

Visualising Old Age

Photographs of older people on the website of the DaneAge Association

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Abstract

This article studies how the Danish advocacy group for older people, *Ældre Sagen* (the DaneAge Association, or DAA), of which around 46 per cent of all Danes over the age of 65 are members, visually represents older people. The study gains theoretical inspiration from media and cultural-gerontological theories concerning the cultural influence of media representations of older people, and the connected perceptions of what it means to be and to grow old. The study is based on an analysis of a sample of 59 photographs that appeared on DAA's website in the period 2016–2018. The results indicate a dominant visual representation of older people as happy, socially involved and extroverted, while representations of older people as weak, introverted and alone constitute a minority. In conclusion, the organisation visually promote a positive image of older people, at the same time as they represent them as excluded from other age groups and from culture and society in general.

Keywords: older people, third age, photography, visual representation, organisational communication

Ageing and the media

Media influence the discourses of culture and society, thereby creating, maintaining and changing images of older people. The media thus constitute an important arena for representations of older people. Media and cultural-gerontological research has shown that stereotypical, often negative perceptions of older people circulate in the media, depending on context and agenda (Blaikie & Hepworth, 1997; Hepworth, 2004; Jönson, 2001; Lövgren, 2009; Rørbye, 1998; Wien, 2005; Williams et al., 2010). This research also indicates how, particularly over the past few decades, the media have played a role in disseminating more positive perceptions of older people as resourceful, healthy and active, and as valuable consumers who even have been dubbed the 'grey gold' (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1995; Katz, 2000, 2001; Marshall & Rahman, 2015; Rozanova, 2010). Stereotypical representations of old age as a life phase characterised by stagna-

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tion, decline and dependency have thus been challenged by new and refreshing – yet perhaps equally stereotypical – views concerning old age and older people.

In this article we consider visual representations of older people in a specific media targeted at older people, namely the website of the Danish advocacy group for older people, Ældre Sagen (the DaneAge Association, or DAA)¹. This website addresses older people and people who have familial or professional relationships with older people, focusing on the challenges of ageing. A study of visual representations of older people on this website is important, because photographs of older people form an essential part of the website and in a concrete way supplement the written text and contribute to the website's atmosphere. Moreover, the photographs give an idea of which older people the DAA has in mind when they address their audience. Finally, the visual representations may also generate a particular image of the organisation, that is, the feelings and beliefs about the organisation that exist in the minds of the audience (see Hatch & Schultz, 1997: 358ff).

Thus, the aim of this study is to determine how older people are visually portrayed on the DAA's website (the Danish version) and which atmosphere is created by virtue of pictures of older people. The investigation will contribute to the knowledge of how member organisations like the DAA manage the dual agenda of lobbying for resources and assistance for a vulnerable minority of their target group, while simultaneously portraying people over 65 in a way that resonates with the majority (i.e. as active and healthy citizens).

An organisation for older people

The DAA is a non-profit membership organisation that lobbies on behalf of the oldest section of the Danish population. They were founded in 1986 and are independent and neutral regarding party politics. They have around 860,000 members, primarily people aged from 65 to 90+. This is a very broad member group, particularly considering that Denmark has a population of over 1 million people over the age of 65. This means that around 46 per cent of the age group over 65 years of age are members of the DAA. The organisation is financed primarily by subscriptions, at DKK 250 (EUR 33) per year, which is affordable to most older people. Besides their headquarters in Copenhagen, they have 216 local departments across Denmark, with more than 20,000 volunteers undertaking volunteer work, such as visiting lonely, older people, providing IT courses and excursions and advocating for the involvement and inclusion of older people in political and organisational work. They maintain an ongoing dialogue with the government, municipalities, the press and the public, to promote a society without age barriers and ageism. Both historically and currently the organisation has a reputation for being a champions of society's weak and vulnerable older citizens. They claim to advocate for all older people, including the weakest groups, which require 'support and care' (Ældre Sagen).

