Social representations and stakes across borders: studying ageing in times of change

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Abstract

After a brief overview of recent approaches to the study of ageing between stereotypes and representations, a study is presented in order to explore the social representations of the elderly in three contexts differing for age structure of the population and for main institutional stakes. Brazilian, German and Italian data were collected via a free association task to the stimulus-word "the elderly" and analysed through content and correspondence analysis. The results bring partial support to the expectations as the three national groups present some differences, both in the content of the representation and in positions taken along the detected underlying dimensions, which appear to reflect and re-launch differences in political and public agendas. Methodological issues concerning cross- and inter-cultural research are also raised and discussed.

Keywords: Social representations, Ageing, Stake value, Geopolitical contexts.

Representações sociais e desafios além de fronteiras: estudando o envelhecimento em tempos de mudança

Resumo

Depois de um breve panorama das abordagens recentes para o estudo do envelhecimento entre estereótipos e representações, um estudo é apresentado com o intuito de explorar as representações sociais do idoso em três contextos diferenciados quanto à estrutura etária da população e aos principais desafios institucionais. Dados brasileiros, alemães e italianos foram coletados por meio de uma tarefa de associação livre para a palavra-estímulo "o idoso" e foram analisados através de análise de conteúdo e correspondências. Os resultados trazem suporte parcial para as expectativas, já que os três grupos nacionais apresentam algumas diferenças tanto no conteúdo da representação, quanto nas posições assumidas ao longo das dimensões subjacentes detectadas, que aparentam refletir e relançar diferenças nas agendas políticas e públicas. Questões metodológicas envolvendo a pesquisa cultural comparativa e intercultural também são levantadas e discutidas.

Palavras-chave: Representações sociais, Envelhecimento, Valor de desafio, Contextos geopolíticos.

The world population is ageing with a speed which has seldom been encountered. This happens – and has happened – with great disparity between and within groups. These dramatic changes provide an intriguing scenario and call for research within social psychology, especially within the social representations perspective, in search of new contents and structures of meaning.

Research on the shared knowledge about elderly people, old age and ageing has been conducted both from the social cognition and

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social representations perspectives. From a social cognition perspective, the theme has been exploited in terms of stereotypes, prototypes, prejudice (ageism, e.g. Giles & Reid, 2005) or processes that can control and de-bias social thought (e.g. perspective taking vs. stereotype suppression, cf. Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Studies aligned with this tradition show mostly a negative bias against the elderly, although other variables such as the quality of contact with elderly people, target gender, differences in target age and study design can moderate the results (Hale, 1998; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005). They also indicate that evaluations of the elderly are multidimensional and affectively mixed; that is, formed by both positive and negative traits. There are good and bad stereotypes related to the elderly (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Hummert, 1990; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005), similar in content among younger and older people, but growing in complexity as people get older (Hale, 1998; Hummert, Garstka, Shane, & Strahm, 1994).

In a parallel way, research on social representations of ageing has been flourishing in the last decades both in Europe and in Latin America, but also globally, devising theoretical and methodological frames in order to study this *issue*, turning attention to the topic at various levels of abstraction. Along time, the social representations of the elderly, of old/third age and of ageing have been explored from a more "concrete" to a more abstract level (Magnabosco-Martins, Camargo, & Biasus, 2009). Similarly to what could be concluded from social cognition studies, the most common pattern of results from social representation studies, found across various European and Latin American countries, points out to the organization of the contents of ageing in two dimensions: a positive and a negative one, reflecting psychological and biological gains and losses derived from getting older (Gastaldi & Contarello, 2006; Gaymard, 2006; Magnabosco-Martins et al., 2009; Moliner & Vidal, 2003; Veloz, Nascimento-Schulze, & Camargo, 1999; Wachelke, 2009; Wachelke et al., 2008). However, while that pattern seems to be general, there are differences in representations linked to different age groups and cultural contexts. Healthy elderly people usually mention more concrete and positive elements than young people, who share a

representation with a majority of negative aspects (Gastaldi & Contarello, 2006; Gaymard, 2006; Hubbard, 2007; Magnabosco-Martins et al., 2009; Wachelke, 2009). Recent research with Italian and Brazilian participants confirmed the existence of differences in the social representations shared by age groups – Italian elders present a representation that is more concrete and richer, while Italian youngsters activate proportionally more normative schemes – and by people from different countries – Italian young people hold a representation with more activated relationships than Brazilian participants from the same age range, and both representations differ in content (Wachelke & Contarello, 2010). The gender variable, in contrast, does not play a clear role in segmenting social representation knowledge; some studies indicate that women emphasize aspects related to beauty and family (Veloz et al., 1999), others suggest that women evaluate ageing more positively than men (Gastaldi & Contarello, 2006) while others again indicate only minor peripheral differences (Wachelke & Contarello, 2010). No defined trend can be outlined from the literature.

Focusing on the elderly, beyond classical stereotypical images (the wizard and the fool) (cf. Jodelet, 2009), (re)new(ed) shared images appear: among them, the weak subject in need of care (both in terms of social exclusion and of health needs) and the liberated person, finally free from social constrains (although considered with interested suspicion by younger relatives). Research carried out along time in the United States, indicated stereotypes such as elder statesperson, grandmother, elderly citizen and inactive (Brewer et al., 1981; Schmidt & Boland, 1986) and "cultural archetypes" such as: golden ager, John Wayne conservative, perfect grandparent, shrew/ curmudgeon, recluse, despondent, and severely impaired (Hummert et al., 1994). Recent research that inquired the cultural basis of such knowledge structures in New Zealand showed the existence of differences in the social representations of the elderly in New Zealanders of European vs. Chinese descent with greater complexity in the former and more reference to implicit role relations in the latter (Liu, Ng, Loong, Geel, & Weatherall, 2003). However, from cluster analyses performed after a card-sorting task, two strong shared patterns

emerge, which the authors interpret as traits that might represent the "hot core" of the representation, maybe universal: curmudgeon and nurturant, with the former particularly linked with the Chinese New Zealander subsample who also share other subtypes: elder statesperson, impaired, old-timer.

