

## Designing for dynamic diversity: Representing various senior citizens in digital information sources

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### Abstract

This article discusses how we can ensure that various senior citizens (women and men, living alone or together, full of vitality or in fragile health, coming from different cultural backgrounds) can identify with images representing themselves so they continue to have access to information sources in our digitising information society. First, the role of two discourse coalitions, the *eternally youthful seniors* towards and the *frail needy seniors* in the Netherlands will be discussed. Then, a case study of the websites of the three senior citizens' organisations in the Netherlands which will be used to answer the question to what extent these organisations represent their various members in their use of images of *eternally youthful* or *frail needy seniors* and if they are represented as a homogeneous or diverse group. Finally, the article will answer the question how creative use can be made of the various images of senior citizens - following the principle of 'designing for dynamic diversity' - to achieve an accessible homepage.

**Keywords:** digitising information society, information accessibility, senior citizens, discourse coalitions, identification, designing for diversity.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In the majority of the western countries the population is ageing at a rapid pace. At the same time, society is increasingly becoming more digitalised. Information is supplied to a growing extent, and frequently solely, in digital form. It is obvious, that this trend poses dangers for people, like senior citizens, who have problems using such new media. They risk being excluded from crucial information (Duimel, 2007, p. 7). Digital information, therefore, has to be accessible for senior citizens, but it is often defined too narrowly. So, the Stichting Accessibility [Dutch Accessibility Foundation] (2010, p. 7) defines web accessibility as the 'usability of the internet', applying criteria such as keyboard accessibility and font size scalability. In my opinion, however, digital information accessibility is determined by factors other than these alone. I therefore advocate the use of a more dynamic concept than the limited technological interpretation usually applied to the access to information, especially where a new medium like websites is concerned. Organisations could strive for 'dynamic diversity' in designing their information sources (Gregor et al., 2002). We must not only take into account such trends in our information society as digitisation and

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<sup>1</sup> Sections 2, 3 and 5 of this article are based on part 3 of the author's unpublished inaugural lecture (Loos, 2010); section 4 is based on an unpublished conference paper (Loos, 2012).

greying, but also the fact that this same society is inhabited by women and men, living alone or together, who are full of vitality or in fragile health, and come from different cultural backgrounds.

In this paper, I will first argue that using *images* with which a diverse group of senior citizens<sup>2</sup> can *identify* could promote their accessibility to digital information. Then, I will show the role played by the dominant discourse coalition (Hajer, 1997) of the *eternally youthful seniors* towards the discourse coalition of the *frail needy seniors* in the Netherlands (Loos, 2010) in this regard. This will be followed by a case study of the websites of the three senior citizens' organisations in the Netherlands which will be used to answer two questions:

1. To what extent do these organisations represent their members in their use of images of *eternally youthful* or *frail needy seniors*?
2. Are their members represented as a homogeneous or diverse group?

Finally, I will answer the following question:

3. How can creative use be made of the various images of senior citizens - following the principle of 'designing by dynamic diversity' - to achieve an accessible homepage?

### Identifying with images

Even if organisations were to apply criteria such as keyboard accessibility and font size scalability, this does not per definition ensure that information is accessible to all senior citizens. This has to do with the fact that accessibility of information also depends on a factor which generally tends to be overlooked: the degree with which the user can identify with the image invoked by the information provided. Let me illustrate this with the help of a concrete example. In a Dutch study, conducted by Loos (2009) into the role of images on websites, an older woman told that she was terribly irritated by all the healthy, rich and radiant couples she came face to face with on many websites. She considered these images an affront to single senior citizens who were unable to spend a lot of money or were in poor health. Whether in advertising, informative messages or public information supplied via folders and websites, these images are a dominant feature in our society. In her 2008 essay *Laat me niet alleen - Oud worden in de eenentwintigste eeuw: Hoe gaan we dat doen?* [*Don't leave me - Ageing in the twenty-first century: The question is, how?*], Renate Dorrestein ardently appealed against the 'pursuit of eternal youth and what may be termed ageless ageing'.<sup>3</sup> The cover of her book superbly depicts the phenomenon of ageless ageing, featuring a vital older couple with a surfboard in the ocean.

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<sup>2</sup> See Dannefer (1988), Lippincott (2004) and Daatland & Biggs (2006) on the 'heterogeneity of ageing'.

<sup>3</sup> Quote on the back cover of the essay.