As an advocacy group, the DAA faces a dilemma, which has grown in pertinence in recent years. On the one hand, the aim of the organisation is to fight for better social, economic and cultural conditions for weak older people; that is, the DAA's legitimacy requires that they represent older people to be in need of support due to, for instance, poor living conditions, loneliness, illness or financial problems. On the other hand, as a membership organisation, the DAA needs to be attractive to both current and future

members, and must thus provide an image of older people to which all members can identify. A similar dilemma is well-known to other organisations with a humanitarian agenda, such as the Red Cross or Amnesty International. Such organisations may be caught between being visible, attractive and dependent on the media, and ‘the public’s scepticism toward mediated morality and what is commonly referred to as compassion fatigue’ (Vestergaard, 2008: 371; see also Moeller, 1999). Regarding the DAA, the question is how the organisation balances representing older people as frail, vulnerable and in need of help, and depicting positive values of ageing and old age to attract members and resonate with the majority of the elderly in Denmark. In this article we ask if and how the DAA visually communicates the message that old age can be good and meaningful, without at the same time overlooking more serious problems that may relate to ageing and old age described in the website’s text, such as problems related to loneliness, poverty, physical and mental decline and dependency on other people. We answer this question in the following analysis, by studying the visual representations of older people on the DAA website.

Third agers in the media

Perceptions of what it means to be and to grow older are often related to ideas of ‘the third age’. According to Gilleard and Higgs (2011), the third age represents a new social space characterised by improved finances, as well as cultural and consumer opportunities that older people previously did not have, but that now offer them the chance for self-realisation and for a new self-understanding based on ‘the liberation of “ageing” from “old age”’ (Gilieard & Higgs, 2005: 161). Thus, old age is no longer necessarily regarded as an end phase, at which life is more or less paused, nor is it seen as an eternal youth. It is instead considered a series of passages, each offering different ways of ‘realising oneself’ (Gilieard & Higgs, 2013: XI) and providing the opportunity to start from scratch. From this perspective, chronological age has been reset, and the limits between adulthood and old age have become less clear. Adulthood passes unnoticed into old age, which should be considered ‘a phase of *regrowth* – not of no-growth’ (Jensen, 1993: 55). The third age, in this sense, denotes a possibility for all adults, regardless of age, to look at their lives as a potential opportunity for growth and development.

Ideas related to the third age, however, do more than just signal options for new and exciting perceptions of older people. When media promote an aspirational identity of active and successful ageing, this image is likely to gain a special status as a normative framework for old age, i.e. older people are *expected* to live an active life and pursue a healthy and socially engaged lifestyle, regardless of whether they can or wish to do so. Based on an analysis of a Canadian lifestyle magazine for older adults, Marshall and Rahman (2015) even indicate a reconfiguration of ageing lifestyles and identities in contemporary culture. Within the discourses of this magazine’s representation, the article identifies four key elements of an aspirational identity for older people: ‘fit, fashionable, functional and flexible’, all of which creates an expectation that older people should live healthy lives, be ready for change and live up to the image of committed and active consumers (Marshall & Rahman, 2015: 577): in other words, that older people do not mind that they are getting old. Another study, focused on a popular Finnish magazine aimed at readers over the age of 50, compares the magazine’s representations of age-

ing and older people in 1996 and 2006 and concludes that ‘in 2006, reflecting the past was a way to find new and better identities in later life. In the 2000s later life is a time of personal growth’ (Lumme-Sandt, 2011: 50). As such, older people are expected to be aware of their future, and regard it as a time for development and new experiences.

In such types of media, we encounter representations of healthy and active older persons, showing how to grow older while still maintaining an active and younger lifestyle (see also Katz & Marshall, 2003, regarding sexuality as a marker of successful ageing, and Williams et al., 2012, regarding the individual training of cognitive abilities, to prevent dementia). In this regard, chronological age is not considered a barrier to development but is instead regarded as a distinctive mark that older people can use, to emphasise the extent to which they wish to keep their bodily ageing at bay. Thus, as Lumme-Sandt (2011) emphasises, a future-oriented mindset is expected in older people, and ‘it seems that a good life in any age is built on changes and reflection, whereas idleness and stagnation are represented as characteristics of unsuccessful life, even in old age’ (2011: 50). Such conclusions relate to the representations of older people in a consumer context, such as lifestyle magazines driven by a commercial intention of promoting an image of ‘youthful’, active and successful older people.