Closer to the cultural groups considered in the present paper, research conducted in Brazil by Magnabosco-Martins et al. (2009) with lexical analysis of interview data brings little support to the claim of a wide generality of the ill-tempered, curmudgeon, type: the four clusters that result from adolescents, adults and elderly participants point to changes in relational bonds with the family, self-perception as aged, issues linked with retirement and experience and prejudice.

Also in Italy, archive research on the representations of the elderly carried out with content and correspondence analyses of literary texts (Contarello, Marini, Nencini, & Ricci, 2011) shows only in part the persistence of the curmudgeon type, in a book located in a shelter home. Withdrawal, impassibility and decline appear in the text with stronger evidence, counterbalanced by the generative power of affective and love relations. In a collection of short stories depicting elderly women living on their own, this kernel disappears leaving room for perceived loss vs. maintenance of energies, bodily aspects vs. emotions, beauty of the past vs. vitality of the present and fragility vs. resistance. It is mainly this last resource that constitutes a powerful mark to define advanced elderly women depicted in the book. Other studies in Italy and elsewhere underline the emergence of multiple images and shared conceptions of the elderly with growing multidimensionality and ambivalence (Deponte, 2008).

This variety in the results might clearly be due to methodological differences, as well as to characteristic demands or again to different aims purchased in the various frameworks in which the enquiries have been conducted. It however opens new questions as regards general and specific views on ageing, mainly in terms of social representations.

A social representations perspective allows to take jointly into account social and psychological processes, as well as macro, meso, and microlevels of analysis. Flick's (1998) schematization appears here helpful, suggesting studying the area defined by macro-structural changes, changes in practices and everyday life activities, and changes at the level of individual and relational experiences (Figure 1).

At a macro level, as we know, the whole world is ageing, but with a different pace in different regions and areas: longevity has not been unknown in the past but the number of people who are expected to reach a remarkable age is growing very quickly (Cesa Bianchi, 1987, 1998), although with great variety and disparity around the planet. Italy, in this regard, is one of the most "aged" countries (the first until some years ago, now surpassed by Japan), followed closely by Germany, but also "new Countries" such as the Brazilian subcontinent, are presenting and foreseeing dramatic changes, as illustrated in Figure 2.
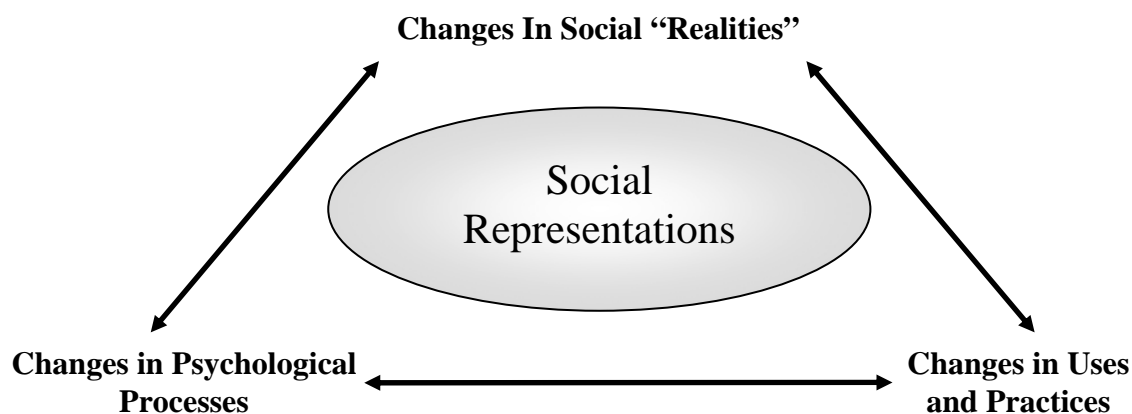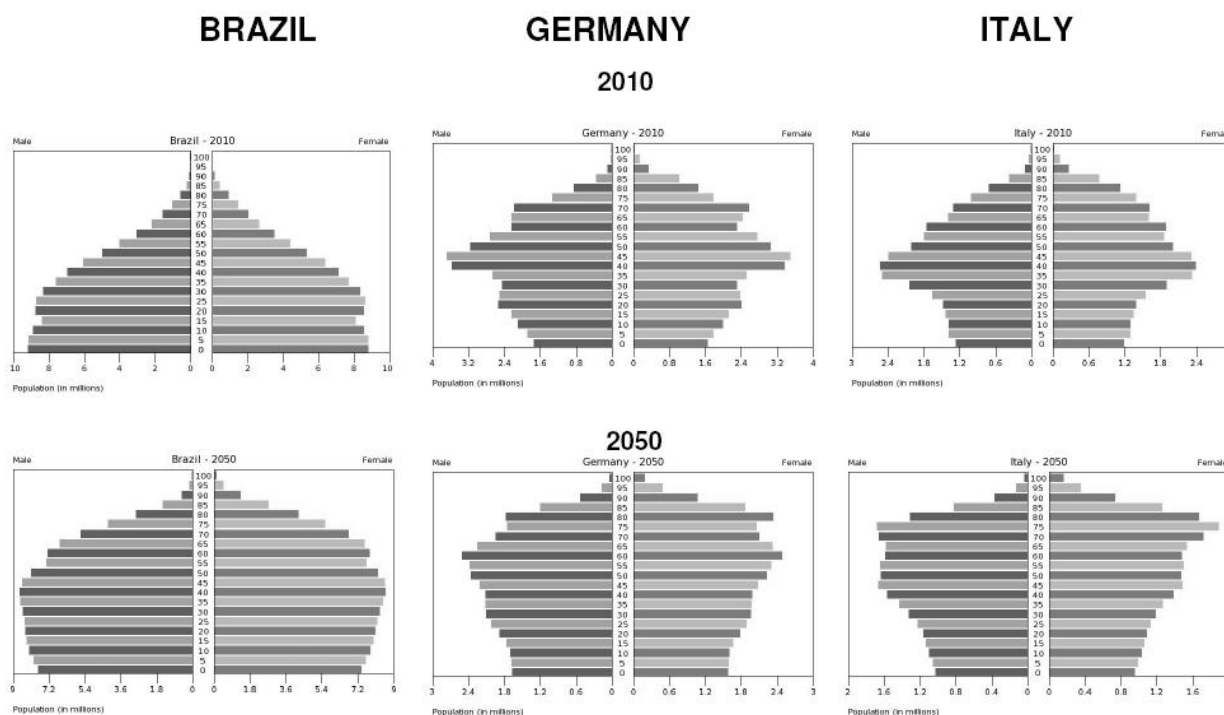

