

RFAS

Revue française des affaires sociales

Call for multidisciplinary contributions on:

“Social representations and types of public action according to age in France and in Canada: where are we in 2022?”

For the July-September 2022 issue of *La Revue française des affaires sociales* (RFAS)

This issue will be coordinated by Laëtitia Ngatcha-Ribert (Université Le Havre-Normandie - IDEES Research Lab), Bernard Ennuyer (ETRES), Marie Beaulieu (Université de Sherbrooke) and Martine Lagacé (University of Ottawa).

This call for contributions is addressed to researchers in demography, sociology, economics, political science, management, psychology, communication, philosophy, law, anthropology, as well as contributors from healthcare and medicosocial fields.

Articles must be submitted before Thursday 10 March 2022

A working session will be held on the morning of Tuesday 15 of February and will be open to all potential contributors in the Ministry buildings (Room 4111 R, entrance at 18 Place des Cinq-Martyrs du Lycée Buffon, nearest metro stations Gaîté, Pasteur or Montparnasse) with the option of participating remotely. You can book your place now by contacting us at: RFAS-DREES@sante.gouv.fr

Despite the clear desynchronisation between the different age groups and the decline of the three-stage vision of life, public policy has for many years strongly contributed to the categorisation of age groups (Guillemard, 2010), though various changing rules and politico-administrative “age policing”. The latter has significantly contributed to the defined boundaries of youth and old age, which was later called into question (Percheron, 1991). Since the 1982 Secretariat of State for Elderly People (circular of the 7th of April), which established an “institutionalised stigmatisation” (Ennuyer, 2020), we may have asked ourselves the following question: has public policy in France and Canada gone so far as to contribute to the segregation of specific social groups, by pursuing, through a discriminatory logic, the separation of different types of populations, particularly among elderly and disabled people?

Meanwhile, social inequalities continue, perhaps now more than ever, to fracture society. It is worth recalling that each individual is the result of an intermingling of variables associated with age and generation, but also gender, social class, and identity or minority groups. In this context, how do these determining factors overlap? Does fanning the flames of an imaginary generation war not merely attempt to diminish their relevance (Peugny, 2020)? What has the global pandemic taught us about this? Paradoxically, although some continue to fear an “age war”, intergenerationality is more present than ever in the minds of various stakeholders, particularly among public authorities, for example through the concept of an inclusive society. In the long term, are we convinced that the values expressed by Europeans regarding age are more similar than we think (Galland, 2021)? Are we sure that work attitudes and behaviours vary from one generation to another (Saba, 2017)? *In fine*, beyond questions of age and generation, facing an “explosion of inequalities” amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic (Lambert & Cayouette-Remblière, 2021), where do we place notions such as age and gender, social class, or even social status, level of education, faith, ethnicity, and sexual orientation or identity? Are there certain social groups which are more greatly affected by age discrimination? As sociologist Juliette Rennes argues, “*the political usage of age categories often masks and plays down other power relationships*” (Rennes, 2009). Should we not place social categories at the heart of discussions on age by evaluating the age criterion using an interpretive framework based on social inequalities and social positioning? Touching on Bourdieu, are we not better equipped to experience youth or old age when we dispose of economic capital, as well as social and cultural capital? What is the most appropriate method of interpretation?

Taking into account these factors, and in the hope of sparking a dialogue between research and public policy, we are asking the following question: **To what extent, regarding work carried out on both sides of the Atlantic, is age still a relevant lens through which to analyse the social world of today, to understand the reality of both younger and older generations, their interrelationships through the implementation of so-called intergenerational policies, their image in society and the way they are treated by the media or public authorities?**

Thus, looking beyond the common fears of today, how can we rethink, or even challenge and overcome, in 2022, age and age criteria involved in and used as a basis for public actions? Conversely, can we consider that the recent situation has caused this criterion, legitimately or not, to be moved to the forefront of public policy-making?

The following three themes have been proposed to structure the issue:

1/ Public action targeting age and generational criteria

This section aims to question the actions taken by public bodies or active stakeholders involved in public policy-making.

This raises the question: are public policies ageist when they target, and as a result reduce and box in, types of individuals according to their age or according to the alleged problems that the social group poses or is supposed to pose to the rest of society (e.g. being perceived as a financial burden due to illness and dependency, etc.)? Yet, wouldn't an inclusive society be one in which each citizen, whatever their age or other characteristics, is a full member in their own right? However, many believe that the way in which France has established and preserved a differentiated approach to treatment when it comes to disability and dependence, based on a cut-off age of 60 years, is similar to discrimination.