The many issues regarding ideas and expectations of the third age are taken into consideration in the following analysis of the visual representations of older people on the DAA’s website. This organisation is an advocacy group that works for better conditions for older people, and have a social profile and a political agenda. The analysis of images on this type of platform provides a valuable complement to the aforementioned analytical findings from investigations of images in lifestyle and consumer magazines.

Analytical and methodological approach

This study’s analysis gains theoretical inspiration from recently changing perceptions of older people and old age, expressed in concepts such as ‘the third age’, and is limited to a contemporary perspective. The analysis is based on a total sample of 59 photographs appearing on the DAA’s website, collected in the period of April 2016 to October 2018. Throughout this period the website was generally quite stable, with almost the same 59 photographs circulating at various intervals. Of the 59 photographs, 50 showed older people; seven show close-ups of hands that were typically writing letters and shopping lists, holding accounts or doing crossword puzzles; and two showed banknotes on a table. Other photographs appeared on the website as well; however, they were advertisements for restaurants, fitness centres, travel agencies, clothes, furniture, aids and appliances and the like. These photographs were not subject to analysis. All photographs in the sample are taken by the same professional photographer, Claudi Thyrrstrup, who is hired by and takes all photos for the DAA. The older people featured in the photos are primarily DAA members or volunteers, and all of them have given their consent to be photographed. The 59 photographs were distributed under three of the website’s nine overall headings: ‘About the DaneAge Association’, ‘Press & politics’ and ‘Knowledge & advice’. There are only a few photographs, often none, under the website’s other six headings, by and large advertisements for various consumer services.

As Pauwells (2008) explains, many visual representations embody ‘intentionally or unintentionally an implicit or more explicit view on, or argument about, what is being

presented visually through the many elements and choices that make up the representation' (2008: 159). Photographs on this website are thus key intermediaries of perceptions of old age, in the sense that they 'guide our thinking of ageing' (Ylänne, 2012: 9). They create a space for perceptions of old age. Fyfe and Law (1988) point out that to understand a visualisation is 'to note its principles of exclusion and inclusion, to detect the roles that it makes available, to understand the way in which they are distributed, and to decode the hierarchies and differences that it naturalizes' (1988: 1). Photographs of older people, therefore, prompt us to investigate who is included and who is excluded from the visual universe of the DAA's website, and how we should characterise the older people to whom the DAA gives visual status and thereby legitimises as representatives of the older population.

My approach gains analytical inspiration from the multimodal framework from Pauwells (2012) for analysing websites as cultural expressions. When analysing websites, visual representations come in many different forms, as Pauwells (2012) explains: charts, photographs, drawings, paintings and abstract symbols and icons – 'each involving a different analytical stance because of their very diverse referents, production processes and uses' (2012: 254). No matter what form of visual representations, Pauwells (2012) argues, they need to be analysed for "what they depict" ("referent" or "content") and "how they depict or represent" (style)' (2012: 254). Informed by these suggestions, the analytical approach to the photographs of older people advocates an exploratory, descriptive approach (what is there to be found?) and an interpretative approach (what could it possibly tell us about older people?) (cf. Pauwells, 2012: 251).

The DAA website can be categorised as a hybrid between an information site and an identity site (Fleming, 1998). On the one hand, the website aims to provide useful information relevant to primarily ageing users. It contains text-based information and advice related to, for example, pensions, age-related illness, changed housing conditions and loneliness. Everything is written in formal and neutral language used for information, and categorised under headings on the bar at the top of the website's main page. On the other hand, the aim is to present the organisation, with the website reflecting the organisation's identity and public image. Both language and visual representations are important instruments for presenting this image, as they simultaneously reflect the developer of the site (Thorlacius, 2014: 340) and the developer's perceptions of the intended users of the website. This analysis hence looks at visual motifs, e.g. whether older people appear alone in the photographs or in company with others, and whether older people are depicted in specific situations or contexts. The analysis also looks at characteristics of individuals (e.g. gender, body expression and behaviour), as well as whether and how these aspects are supported by analyses of elements such as image composition, colour, camera distance and camera angles.