Figure 1 - The space in between (Flick, 1998; cf. Moscovici, 1961/76).

BRAZIL   **GERMANY**   **ITALY**

2010

2050

Figure 2 - Age structure of population 2010 x 2050 (US Census Bureau, 2010).

Specularly, ageing assumes new stake values, both at a general level and at more specific ones. If a wider proportion of the population has more chances to get older, it becomes a shared aim to look for improved ways of ageing, suitable to expand and enrich this new "time for life". Both in terms of social policy and of theoretical advancements, we thus encounter new agendas and proposals.

In the Nineties the World Health Organization launched the idea of *Active Ageing* to enhance the process of optimization of opportunities regarding health, social participation and security (cf. WHO, 2002). The aim was to promote physical and psychological well-being towards an enhanced quality of life of the elderly and of the population in general, following the principles of human rights and equal opportunities. The term Active refers here not just to movement or exercise but to active participation on economical, social, cultural grounds, by elderly people, including those with handicaps or disabilities. Underlying Active Ageing, there are determinants of varied nature: *economic, behavioural, personal, physical, social, and linked with health and social services*. These recommendations have been later introduced more locally, with more specific guidelines and concerns.

In parallel, within the social psychological domain, new theoretical advancements have been proposed, mainly by Baltes and Baltes (1991) who studied what they named "successful ageing" in a main stream perspective and by Gergen and Gergen (2000, 2002) who deepened the inquiry on "positive ageing" along a social constructionist line (cf. Contarello, Romaioli, & Bonetto, 2009).

These advancements, both in terms of social policy and of theoretical developments, did later expand and penetrate at a national and regional level.

Main institutional stakes regarding ageing in three countries

First, let us consider a "country of young people": the recent and fast demographic change in Brazil led to a National Policy of the Elderly only in 1994. Current national guidelines regulate fundamental rights of the elderly in terms of health, leisure, culture, work, housing, transportation and other civil areas (Ministério da Saúde, 2003). Having in mind the national standards, there is considerable autonomy also for health promotion and health care actions at the level of cities (Prefeitura Municipal de Florianópolis, 2006).

According to Carvalho and Rodríguez-Wong (2008), the demographic change in Brazil presents both opportunities and challenges. Structural reformations linked to social security will be necessary to handle high and stable elderly dependence rates, but the reduction of the young population might be associated with higher return from the resources invested in it. It is maintained that it will be essential to prepare well the future generations to become an effective workforce, as they will be the ones responsible for making up for a growing proportion of dependent elderly people. As a consequence, investing in health and education will not only be important for the quality of life in the future, but will also enable the balance of the whole society. In the same vein, Melo et al. (2009) defend that broad efforts of health education directed towards the needs of elderly people and specific aspects of the ageing process are a pathway for the social integration of older people through the identification of situations of disadvantage and inequality and their overcoming.

More focused on the psychological dimension of the phenomenon, Schneider and Irigaray (2008) state that the increase of the elderly population in Brazil will force a discussion of the views of Brazilian society in terms of old age and the elderly; but that it is still impossible to predict if there will be a revision of stereotypes and beliefs, and if that change will be positive or negative.

In Germany the urgency of new social policies and changed attitudes is increasingly perceived. The ageing of the population, the decrease in birth rate (at top levels with Japan and Italy) and the increase in heterogeneity due to immigration brought governmental institutions to start projects and to propose dedicated guidelines. Along this path, the President of the Republic, Horst Köhler, founded in 2005 a Demographic Change Forum. The ageing issue has been approached from different perspectives with the involvement of several Offices, including the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Transportation Building and Urban Development. There is a wide spread concern with the consequences of an ageing society and reflections have been raised to counterbalance negative attitudes and stereotypes. For instance,

in "The role of the elderly in an ageing society"[1] Ursula Lehr, both an academic and a former Minister of Family, maintains that: the elderly and the youth have joint responsibilities (joint actions and opportunities are needed of mutual learning and help); the elderly constitute an important economical force (an ageing society has not only costs but also gains, the importance of the elderly for new features of the market should be recognized and exploited[2]); what is needed is not a new policy for the elderly but a policy with and for them. Another concern, shared with other European countries, is to extend the presence of the elderly in the workforce, as active producers in society (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens Women and Youth, 2007). The theme of inclusion is further enhanced when disabled people are considered. Due to specific historical reasons, in Germany the number of disabled individuals who are entering a later phase of their life constitute a new phenomenon. In a brochure of a demographic report issued by the German government it is stated that: "Until now, few of these people had any prospect of a long life in Germany. Due to the National Socialists' extermination policies, people with congenital disabilities are almost entirely absent from the age groups of 60 years and older"[3]. This, added with the more generally encountered improved living conditions, let foresee a growing numbers of disabled seniors who, at present, have little chance apart from living in dedicated homes. The above mentioned study from the Berlin Institute, where we found the present picture, informs that "some civil society initiatives – such as "Mehrgenerationenhäuser" (houses shared by multiple generations) and neighbourhood management projects – are already illustrating the possibility of successful inclusion" and concludes that "a paradigm shift, from care to participation, has yet to be realised in the everyday lives of the disabled – despite being advanced by professionals and initiated in legislation". Apart from disability,