In comparison, several other countries have chosen different approaches, not creating a distinction based on age but instead on the needs of each individual: how can we justify these decisions? As argued by René Rémond, *“For the last three hundred years or so, French civil and political society has made this age division a way of segregating individuals and the major principle of regulation for all kinds of activities”* (Rémond, 1991). Annick Percheron writes in the chapter “Age Policing and Management” in the same book, *“in no State, apart from perhaps the United States in the case of civil rights, has age been the subject of its own public policy. However, since the dawn of the modern era, age policing has been a key dimension to all political actions. The actions carried out by the state in its fundamental role as “master of social issues”, “reducer of uncertainties” or “regulator of the economy”¹ has in all places led it to govern and regulate age groups. As a result, definitions and perceptions of the different age groups are changing (...) Through family, education, social protection and health policies, through the implementation of pension and early retirement schemes, the public authorities have gradually regulated - if not invented - the categories of early childhood, youth, the third age, the fourth age, basically all age groups except adulthood.”*

As a matter of principle, these established norms are generated then “smoothed over” by public policies: the political and social debates around the “youth RSA” scheme and a universal youth allowance are a perfect example. The age limit of 25 is a cut-off that, as a reminder, was decided more or less at random following the parliamentary debates on income support between the advocates of public assistance and the advocates of family assistance. In 2009, the highlighting of these in-between situations led the French President to put forward a “RSA Jeune Actif” (Young Professionals Allowance). The limitations of these “cut-off ages” can be illustrated by also looking at the issue of retirement age and older unemployed people, for whom the calculation or duration of entitlement is determined by age (Articles 3 and 9 of the Unemployment Insurance Regulation). The often region-specific nature of youth and old age policies is also worth mentioning, as social assistance is decentralised. In addition, by claiming

age as a homogeneous entity, by considering the elderly population or the young population as monolithic groups, by glossing over the unique characteristics of each individual (generation, social class, gender, community, marital status, cultural, religious and philosophical background, etc.) and by attributing certain qualities and flaws to their group as a whole, in this case usually the negative stereotypes associated with old age (decline, losses and deficits, particularly cognitive) or youth (carelessness, irresponsibility, lack of independence, etc.), does this not leave us with a “false” social homogeneity (Ennuyer, 2020)? To take an extreme example, what does a working person aged 60-65 have in common with a 100 year-old? To look at it from another angle, is it not a form of ageism to group together everyone aged 18 to 34 years old or everyone aged 65 and over in opinion polls and quantitative studies? In the words of Pierre Bourdieu, “*youth and old age are not givens, but rather, they are socially constructed in the struggle between the young and the elderly. Relationships between social and biological age are quite complex.*” (Bourdieu, 1984).

2/ The existence of types of discrimination, including legal discrimination, and how they are experienced

Is this targeting and segmentation of the population not often used, following a logic of positive discrimination, in the aim of providing social protection to specific groups? This brings to mind the debates on retirement age thresholds, as well as all the schemes that allow older and elderly citizens (like other groups) to benefit from special tax rates or reductions. This theme will address the tools, particularly in the field of employment, used to bring about some form of positive discrimination. This is seen in measures aiming to boost employment among over-50s or in policy levers for the promotion of youth employment.

The world of work is probably one of the most well-documented sectors in this respect, whether this is due to the voluntary strategies implemented for the early exit of older citizens (Poussou-Plesse, 2007; Moulaert, 2012; Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors, 2018 and 2014) or the active employment policies aimed at young people with a view to professional and social integration, which is at the heart of questions surrounding the existence of a “French model” of social protection activation (Barbier, 2002; Barbier, 2008). Supportive measures have recently been implemented for students (in France but also in Canada as announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on 28 April 2021). Access to employment and professional training is also a major issue on both sides of the Atlantic (for example in France with the “*un jeune, une solution*” scheme (“one young person, one solution”) and in Canada with the 2017 report by the Expert Panel on Youth Employment). Some have called for “emergency social measures” such as a minimum wage for under-25s and the extension of common law social schemes for 18-25s (Huillery, 2021).

Now that calls for more inclusive interpretations of age are being made (Van de Velde, 2015), what would “age-neutral” policies look like? If in 2009, some called for caution with regard to the latter, as age discrimination is a complex reality mixing exclusion and inclusion (Caradec et al, 2009), where are we now, in 2021? By implementing specific measures, are we not in danger of fueling this heavily mediatised and feared “age war”? As Geneviève Laroque recalled: “*We must re-examine our perception of old age, but certainly not by using specific*

tools designed to their advantage, as this advantage will eventually be turned against them. However, we have to take major steps in order to assist individuals with debilitating chronic health conditions or disabilities with the provision of long-term care.” (cited in Ennuyer, 2012). And in what way can the concept of systemic discrimination recognised in a decision made by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1987 contribute to the rethinking of the legal categories associated with age with a view to the inclusion of ageing individuals (Mercat-Bruns, 2021)? The contributions could also explore the measures implemented in the aim of incorporating the intergenerational as a new dynamic in age group relations.