Analysis

Photographs of older people have a prominent place on the DAA's website. The advanced age of the photographed people is recognised by grey and often sparse hair growth, by wrinkles and slack skin. The photographs are all large and in colour, often covering nearly half of the screen, and to get to the text-based information, the user has to scroll down. None of the photographs are titled. In some cases, however, words are placed

across the photographs, directing the user's attention to the topic of the written information under the photo. Thus, the photographs primarily appear independently on the website as atmosphere-creating images. They represent a kind and colourful invitation to the whole website; they function to catch the eye, and they supplement the factual, written information on issues and problems related to ageing.

Socially involved and extroverted

Generally, the sample is dominated by photographs of older persons who appear socially involved with other people. Such photographs, all colourful, account for 40 out of the sample's 50 photographs of older persons. A representative example is Image 1 below, featured on the main page of the DAA's website throughout 2017. In the photo we see three women and a man. Three of the people are in focus, with the fourth woman in the background apparently talking to another person who is not visible (Image 1).

Image 1. Social involvement – DAA activities



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2017, October 18].

The three persons in front are smiling happily, and the woman in centre has eye contact with the photographer. Even though it seems to be cold, and black colours dominate, the photo gives the impression of a warm and intimate situation, due to the peoples smiling faces and their bodies being very close to one another. The picture is tightly cropped and photographed in medium close-up, which enables viewers to get a general impression of the depicted persons without getting really close to any of them. Medium close-up means that viewers are positioned within the frame, and thus have access to the situation and the social space that the three persons, in this case, create together. The centring of the smiling faces allows the picture to express the positive aspects of spending time with other older people. The image depicts a pleasant atmosphere in which the situation and the togetherness of the depicted persons are important, not the individuals, as such. Their body language appears to be relaxed and they definitely seem to be having fun. Even though, given their grey hair and wrinkles, we are in no doubt of whether these people are ageing, the overall meaning seems to be that socialising and having fun are more important and more interesting than focusing on the decay that the individual bodies would obviously also show, had the picture been photographed in close-up.

Moreover, the picture's audience might feel invited to join this jolly group, as text across the picture in large font size says, 'A good life. For all your life' (translation by author). Scrolling down to the photo's accompanying written text, it says:

Age is something everyone has, but nobody is only their age. Some need care and support. Others cannot find enough hours in the day for everything they have to do. DaneAge Association creates space for good lives – regardless of age. Join us. You're welcome (Ældresagen, 2017, translation by author).

In the same way the photograph expresses the joy of being together with other people, the text emphasises the importance of creating spaces for good lives by joining up with others. Though this is a statement by an advocacy group for older people, it highlights that age does not really matter.

In 2016, the main page of the DAA website had a photo of a similarly relaxed social situation: a large photograph of three men sitting around a table and talking (Image 2).

Image 2. *Social involvement – sharing a meal*



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2016, April 15].

Plates and leftovers indicate that they have finished their meal but are still chatting. The conversation seems to be easy, as the men are laughing. It appears also that the men are ageing, which can be seen from their wrinkled faces, white hair and clothing that is characteristic of ageing men. This picture depicts a pleasant atmosphere, which is due to both the happy and involved men and the table, which has an informal appearance with cups and plates in rather random positions. This picture too is photographed in medium close-up, enabling the viewer to get a general impression of those depicted but without approaching close intimacy with any of them. Together with the photo's tight cropping, however, this helps the viewer feel included in and part of the social situation – an element that would be lost in a close-up.

The text across this picture in large font says, 'We meet around the table', referring to the scene depicted in the photograph, as well as to a recurring national event bringing people together over a meal: *Denmark – sharing a meal*. Overall, this picture makes

the claim that older people can create something valuable when they join together, tells a story of the benefits that come from social involvement with other people and shows that sharing a meal involves sharing stories and lives.