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[1] www.projectcare.de/infothek/gastbeitrag_ursula_lehr.php
[2] In particular with the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), new services such as telecare and "smart homes" might find a greater diffusion (www.ict-ageing.eu).
[3] www.berlin-institut.org/selected-studies/elderly-and-disabled.html

the theme of ageing people and ageing society is widely treated at institutional, cultural and communicative levels, mainly through mass media. For instance, a wide project entitled "Active in Ageing" has been initiated in 2008 by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth and sponsored by public and private entities. It involved more than one hundred and fifty villages and towns in order to encounter requests and needs of the elderly and including them in participatory processes. Interdisciplinary research groups have also been activated in order to better understand the state of the art and facilitate social inclusion. But a very sensitive topic concerning ageing, in these days, regards retirement with the pension reformation which was signed in 2007, became law in 2008 and will become effective in 2012[4], resulting in growing discrepancies between salaries and pensions. Similar to the general European trend but with its own specificities, the German way is accompanied by fear and uncertainties in various sections of the population[5].

Finally, in Italy, a brief overview of key - words and communication campaigns regarding ageing promoted by the Ministry of Health in the last years, indicate: self-monitoring through correct eating, physical activity and ways of using leisure; need of intra-generational support accompanying the more usual inter-generational one, due to the inversion of the demographic pyramid and thus the growing number of families without children; primacy of prevention from illness and climatic strains[6]. But health, although conceived of primary importance, remains one between others domains of concern: following the WHO guidelines, different areas are considered in the general social agenda: culture, permanent education (mainly with ICTs to cope with the digital gap), leisure, self-help and, in general, prevention (De Beni, 2009).

Scholars and practitioners converge in considering, jointly, the role of micro (personal) and macro (socio-economic-cultural) interventions. On one side, adaptive strategies are studied and promoted - in terms of life-styles, cognitive and physical abilities and social commitment focused on relationships– and particularly of self-efficacy, coping and resilience (Marigo, Borella, De Beni, Caprara, & Fernández-Ballesteros, 2009). Family relationships also play an essential role (Tamanza, 2001). On the other, the role of public services is enhanced, as well as the urgency of organizing such services in ways that take into account three aspects: a new idea of the elderly overcoming a simple biomedical view of health towards a multidimensional one (WHO, 2002); the need of a network of services encompassing different possible solutions for different requests (from daily centres to home-residential structures); multidimensionality of the approaches and multi-professional work dedicated to the care of the individual in his/her wholeness (Pavan, 2009). On the social pole, key words which are often raised are: rights and solidarity; culture of citizenship (with concerns in terms of social inclusion vs. exclusion); individual and political history aimed to promote and support ageing (Scortegagna, 1999). Aligned with the last point, with the institution of the Memory Day in 2000, following the international demand to institutionalise a commemoration of the victims of the Shoah, a special attention has been given to witnesses of the Second World War, i.e. elderly people, who have been invited to speak in schools and in the mass media.

All these recommendations and guidelines indicate virtuous routes that should be covered, although most of the efforts of public and private services are dedicated to impaired elderly over eighty and individuals affected by dementia (Pavan, 2009) and positive actions and dispositions are mostly supported by voluntary efforts. However, centres of research as well as cultural and social circles have and are growing at an exponential rate.

Two further aspects are often raised in everyday communication, mostly conveyed or expanded through mass media. The first regards, as we saw for Germany, the growing purchasing power of a wide slice of the elderly population that attracts the interest of the market towards these new potential buyers. It is however interesting to note how the elderly are little represented in advertisement and, when they are, in a little enticing way (Hubbard, 2007; Leone, Mastrovito, Polo, & Contarello, 2010).

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[4] www.planetsenior.de/renteneintrittsalter
[5] Holger Viebrok, in www.bmfsfj.de.
[6] www.salute.gov.it

The second pertains, again, the hot debate on the reorganization of retirement and pension rights, a theme which is a key issue, in Europe and in the world, with the generation of "Baby Boomers" entering its retiring age. In Italy as well, the reformation of the pension system is raising controversies and severe concerns, opposing private and public work sectors, on the one hand, and people from different generation, on the other, with an approach to the problem as if it were a "zero sum" game.

It is also worth noting that the economical trajectories of Europe and emerging countries (including Brazil) go to opposite directions. Although the current economical crisis has global reach, its effect is being felt differently: a step backwards with a feeling of loss in the former and more like a deceleration – or an opportunity? - in the latter. This very likely is reflected at collective emotional states (Frijda, 1997), which might also account for a good deal of shared thinking contents and of the constitution of institutional agendas.

From this brief overview it is already possible to identify both common and quite specific aspects of the three contexts in dealing with the topic of ageing. The aim of the present research is thus to explore social thinking on the elderly in "everyday people" in order to empirically illustrate the reciprocal association between macro-cultural and social-psychological levels present in social representations theory and more explicitly in Flick (1998)'s model. By macro-cultural we mean geo-cultural contexts that differ both in demographic profiles and in particular institutional stakes; at a social-psychological level we took into account the affiliation to those macro cultures but also specific positions, within each context, in terms of generation and gender.

Method

Design

The research is of an exploratory kind, aimed to inquire the social representations of "the elderly" – our textual variable - with a balanced design, taking three variables into account: geo-political context (3: Brazilian, German, Italian), gender (2: women, men) and generation (2: young, elderly) of the respondents.