This will focus in particular on the cases of affected individuals, their “specific experiences” and the social and individual effects of these age policies.

The aim will be to understand the way in which these target groups receive this discourse and experience the use of these schemes. While this type of question has already been addressed in relation to policies targeting disabled workers or promoting gender equality, we have only a handful of research studies questioning the effect of age policies on their beneficiaries. What are the social and individual effects of these age policies? How does each person place themselves in these categories and in these age-oriented public policies? What sort of obstacles do these targeted groups face on a daily basis? Which parts of society are affected? How do they experience these schemes? What about their integration into a work collective? Do they perceive themselves or are they perceived as illegitimate for the job in question? What are their relationships with people of other generations? Do they benefit from a “support” scheme that allows for a new kind of collective solidarity (Outin, 2016) and how do they view this support?

Contributors should explore specific experiences of ageism as well as the conditions that cause this social reality to be produced for these individuals. Ageism can be experienced in many forms on a daily basis: through remarks or behaviours, through practices that may or may not be institutionalised, through an unwelcoming outside world with, for example, poorly adapted urban development or even through the invisibilisation of older people and the difficulties of being heard (Caradec, 2017). The French *Défenseur des droits* (Rights Defender) also indicates that “the different types of age discrimination have the characteristic of being widely invisibilised or tolerated as they are highly internalised and normalised” (*Défenseur des droits*, 2013), which was confirmed by the WHO in their report.

Nevertheless, although it remains difficult, to name just a few examples, to seek employment or to be recruited before reaching a certain age and a certain number of years of experience, to be trained in certain workplaces after 50 years, or to obtain a loan for a new house, whether in France or in Canada, would we be right in saying that there have been noticeable improvements in this area? This is shown by the fact that older people, for example, are speaking up for themselves, sometimes through associations such as Old Up in France, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons or the FADOQ network in Quebec. The actions taken by several institutions working to fight discrimination against the older population such as HALDE, now the *Défenseur des Droits*, or the CSA in France, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Quebec *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* can also attest to this. In light of this, outside of public institutions, who are the other players contributing to the

fight against ageism? How do groups of professionals (occupational therapists in Canada, geriatricians in France) or associations for the defence of the elderly, such as the French association FIDES (The inter-regional federation for the employment of elderly people), the Ontario *Fédération des aînés et des retraités francophones* (Federation of French-speaking seniors and retirees), the Quebec association AQDR (The Quebec Association for the Rights of Retired and Pre-Retired Persons), or the FADOQ Network, manage their role in order to avoid discourses that may seem infantilising and condescending?

Additionally, contributions may wish to include field surveys on practices in the health and medico-social sectors, both before and since the start of the pandemic, as well as on the contradictory discourses that have been and continue to be heard today on so-called vulnerable people, who are considered to be in need of protection and therefore must be locked up. Furthermore, ageism has for a long time been presented as a breeding ground for abuse. In reality, it is often experienced by the older population as a type of abuse in its own right (Beaulieu and Crevier, 2013). Specifically, was there a need for a different treatment of over-65s when establishing and relaxing the protective measures against COVID-19? How do we view, when dealing with a bed shortage in intensive care units, the “selection” or even “sorting” according to age which was once envisaged—and certainly exists in practice, based on the reasoning that intensive care would be harmful for certain patients? What is revealed by, for example, the non-visibility of elderly deaths at the beginning of the health crisis, both in care homes and at home, and their omission from statistics, as highlighted in a recent notice from the INPEA (International Network Prevention of Elder Abuse) (Beaulieu, Cadieux Genesse, St-Martin, 2020)? More generally speaking, beyond the context of the pandemic, are we not seeing a trend in the renunciation of care for the very elderly? Is it easy to undergo an operation or be treated for cancer when you are over 80 years old, for example? Are the years of your life after 80 just a “bonus”² during which we shouldn’t ask for much? What are the attitudes of healthcare workers and their ultimately institutional constraints in these situations?

Several contributions could discuss the various forms in which ageism is experienced, both in the daily lives of individuals as well as in fiction and the media. Indeed, by looking at people's living conditions as well as the social representations of the “old”, the “elderly” or the “young” in the media, we wish to question the realities and the social imaginary which are the basis of all types of culture, and this is something the third theme will address in more depth.

3/ What social representations and social distinctions are at play?

This theme offers to provide a fresh perspective on the fictional and media representations of elderly and young people in France and Canada.