As already mentioned, photographs like these are dominant under all three of the website's selected headings (as specified on p. 6). Compared to the findings of Marshall and Rahman (2015), concerning the key elements of an aspirational identity of older people, we cannot find 'the fit, the fashionable, the functional and the flexible' among these photographs. Based on these dominant photographs, life is about having a good life, which over and over again is illustrated by pictures of socially engaged and happy older persons having a good time together. This may, as Lumme-Sandt (2011) points out, express 'a sort of praise for the charisma of ageing', which includes more than just bodily appearance, namely 'having inner beauty, composed of life experiences and self knowledge' (2011: 50). Thus, key elements would rather be 'the hearty' and 'the socially involved' as ways of accepting the fact that one *is* old and ageing, not as ways of escaping chronological age or making it invisible.

Older people and children

More information about the *Denmark – sharing a meal* event could be found under the heading 'Denmark – sharing a meal'. In this case, too, we are presented with a large picture of three extremely happy people, probably grandparents with their grandchild, in a situation in which they are baking (Image 3).

Image 3. *Older people and children*



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2016, April 15].

This picture illustrates a private scene at home, in the kitchen. The two older persons' full attention is on the girl in the middle, who is the centre of attention in the photograph. Everything looks neat and proper: all are well-groomed, dressed in newly-laundered aprons and photographed against a light and inviting background, which underlines the

light-hearted, carefree atmosphere. These persons are also photographed in medium close-up, and the picture is tightly cropped so that the viewer might feel as though he or she is in the same room, taking part in the happy social situation. This picture represents a familiar situation involving children and their grandparents. Both parties are enjoying each other's company. The little girl shows a powerful attitude, as if she has succeeded in doing something that might impress the ageing man. All three people are smiling and having fun together. It is thus emphasised that socialising across generations can be rewarding.

Interestingly, however, this is but one of two such photos in the total sample that involve children and older people together. Older people are depicted almost exclusively together with other older people. Teenagers are completely absent, and adults up to the age of around 60 are likewise largely absent from the visual material. This may indicate that older people are not necessarily being portrayed in their usual social roles as parents or grandparents; however, this also suggests that older people are regarded as a social group with no relation to or importance in age groups other than children – a relationship that is also represented sparingly. The photographs emphasise that older people first and foremost find 'the good life' through socialising with other older people. Within the website this is perceived as a strength but, from a larger social perspective, it also points to a certain age-based isolation.

Older people in institutional surroundings

Yet another of the many examples of socially involved, extroverted, and happy older people can be found under the webpages 'About the DaneAge Association', 'Organisation' and 'Our aims and strategies'. Once again, we are presented with a large photograph that fills most of the screen, and we have to scroll far down the page to find the text on aims and strategies. This picture has many features in common with the previously described photographs on the website's main page, but the environment is different (Image 4).

Image 4. *Older people in an institutional surrounding*



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2017, February 8].

In the foreground, three persons are sitting close together, reading a magazine. The background shows there are other people in the room, one of whom who is a wheelchair user and another who has a walking frame, and the immediate association is that the persons are in a centre for older people. The colourful photograph focuses on the strong relationship between the two women in the centre, who have direct eye contact and are smiling warmly at one another, while the third person is also part of the shared situation and is laughing heartily. They are all older people with grey hair and wrinkles, photographed in medium close-up, which primarily gives an impression of the situation's social dynamics. The photo sends a clear signal of the happy and intense atmosphere that can arise among older people in a centre for older people. Scrolling down on the same page, we can read about the aims and strategies of the DAA:

Some have a relatively unproblematic and satisfactory existence, while others are vulnerable and rely on help. [...] We focus on the older people who are in poor health, rely on care and nursing, do not have much money, and are alienated by new technology, and so on. (www.aeldresagen.dk, translation by author) [accessed 2017, February 8]

Considering the text and photograph on this page, the photograph does not have an immediate association with the text's 'older people who are vulnerable and rely on help [...] and are in poor health'. On the contrary, it gives the impression that older people are happy to be socially involved. This highly positive visual representation of older persons offers no visual evidence of the vulnerable older people whom the text concerns.