Participants

The average age of Italian and German participants has been chosen following the WHO's definition: 65. Considering that Brazilians have a shorter life expectation and retire earlier than Europeans, we included participants over 60. Table 1 presents the distribution of participants regarding the study design, also presenting the mean age for each condition.

Table 1 - Participant distribution in study design conditions (mean age in parentheses).

Generation	Cultural context						
	Brazilian		German		Italian		
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Young	25 (21,96)	31 (21,16)	36 (21,03)	30 (20,83)	36 (21,05)	34 (22,56)	192
Elderly	26 (64,92)	23 (67,61)	30 (70,77)	31 (71)	31 (73,61)	35 (71)	176
Total	51	54	66	61	67	69	368

Instrument

The instrument consisted of a free association task. Participants had to provide three responses (words or expressions) immediately brought to their minds by the stimulus expression "the elderly person is…".

Procedure and data analysis

The convenience sample of 368 participants was formed with the help of personal contacts from one of the authors (MMN), who has lived in cities in the three considered Countries. Most elderly Italian participants were contacted in a Third Age centre in the city of Vicenza (N = 36). The other ones were found with the help of friends and acquaintances from the cities of Piacenza, Vicenza, Monfalcone, Ravenna and Manfredonia. Most of the young Italian participants (N = 51) were undergraduate students in the University of Padua; the others were contacted through acquaintances in the cities mentioned above. The young and elderly German participants were invited to participate

through personal contacts in various German cities: Bassum, Lohra e Nordhorn (North), Krefeld, Moers, Wetzlar (Center), Schwäbisch Gmünd (South); Dresden, Chemnitz e Görlitz (East). The Brazilian participants were contacted with the aid of a personal network in the Rio de Janeiro region. Questionnaires were completed individually by the participants.

Data analysis was conducted with the help of Spad.T software. Responses were classified and grouped in terms of similarities of meaning by means of content analysis. Two main analyses were conducted to assess the associations of the variables of the study. Specificity analysis aimed at identifying vocabulary that was specifically linked to each group. Correspondence analysis was conducted so as to identify the main associations among words, also taking into account the three design variables (cultural context, generation and gender) as illustrative variables. The interaction between generation and cultural context was also considered as an illustrative variable to help the interpretation of results.

Results
The content of the representation

A total of 1101 lexical forms were provided, with 49.8 of distinct forms. After the usual treatment of the text reducing synonyms and antonyms and fixing a frequency threshold at 2, the associations produced by the 368 participants gave rise to 81 distinct (categories of) words. The most frequent ones are: experience (N=118), wise (N=78), in need of help (N=48), slow (N=41), weak (N=34), affable (N=kind, benevolent) (N=28), alone (N=27), calm (N=27), affect (N=24), elderly (aged, no more young, ahead in years) (N=23), active (N=19), giving help (N=19), happy-allegro (N=19), beautiful (N=18), intelligent (N=18), world-wise (N=18), forgetful (N=17), stubborn (N=16), fragile (N=15).

As regards the geo-political context, screening the lexical forms typically associated by participants of the three groups through the specificity test provided by the software, we find in Brazilian responses: competence and experience, positive and affective nuances (it is worth noting that good and joyful – *alegre* – are not only specific but also exclusive of this group), offered help (protection) and equality (equal to others, which also rise the theme of rights), but also need for help and elements of exclusion (cast aside). The association "brave"

lets us think of challenges faced by the elderly, while the association "stubborn" adds to this some element of rigidity and obstinacy.

As regards the associated lexical forms typical of the German sub-sample, wisdom and satisfaction go hand in hand with elements of restrain (slow, modest, weak, poor, with the last two terms exclusively provided by this group), counterbalanced with mental (open/interested) and spiritual (creature of God) features (Table 2).

Finally, in the specific Italian answers, memory comes first (and only here), followed by maturity, provided help and need for inclusion (someone to accept, only mentioned by this group of participants). The theme of retirement is raised particularly/almost exclusively by these respondents, as well as loneliness and a sort of playful attitude to life (adult child, idiosyncratic of this group). Physical feature appear in the form of wrinkles.

The comparison in terms of age shows that young participants associate specifically, both positive nuances (wisdom, beauty/*bello*, affection), and critical aspects (fragile, lonely). Reference to the family is also typical of young people as well as (and only of them) conservatism. Interestingly, the Oxford dictionary defines this word "the tendency to resist great or sudden change" and immediately illustrates it with "the innate conservatism of older people". Yet, no elderly in our sample mentioned this element in connection with the stimulus word.

From the elderly, on the contrary, a general positive picture emerges in terms of maturity, satisfaction, usefulness altruism. Efforts and challenges appear as well (hope, bravery) although an external undermining view is critically advanced (poorly valued, worked for us) and diminished energy is admitted (less efficient). With a mirror-like pattern, while conservatism is only reported by young people, here an exclusive association is found with flexibility (Table 3).

Specific words by gender are less frequent. Women mention affective and relational elements – to be helped (10/13), lonely (18/27), affect (16/24) – while men associate features of experience, activity and understanding: person who has seen a great deal of life (experienced person) (14/18), worker (9/11), sympathetic (4/4). Statistics relative to the last term shows only a trend (p<.06), but only men report it within the participants.

Table 2 - Specific vocabulary by cultural context.

