'ageing well' discourse.

### **Societal implications and future research**

What are the implications of such findings? First, the fact that older people are mainly represented as healthy/active could have a positive role for the image of the organization; as well as for the older people wanting to present themselves as members, and possibly for other stakeholders. It is understandable that any organization would like to present a positive message of living nicely in later age (including visual message). Still, later life, particularly the fourth age, comes with cognitive and physical decline and the risk of reduced access to social capital. Such older people might perceive photographs with happy healthy/active couples as 'unrealistic' (see also Loos, 2013), and feel 'injured' by the standards they are pressured to comply to by the 'ageing well' discourse. We noticed that the absence of fourth agers suffering from frailty/passivity on the websites vary from country to country, on the websites we performed the analysis. Indeed, such differences

might account for different views of the people who organized the websites or for the policy of the organization. To explore this idea, in future research we aim to conduct interviews with people who are in the board meetings of the selected organizations. Regardless the internal reasons specific organizations might have to choose particular photographs and not others for the website, visual representations account for cultural values and could be studied as such.

Loos & Ivan (2018 [forthcoming]) discuss to which extent pictures can ‘injure’ and if a picture can hold a neutral content to avoid ‘visual ageism’. Another point is that the same visual content could have a different impact on older people (as intended audience of these websites) in connection with the cultural values shared in that particular society. So, a visual representation of older people in a masculine manner – facing competition, success and achievement and consistent with the ‘ageing well’ discourse, might have a different impact on an old person from a less masculine country (e.g. Romania), in which the societal pressure for older-old to look like this is lower; than in a more masculine country (e.g. UK) in which the societal pressure to meet these values is higher. And a visual representation of older people doing things together might ‘injure’ more an older person having few social contacts and living in a high collectivistic country (e.g. Romania), than in a high individualistic one (as UK) – the pressure to conform the standards implied in the visual representation could be different in the two contexts.

Organizations could keep this in mind while using pictures for their website or in other media and consider to use various kinds of pictures (see Loos (2013) for the designing for diversity approach) or to avoid using pictures of older people that stigmatize, marginalize or injure. They can look into the cultural situatedness and intersectional character of age relations and consider alternative strategies of both visibility and invisibility to talk with and about our ageing societies.

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**Eugène Loos** is a professor of “Old and New Media in an Ageing Society” in the Department of Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam and an associate professor of Communication, Policy and Management Studies at the Utrecht University School of Governance in the Netherlands. Currently his research focuses on the role of old and new media related to accessible information for senior citizens, in order to guarantee their inclusion in our society. He investigates the (ir)relevance of age for: (1) different groups of older adults' digital information search behavior, (2) their perception of the reliability of information, (3) their identification with images in information sources, (4) the impact of visual and textual signs in digital health information on their cognition and affection, (5) the creation and use of (intergenerational) digital games for their wellbeing

**Loredana Ivan** is associate professor at The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Communication Department, Bucharest, Romania. She is teaching topics related to Interpersonal Communication and Interpersonal Communication Mediated by Technologies. She is part of the Ageing Communication Technologies project (<http://actproject.ca/>) based in Canada and co-applicant of ACT project research grant. She is also part of the COST ACTION IS1402 Ageism - a multi-national, interdisciplinary perspective. Loredana Ivan was Marie Curie scholar (2003-2004) at the University of Groningen, Interuniversity Center for Methodology (ICS) and visiting researcher at Humboldt University from Berlin, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology (2012-2013). She is the author of *Cele mai importante 20 de secunde* (The most important 20 seconds, 2009) and co-editor of two other books in nonverbal communication area.

**Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol** is a senior researcher at the IN3 – Internet Interdisciplinary Institute, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya; and co-director of the research group Communication Networks and Social Change. Her research interests focus on the role that digital (mobile) communication plays in empowering and developing individuals' potentialities among non-central societal groups, mainly older people and low-income populations. Also, she is interested in applying new digital methods and on understanding their limitations and opportunities they provide.

**Maria Sourbati** is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communications in the School of Media, University of Brighton. Her research interests lie at the intersection of communications and social policy. She has published widely on communications regulation, digital ICT and digital literacy, disability and age relations.

**Maria Ekström**, D Sc (Econ), Head of Master Programme in growth leadership, Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Her research focuses on cross-cultural comparison of senior consumers and visual research methods.

**Monika Wilinska**, PhD, assistant professor at the School of Health and Welfare, Jönköping University Sweden. Her research focuses on the intersectional approaches to the practices and processes of the inequality (re)production in later life within the context of welfare states. Monika has a particular interest in cross-cultural approaches to age and the role of language in mediating ageing experiences.

**Simone Carlo**, PhD in Communication Cultures at Università Cattolica, Italy. His scientific interests concern domestication of digital media, ethnography of media practices, social exclusion and use of communication technologies. He has publications about digital divide, digital literacy and uses of ICTs among elderly.

**Ioana Schiau** is an assistant professor at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest, Romania. She is part of a local research team that investigates the intersection of ageing and digital technology. Her research interests also include the use of humor in interpersonal and mass communication.