Under the webpages 'About the DaneAge Association' and 'The voluntary effort', a large photograph once again catches the viewer's attention (Image 5). The picture shows seven older women, seated and facing the camera.

Image 5. *The voluntary effort*



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2018, January 12].

All of the women look happy and they are each holding a ball, suggesting a physical exercise scene, maybe in a centre for older people. The photograph is dynamic, due to the women's colourful clothing, lively facial expressions, multi-coloured balls and the fact that they are perceived as being intensely occupied with the balls. The picture radiates warmth and enthusiasm, underlining the lust for life described in the text beneath the photo concerning volunteer work. Neither the photo nor the text, however, describes older people who signal a need for help and support. Indeed, they appear very much able to take care of themselves, being actively engaged in a sociality and fellowship. Socialising is once again highlighted: exercising and leading an active lifestyle are successful, insofar as they are embedded in social activities.

This photograph is the basis for a campaign to sign up as a DAA volunteer. Clicking on the picture provides access to videos featuring volunteers who primarily emphasise how they themselves benefit from their volunteer work. The videos do not focus on what it is like to be old, reliant on external help or lonely. This aspect is visually excluded in favour of a focus on the volunteers' positive experiences of helping others, and on the older people's exclusively good experiences as recipients of help.

One might expect vulnerable and tired people to be represented when we click on 'Nursing homes' under the 'Press & politics' menu. In Denmark, nursing homes are for society's weakest, most debilitated, and frailest old people, many of whom who suffer from dementia. Under this topic, however, we see the same photo as in Image 4 (three women reading a magazine together). The text beneath the photo, however, emphasises that

lack of time and staff are the two main causes for failure to thrive among Danish nursing home residents. Lack of staff means it is not always possible to provide dignified care in nursing homes. (translation by author)

A similarly ambiguous structure, where a positive visual representation of life in a nursing home contrasts with a text that critically comments on older people being treated poorly at nursing homes, is found in several other webpages under the 'Press & politics' menu. Here it becomes clear that the DAA has a dual mission. On the one hand, the organisation have a political agenda that they seek to communicate via text to their wide audience of members, politicians and the general public; on the other hand, to attract members, they also wish to promote an attractive picture of older people being happy, despite the fact that these individuals *are* old and vulnerable, and despite that they are not being treated properly.

Alone, but active

Even though the majority of the photographs on the DAA's website depict older people as socially involved with other people, photos of older people appearing alone are also found in eight of the 50 photographs. These pictures feature older people alone and without social interaction with others, though the older people are also depicted as seriously engaged in an activity, such as keeping accounts, driving a car or typing on a computer. Although photographs of social interaction and communities are absent in this category, the element of activity is dominant, represented by pictures of older people who are individually engaged in keeping themselves going and in good shape.

That is, there are visual representations of older people who are active either within (in a job for seniors) or outside the job market, for example, exercising in a fitness room.

Digitisation is a contentious issue that has presented and still presents problems for many older people (Christensen & Jerslev, 2017). Since 2014, the majority of the communication between public bodies and Danish citizens are required to take place digitally. This was a result of a national digital strategy implemented, despite the fact that a large proportion of older people, especially women, have either never been online or are not competent users of digital media, computers or the internet. In the visual context of the DAA website, however, digitisation and computer use are presented as both an enjoyable pastime and an activity that requires attention (Image 6).

Image 6. *Alone but active*



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2017, June 22].

Nevertheless, only two photographs in the sample address this area. They show ageing men – not women – who are smiling and concentrated while seated at a computer. Rather than giving the impression that using digital media is difficult, the photographs suggest that it is fundamentally fun and exciting.

Under the headings ‘Knowledge & advice’ and ‘Exercise’ older people are primarily represented as physically active, out running in the forest or exercising in a fitness room. They are also presented as attentive information seekers, with regards to the medicine they need to take. They do crossword puzzles to keep their brains active. There are warnings about poor nutrition when ageing and living alone, and older people are encouraged to cook for themselves. The latter is illustrated by a video in which an ageing man – deep in concentration – gives cooking instructions as he prepares his evening meal.