Group	Lexical form label	Percentage		Frequency		V. Test	p
		Internal	Global	Internal	Global		
Brazilians	competent	2,63	0,75	8	8	3,944	0,001
	someone to help	2,96	1,22	9	13	2,803	0,003
	cast aside	2,63	1,03	8	11	2,768	0,003
	experience	15,46	11,04	47	118	2,734	0,003
	stubborn	3,29	1,50	10	16	2,620	0,004
	good	2,96	1,31	9	14	2,533	0,005
	joyful	3,62	1,78	11	19	2,491	0,006
	brave	1,32	0,37	4	4	2,487	0,006
	needing help	6,91	4,49	21	48	2,178	0,015
	protective	2,30	1,03	7	11	2,157	0,016
	equal to others	1,97	0,84	6	9	2,077	0,019
	affect	3,95	2,25	12	24	2,063	0,020
	sensitive	1,64	0,75	5	8	1,685	0,046
Germans	slow	6,74	3,84	25	41	3,342	0,001
	satisfied	2,16	0,84	8	9	3,022	0,001
	reasonable	1,89	0,75	7	8	2,719	0,003
	wise	10,24	7,30	38	78	2,532	0,006
	open	2,16	1,03	8	11	2,283	0,011
	modest	1,08	0,37	4	4	2,187	0,014
	poor	0,81	0,28	3	3	1,733	0,042
	weak	4,58	3,18	17	34	1,696	0,045
	creature of god	1,89	1,03	7	11	1,674	0,047
Italians	memory	1,78	0,65	7	7	3,124	0,001
	mature	2,54	1,12	10	12	3,017	0,001
	retired	1,52	0,65	6	7	2,265	0,012
	lonely	4,06	2,53	16	27	2,203	0,014
	wrinkled	2,03	1,03	8	11	2,126	0,017
	helpful	2,79	1,78	11	19	1,656	0,049
	someone to accept	0,76	0,28	3	3	1,647	0,050
	adult child	0,76	0,28	3	3	1,647	0,050

Table 3 - Specific vocabulary by generation.

Group	Lexical form label	Percentage		Frequency		V. Test	p
		Internal	Global	Internal	Global		
Young	wise	10,50	7,30	59	78	4,217	0,001
	beautiful	2,85	1,68	16	18	3,027	0,001
	affect	3,38	2,25	19	24	2,495	0,006
	wrinkled	1,78	1,03	10	11	2,366	0,009
	family	1,96	1,22	11	13	2,112	0,017
	fragile	2,14	1,40	12	15	1,922	0,027
	conservative	0,89	0,47	5	5	1,753	0,040
	lonely	3,38	2,53	19	27	1,696	0,045
Elderly	mature	1,97	1,12	10	12	2,258	0,012
	satisfied	1,58	0,84	8	9	2,226	0,013
	useful	1,78	1,03	9	11	2,023	0,022
	full of hope	0,99	0,47	5	5	1,982	0,024
	flexible	0,99	0,47	5	5	1,982	0,024
	altruistic	1,38	0,75	7	8	1,963	0,025
	poorly valued	0,79	0,37	4	4	1,642	0,050
	less efficient	0,79	0,37	4	4	1,642	0,050
	worked for us	0,79	0,37	4	4	1,642	0,050
	brave	0,79	0,37	4	4	1,642	0,050

The structure of the representation

In order to detect underlying principles governing the representation, a correspondence factor analysis was carried out. On the basis of the Scree test four factors appear to be prominent (Figures 3 and 4).

The first factor (Inertia=2.25%) can be named Loss & Resources vs Assets/Qualities and opposes a traditional view of decline and possible exclusion (worry, insecurity, loneliness, need, devaluation), only slightly counterbalanced by some resources (being a reference point, having something to teach, showing courage and being a creature of God…) to a very positive view, mentioning social inclusion, positive emotions (joyful-*alegre*, satisfied) and nuances in the present and past (useful, experienced person) with elements of denial. Retirement and work, in this context, appear to be elements deserving further analysis. The first pole is expression of women and elderly participants; while the second is associated with men and younger participants. A closer analysis in terms of illustrative variables, considering the interaction between generation and national context, shows that young German and young Brazilian respondents take position on the positive pole, elderly German and elderly Brazilian ones on the negative, while the Italian respondents do not take position along either pole of the factor.

The second dimension (cumulative inertia=4.48%) opposes the usual, well-known picture of deceleration and Decay, on the one hand, to a view of Fulfilment on the other. Loneliness, forgetfulness, weakness, aesthetic changes (wrinkles) give voice to the *leitmotif* expression "it's bad to become old". Knowledge, wisdom and hope however spin out or lighten this perspective that is mostly offered by the Italian (young) and German (young) respondents and, overall, by the younger ones. On the opposite pole, the view of a content and satisfied person, who had something to say and give and continues to be potentially a reference point is offered by the elderly and by the Brazilian (both young and elderly, also German elderly) respondents. The element of activity is included in this kernel as well as reference to spiritual aspect (creature of God).
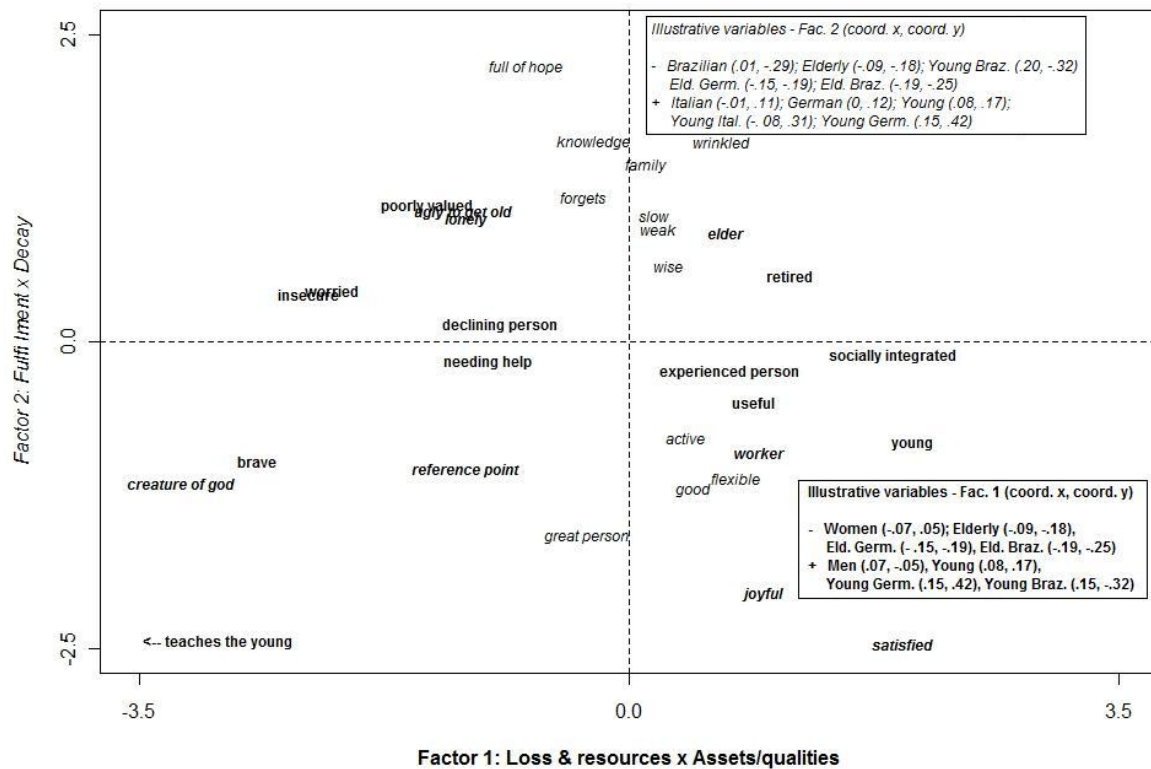