Coinciding with the World Health Organisation’s publication in 2021 of an almost 200-page report on ageism, this theme is centred on a subject that is now more relevant than ever, looking at ageism as a “complex”, “changing” and “ambiguous” phenomenon (Lagacé, 2013). According to the WHO, ageism occurs “*when age is used to categorize and divide people in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage and injustice and erode solidarity across generations.*”

² Xavier Lescure, Head of Department at Bichat Hospital in Paris, France Inter, 24 January 2021.

Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age (WHO, 2021). In addition, “ageism goes hand in hand with indifference, rejection, exclusion, infantilisation, stigmatisation and ridicule.” (Lévesque and Beaulieu, cited in Beaulieu and Crevier, 2013). We also talk of “age-related discrimination” (Ennuyer, 2020), a term which itself bears a certain ambiguity, as it can, depending on the case, refer to types of prejudice and discrimination faced by elderly people over over-60s, or more widely refer to those associated with age in general (Puijalon & Trincaz, 2000). The latter of these two is our favoured perspective.

In a context in which two major paradigms have emerged in a short space of time, on the one hand that of societies hoping to be more “inclusive” (Gardou, 2013; Ngatcha-Ribert, 2018), but also that of “ageing well”, which seems to distance itself from the more degrading forms of ageing, particularly through prevention (Puijalon, Trincaz, 2000), various stakeholders, including public authorities, are now trying to establish initiatives and strategies aimed at combating ageism (Dufeu-Schubert, 2019; Conseil des Aînés du Québec, 2010). In this regard, the WHO recommends three types of strategies to fight ageism: policies and legislation, education and interventions that foster connections between the generations. Public awareness campaigns (such as the WHO’s *Years Ahead* campaign in 2016) aim to change perspectives and practices and present older age as an opportunity and not as a burden or a decline.

Looking more towards our collective imaginary, this theme welcomes studies focusing on ageism and the analysis of representations of young or older groups, particularly in fiction (cinema, literature...) and the media. We have seen a great deal of progress in this area, particularly looking at the representations of people living with Alzheimer’s, which have become more nuanced and complex than in the past (Ngatcha-Ribert, 2019). In any case, in France, according to the Diversity Barometer of France’s Media Regulatory Authority, the *Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel*, over 65s only make up 6% of those indexed³ despite they account for 21% of the French population (CSA, 2019). Between the often negative representations in which old age seems to be “Alzheimerised”, with cognitive disorders appearing as the dominant paradigm (Adelman, 1995; Billé, 2014), and the falsely positive representations of people who do not age and therefore constitute an inaccessible model, there seems to be very little room in these paradoxical models for “ordinary” depictions of old age and more authentically positive social representations (Lagacé, 2010). How do we fairly represent, i.e. without angelism or miserabilism, the reality of over 60s in all its diversity? Why do certain dominant figures, and as a result, social representations, end up taking root when it comes to ageing individuals and younger people? Is this just a “simplification of the real world”? Or is it perhaps a need to caricature the situation? The result of individual and collective fears?

Recently, stories have amplified the voice and experiences of senior famous figures or researchers, such as Laure Adler and Rose-Marie Lagrave in France or Janette Bertrand and Jocelyne Robert in Quebec for whom, more than 50 years after Simone de Beauvoir’s work,

³ The indexing of each of the seven criteria is carried out by taking into account the assumed most obvious categories, i.e. as most viewers would perceive them. By age: 20 and under, [20-34 years], [35-49], [50-64], [65 years and over].

age remains an unthought. Sometimes taking the form of self-fulfilling prophecies (the imposition of a stereotype can sometimes cause individuals to adapt their own behaviour to fit this stereotype) or prescriptive sets of rules regarding staying active and healthy in old age, what consequences do these images and these selective invisibilities have (and according to which implicit criteria?) on the “ageing” population? As discrimination can sometimes be so complex and subtle, are we not all capable, even the most well-informed among us, of internalising these ideological (Huillery, 2021) and moralising sets of rules (Dauphin, 2017; Lima, 2016)? We are quick to pass judgement on the conforming or deviant nature of behaviours and lifestyles when it comes to young people, for example. To confront these taboos and prejudices, can we offer alternative, more positive depictions of youth, old age and vulnerabilities? How do we reach out to and influence younger generations? Contributors may also wish to study the words, expressions and terminology used on a daily basis, often uttered without a second thought, such as “to have a senior moment”⁴ or “OK boomer!”⁵. The contributions might also explore the social representations of intergenerational relationships as a new injunction in age group relations.

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⁴ To have gaps in your memory, something which is presumed to be typical of the elderly population.

⁵ An expression used by the younger generation to address over-50s, expressing a weariness of lessons taught by “baby boomers”, who enjoyed full employment and economic growth, spent as much money as they pleased and did not care about the state of the planet.

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before Thursday 10 March 2022