In a minor part of the sample with older persons appearing alone in the photos, it is possible to recognise two of the four key elements of an aspirational identity that Marshall and Rahman (2015) identified in discourses on older people in examining a magazine for older people. In particular, the key elements ‘fit’ and ‘functional’ can be

applied to this visual part of the DAA's website. Images of bodies exercising or doing useful work, credit older people with the ability and willingness to keep themselves active; in other words, ageing is represented by 'doing' rather than by 'being'. But even though there are visual representations of individual purposefulness and functionality that, in the words of Lumme-Sandt (2011), contain a future orientation, these are remarkably few in number when compared to the pictures of extroverted and happy older people being socially involved in the here and now.

Introverted and alone

The DAA website also presents a third type of photographs of older people, which has a more sombre tone, in which older people figure alone and deep in thought. These are far fewer in number: only two out of 50 photographs. One of these photographs appears under the headings 'Press & politics' and 'Loneliness'. It is a large photo that shows a woman sitting alone by the sea (Image 7). The photograph has a gloomy, greyish tone, which is particularly emphasised by the woman's black jacket and the dark sea that fills a large portion of the photo, and frames the woman. She seems to be immersed in her own thoughts, expressing serious reflection, while staring inscrutably into the distance. The text across the photo translates as, 'No older people should feel lonely', thereby potentially fixing the meaning of the photo as an image of a woman who is not only on her own, but who is lonely.

Image 7. *Introverted and alone*



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2018, February 8].

A similar introverted attitude is seen in the other photograph of an older woman under the headings 'Knowledge & advice' and 'Malnutrition is dangerous for old people' (Image 8).

Image 8. Malnutrition



Photographer: Claudi Thyrrstrup. Published at: www.aeldresagen.dk [accessed 2017, July 7].

Sitting alone on a bench in what we can assume to be a public place (there is a large rubbish bin beside her), this woman is photographed in medium close-up, which positions the viewer within the frame but not in close intimacy to the woman. The photograph is unusual and disconcerting in the context of the website, due to the woman's closed eyes, her bodily passiveness and her solitude. In light of the heading concerning malnutrition ('Malnutrition is dangerous for old people'), we are led to assume that the woman is weak and tired from a poor diet. Yet she also appears to be a nice older lady, with nice white hair, a pearl necklace and a well-pressed blouse, which serve to emphasise even more strongly that *all* older people are at risk of malnourishment.

Both this woman and the aforementioned lonely woman by the sea show no signs of bodily activity or social contact with the surrounding world. Such photographs could be categorised as negative images, belonging to the category of images that Martin (2011) denotes as representations of 'visualising risk'. Moreover, such photos often portray women as passive and at risk, while men are more likely to be portrayed as active and independent (Martin, 2011: 51). In contrast to the other categories of photographs on the DAA website, these two connect ageing to 'being' rather than to 'doing'. In terms of the overall sample of photographs, these two photographs of older women are nevertheless unique.

Discussion

The aim of this analysis was to answer the question of whether, and if so, how the visual representations of older people on the DAA website serve a dual purpose in line with the organisation's objectives: on the one hand as an argument for the necessity of a special ageing perspective on the world and of a struggle for better conditions for older people, including the weak and vulnerable, while on the other as an argument for older people having an active, successful and future-oriented life – but *without* ending in a commu-

nication situation that has too much in common with commercial marketing logic, and which may inadvertently strike a hollow note.

On the basis of the analysis we can, first of all, note that, far from being absent, images of older people take high priority in the overall communication strategy. There are numerous large photographs used to catch the eye of the viewers and that present older bodies and signs of ageing, such as grey hair and wrinkles. However, signs of ageing are not particularly emphasised, given that the older people are photographed in medium close-up. Moreover, the photographs are tightly cropped, facilitating the viewer's identification with the social situations and relations appearing in them. Rose (2012) emphasises that images 'work not simply by what they show but also by the kind of seeing they invite' (2012: 12). The majority of the photographs on the DAA's website thus, first and foremost, invite the viewer to see older people as happy persons, who are socially committed and involved in enjoyable fellowships, whether within the four walls of their homes or in institutional settings such as nursing homes. In this way the DAA promotes old age as an 'attractive' stage, and counter ageism and the often stereotyped images of older people in mainstream media.