Figure 3 - Correspondence analysis: factors 1 (bold) and 2 (italics).

The third factor (CI=6.66%) contrasts Lights & shadows, enhancing elements of need, insecurity, vulnerability, tiredness and devaluation, but also qualities and shortcomings linked with old age (calm, prudence, will to struggle… stubbornness) with a somehow positive view of a still young living being, socially integrated and useful, retired, advisor and reference point) which however relegates the elderly in the past: a living witness of what does no more exist, History & memory. This second view is voice of Italians (both young and elderly) and of young respondents, while the first of Brazilians (both young and elderly), and elderly ones. Interestingly, young German participants take position on the second pole, while elderly ones on the first, enhancing need, insecurities and characteristics of getting old.

The fourth dimension (CI=8.77%) opposes again a more negative view, enhancing decline and roughness –the elderly is seen on a declining line, ill-tempered, crabby and devalued– to a more positive one, underlying the element of respect that has to be paid to those who worked and contributed in the past and still can work with competence nowadays (equal to others). We propose to name the factor: Change into negative vs. Positive evaluation of what has been given. The young (German) and the elderly (Italian and Brazilian) take position on the two opposite poles, as well as the Germans overall (on the first) and the Brazilians (the second).

Discussion

Far from suggesting generalizations from these exploratory results, we can note kernels of meaning and depictions of the elderly which can help us to speculate on the rise and fall of new and old sketches or representations. As a word of caution, we admit an overall positive stance in these results, which may be due to social demands/desirability or to some specific cues of the convenience sample. Taken at face value however, these results show the evanescence of the representation of the elderly as foul, abandoned or "broken" (which is still found in archive data with literary texts). Neither have we found a clear image of wizard, although elements of competence, on the one hand, and the importance of the elderly as witness, on the other, are clearly present (Jodelet, 2009).
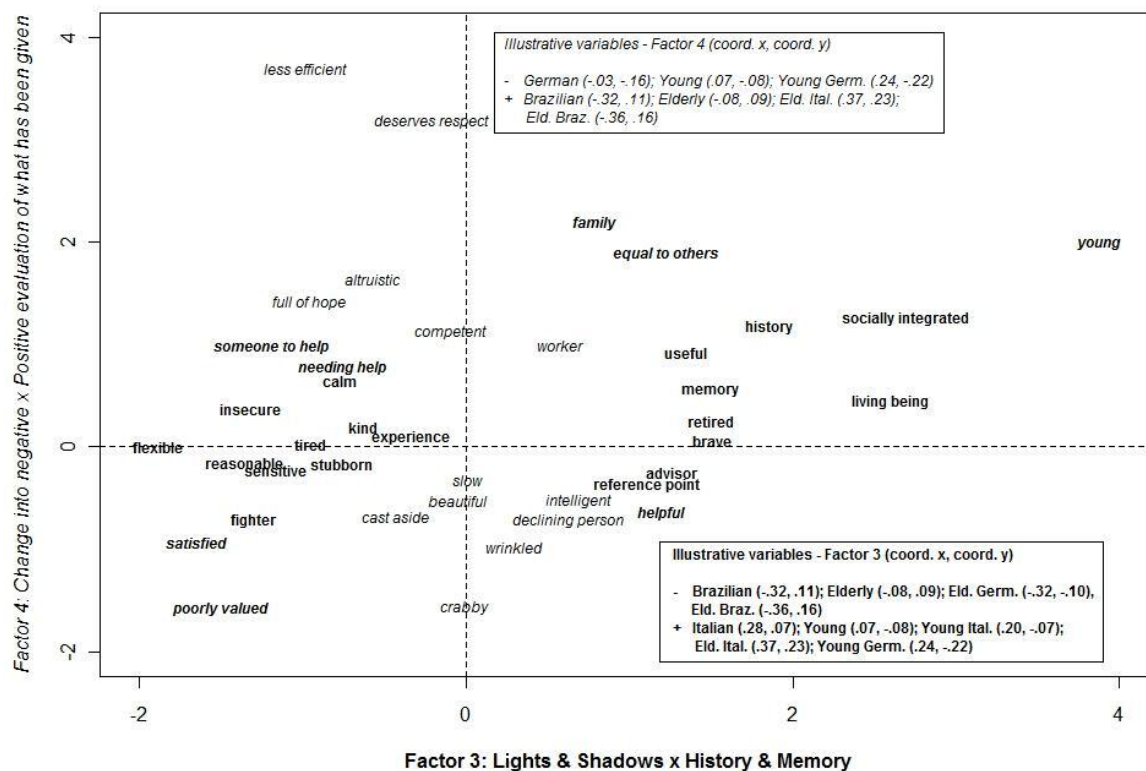

Figure 4 - Correspondence analysis: factors 3 (bold) and 4 (italics).