Answering Hepworth's (2004) questions of 'What is the "look" of age?' and 'What do we see when we see old age?' (2004: 3), the DAA invite the website user to view older people in a manner in which age itself does not really play a role. What we see in the photographs would not, however, be an example of 'growing older without aging' (Katz, 2001: 27), as we are confronted almost solely by photographs of grey-haired, wrinkled people, rather than of younger persons. Signs of ageing, thus, are not invisible. They seem to be accepted as a fact of life that does not prevent older people from having a good time – at least together with other older people. Discourses of aspirational identities, which dominate communication strategies of commercial media actors, such as magazines, are not dominant in this context. The Danish advocacy group addresses civil society with political intentions and visions of better conditions for older people and, in line with the Danish welfare society, they attach great importance to social cohesion as a starting point for a good life – including in old age. The photographs support this intention in visually representing older people in a very positive manner, generally with only a few indications of problems arising from their age.

In this context a good old age is less a matter of improving one's body so that one is fit and fashionable, or about reducing visible signs of ageing. Quality of life is a question of well-being, which of course depends upon one having a body that works but which also necessitates having fun and engaging in social relationships with others. Unlike a lifestyle magazine, the DAA do not appeal to their audience as individuals who are primarily interested in bodily appearance, such as looking younger than one is. Moreover, relatively few images refer explicitly to a future orientation of older people being keen to take on new identities in their later lives; the aspect of 'becoming' is not prioritised. The DAA's website instead points to older people as finding themselves in a particular situation, characterised by both 'being' and 'doing', with priority given to the quality of life in pleasant social interactions here and now.

The analysis also showed a smaller number of photographs in which older people are not presented as part of a happy and well-functioning fellowship. Some of these photographs emphasise older people's individual activities, such as doing crossword puzzles, using a computer and exercising. Such photographs focus on active ageing, and the visual

expression supports the impetus to remain active and high functioning, so as to hold the ageing process at bay. The remainder of the photographs of older people appearing alone can be regarded as an antithesis to the photographs of both socially minded and active older people, as they represent individuals who seem to be lonely, less active and introverted. In quantitative terms, however, these images are in the absolute minority. Finally, other aspects of ageing, such as advanced physical degeneration, were not visually represented on the website. Therefore, any scepticism towards mediated morality that the user of the DAA website may have, is countered by the invisibility of such aspects.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the DaneAge Association (DAA) seek to promote a positive image of older people, of ageing and old age. Their visual strategies primarily emphasise happy and active older people who enjoy social interaction with others. The social space of interaction is limited to private settings and common areas of nursing homes, which suggests that older people have a small radius of action and are only interesting to other older people. They seem to be in a world of their own. Additionally, the absence of other age groups in the visual material, with the exception of a few children, suggests that older people are excluded from the rest of culture and society. Apparently, this is a legitimate view of older people, in spite of the fact that they have taken an active part in culture and society throughout their long lives and still do in one way or another.

The DAA has a wide member group, and thus also represents older people who have neither the opportunity nor the desire to be particularly socially involved or physically active. Probably such persons will have difficulty seeing themselves represented in this positive and trouble-free way. Paradoxically, the organisation does not show vulnerable people who probably need the organisation the most. This lack of visibility of frail older people when trying to attract more members, is a dilemma. However, a visual communication strategy towards ageing members that places too much emphasis on the 'negative' aspects of ageing, such as physical degeneration, dependence and loneliness, would likely be accused of presenting a distorted image of older people. Bearing in mind that the DAA represents most of the Danish older population, the organisation faces a difficult balancing act. The questions are thus whether the focus on social empowerment and the promotion of positive and active ageing, as is predominantly the case in the visual material, can actually embrace all ageing members, and how this 'look of age' influences older people's own experiences of becoming and being old.

Note

1. www.aeldresagen.dk.

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