In terms of content of the representation, experience and wisdom come first, followed closely by need, help (needed and given), weakness and slowness, and a variety of personal features which span from easy temperament (apart from stubbornness) to intelligence and activity.

In terms of structure, we see that the organising principles of the representation enhance features of losses (counterbalanced by remaining resources) vs. assets, decay vs. fulfilment, emotional contrasts vs. competent witness of the past, decline vs. positive consideration of what has been previously accomplished.

The overall picture is not a negative one. However, if we search for the presence of what theorists consider important for a positive, successful ageing, we find cues of activity (active), positive mental states meant as counterbalancing resources and spirituality (creature of God, which includes closer to God, closer to eternity, grateful for any new day), but not so much of relational resources (apart family and a less present "friend") and almost not at all of bodily aspects (apart more superficial cues such as wrinkled). Although individual and social thinking is always embodied thinking (Jodelet, 2007), which should also be true for ageing, such pattern has not been supported by our results.

A separate analysis of the typical associations provided in the three different contexts show the prominence, in the Brazilian answers of both competence and affection (but also elements of exclusion), in the German ones of wisdom and reasonableness, but also of weakness and poverty, in the Italian ones of maturity and knowledge of the past (if we correctly interpret the reference to memory), but also of loneliness and difficulty to recognise the responsibility of time going through (adult-child).

In terms of the detected underlying principles, participants from different contexts hold different positions. Brazilian participants underline elements of fulfillment, positive nuances slightly overcast by shadows and a positive evaluation of past achievements of the elderly. Overall, the Germans stress features of decay and changes towards decline. Also the Italians refer to decay elements, but at the same time value the role of elderly people as guardians of historical and cultural knowledge.

Trying to interpret those results having in mind the main stake values associated with each context, we can outline a tendency for inclusion of the elderly on the part of Brazilian participants. The elderly are perceived as a group that has contributed positively to the country, and currently deserves the support of younger generations and society in general due to the recognition of specific limitations of old age. This is coherent with Carvalho and Rodriguez-Wong's (1998) call to invest more in the young as they will be responsible for dealing with the problem. In the Italians responses first emerges the view of ageing as a "curse" of life (it seems as if we could hear the refrain "it is bad to become old") only attenuated by the recognition of keeping knowledge and wisdom intact. But later a very strong kernel of positive aspects suggests that the elderly are represented as living libraries, highly valuing their memory and experience. This seems to resonate with the investment made mostly in the last decade to give them voice to recollect events from the past and particularly from WWII and the subsequent constitution of the Italian Republic, while economic and activity aspects from the country's agenda do not appear. In contrast, the representations of the Germans on the whole tend to be one-sided: they are more critical and pessimistic towards old age. This might reflect a perceived threat linked to foreseen and actual change in economic welfare policies, and a feeling of relative deprivation. Perhaps this worried perspective is acknowledged at an institutional level and stimulates the implementation of several projects to compensate a situation of perceived vulnerability, but has a hard time entering everyday knowledge.

It must be taken into account that each of those national contexts is also crossed by specific issues that complexify the social scenario and also the understanding of the ageing phenomenon. In Germany, for example, the reunification of East and West Germany introduced new demographic dynamics, which would merit a study of its own. Liu et al. (2003) have already shown that there may be considerable variation in representational content within a same national context due to the impacts of migration from places with different historical backgrounds.

Focusing more closely on the interaction between contexts and generations, we see how

the repeatedly encountered inside vs. outside perspective, with more critical views by the youth, as already reported in the literature review, first seems contradicted by German and Brazilian respondents but later explicitly reappears, although in a minor version for the Brazilian participants who show more communalities between young and elderly people than the other two groups. As regards the Germans, considering separately the two age groups allows positive views to emerge: by the young in terms of assets such as social inclusion, satisfaction and basically a denial of ageing; by the elderly in terms of what most gets close to active ageing, qualified by respect and reference to spiritual nuances. Finally, the importance of the elderly in terms of witnesses for collective memory is enhanced both by young and elderly Italians but only by the young German participants and not by the Brazilian ones. This result would deserve further analysis, as it might be linked with other phenomena such as collective memories of a dramatic past, but we think it can support the view of the importance of specific generations linked with topical times in the history of a country.

In various occasions (Contarello, Bonetto, Romaioli, & Wachelke, 2011), we mentioned the potentials of including ageing in intercultural research and stressed how we should take into account the porosity of the borderlines between the groups or cultures we consider as modalities of our design variables: elderly vs. young, national group vs. national group. According to the invitations of an intercultural approach we might re-launch the present results in interviews and/or group discussions or include in paper & pencil instruments questions aimed to obtain reciprocal expectations and thus a more multifaceted view of ageing in a changing world. According to such perspective, we have also to take into account our own role, as researchers, in the generation of shared meaning. In the present research, a particularly fortunate occasion was found as the first author (MMN) partially belongs to the three analysed contexts, mastering their three languages and participating in their cultural domains. The exchanges in terms of reading and interpretations of the results with an Italian (AC) and a Brazilian co-author (JW) were of help, forcing to make explicit several implicit presuppositions of each one. Also in terms of

generation, although not included in the two age spans considered in the research, the three of us are living different moments of adulthood, thus looking at ageing from a different angle and temporal distance.

If an intercultural stance might be auspicated for future research, the present study achieved, in our view, two purposes: to (partially) corroborate with empirical data the assumed relationship between cultural stakes and shared everyday-life views; and to raise attention to thorough analyses on the role of generations, more than age, in the study of the social representations of ageing.

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