Now, there is undoubtedly a group of senior citizens that is attracted by pictures of this kind, but there are also an awful lot who find it impossible to identify with such images. The question is, what happens when organisations use images of this kind only - on their homepage, for example. Healthy senior citizens with money and a partner are likely to have no trouble identifying with such images. The picture of a vital older couple on a scooter at the top of the homepage of the Dutch 50PlusBeurs, the trade show for over-fifties, in 2010 is an excellent example:



Figure 1: 50 plus beurs Vier 't leven [Time to enjoy life]<sup>4</sup>

Under the picture runs the caption: 'A warm welcome to the site of the world's biggest event for active plussers':

'Time to enjoy life!' This is the 2010 theme of the 50PlusBeurs. Drop by and discover undreamt possibilities. Learn from the workshops. Look at what the future has to offer you. Get information and advice. Taste, touch, smell and enjoy with all your senses. You'll be amazed at the range of exhibits. Enjoy the shows, indulge and treat yourself. Visit and compare. Enjoy a truly immersive experience at the 50PlusBeurs! [translation]

While this text is fine for healthy, rich senior citizens with a partner, older singles in poor health and/or with little money will obviously not identify with the temptations described, and the chance that they will consult a website with such images and text in search of information is likely to be small. This does not promote the accessibility of a website of this kind for that target group. In the Netherlands the size of this group of poor senior citizens should not be underestimated. The website of the Dutch Nationaal Ouderenfonds [National Fund for Senior Citizens] reports that<sup>5</sup>:

In the Netherlands, some 1.4 million people live (in 2005) under the poverty line. This is equal to 8.8% of the population. Of these, 7.2% are aged 65 and up. In total, there are 100,800 people of 65 and over living under the poverty line. (Source: Armoedemonitor SCP 2007<sup>6</sup>) [translation]

Poverty is not the only important aspect in this regard. Van Campen (2011, p. 5) points out that the group of people with functional deficits is increasing rapidly in the Netherlands:

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.50.plusbeurs.nl>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ouderenfonds.nl>

<sup>6</sup> See Vrooman et al. (2007).

The number of frail older people will increase by about 300.000 persons, from almost 700.000<sup>7</sup> in 2010 to more than 1 million persons in 2030, according to the estimations of the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau [The Netherlands Institute for Social Research] (van Campen 2011). (...) We define frailty among older people as a process of the accumulation of physical, mental, and/or social functional deficits. [translation]

This group should also be taken into consideration in the design of information sources. It is important that they have access to the information to which they are entitled in order to continue to be able to function socially.

The next session discusses why we are swamped by images of this kind, showing healthy, radiantly beaming senior citizens enthusiastically engaging in activities and with money to spend.

#### **Discourse coalitions: the eternally youthful seniors versus the frail needy seniors**

Hajer's concept of discourse coalition (1997, p. 65) can help us explain the frequent occurrence of images of this kind in our society. He defines a discourse coalition as 'the ensemble of (1) a set story-lines; (2) the actors who utter these story-lines; and (3) the practices in which this discursive activity is based'.<sup>8</sup> The following illustrates the extent to which actors such as insurers of pension plans and public authorities are concerned - as part of a discourse coalition - with constructing the narrative of a pleasant life full of attractive activities.

In the Netherlands, Zwitserleven (an insurer of pension plans) has contributed strongly to this kind of story-lines. Dutch people probably remember the commercial starring Kees Brusse lounging in a deckchair on a sunny beach abroad, reading about the weather in the Netherlands in an English newspaper and then looking into the camera...

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<sup>7</sup> The Dutch population numbers about 2.5 million persons of 65 years old and older (van Campen, 2011, p. 19).

<sup>8</sup> Hajer (1997) conducted his own research into discourse coalitions in the acid rain debate.



Figure 2: *Zwitsersleven*

... and mockingly declaring<sup>9</sup>:

I am afraid that this is going to be a very boring sort of commercial. It seems fair to warn you. So, all of you, go and make coffee, because nothing else is going to happen. Unless you think it's fun to watch me, but that I can't imagine. The weather in Amsterdam [with an English accent]: cloudy, heavy rain [grinning] oh, dear [shakes his head]. [translation]

The message of this story-line is clear: take out a *Zwitsersleven* policy and you, too, are guaranteed to enjoy your retirement in a similar paradise. In later commercials, the actors responsible for imprinting this story on our minds have become younger and younger.<sup>10</sup> After all, you can't start too early to start to save for your retirement pension. As the number of senior citizens has continued to rise, more and more companies have started airing commercials of this kind. And it hasn't stopped there. Below, we'll see that the Dutch government is uttering a similar story-line: if you assume responsibility and start saving for your old age, you can 'compensate the loss of resources in later life'. This looks to be a discourse coalition, and more specifically, that of the *eternally youthful seniors*. This discourse coalition is rooted in a distant past, as the following painting shows:

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.reclamearsenaal.nl>

<sup>10</sup> See Kees Schiferli (1983) on the backgrounds of the *Zwitsersleven* advertising campaign on <http://www.reclamearsenaal.nl/index.php?id=116> and De Lange (2008) for a critical review of the *Zwitsersleven* experience.

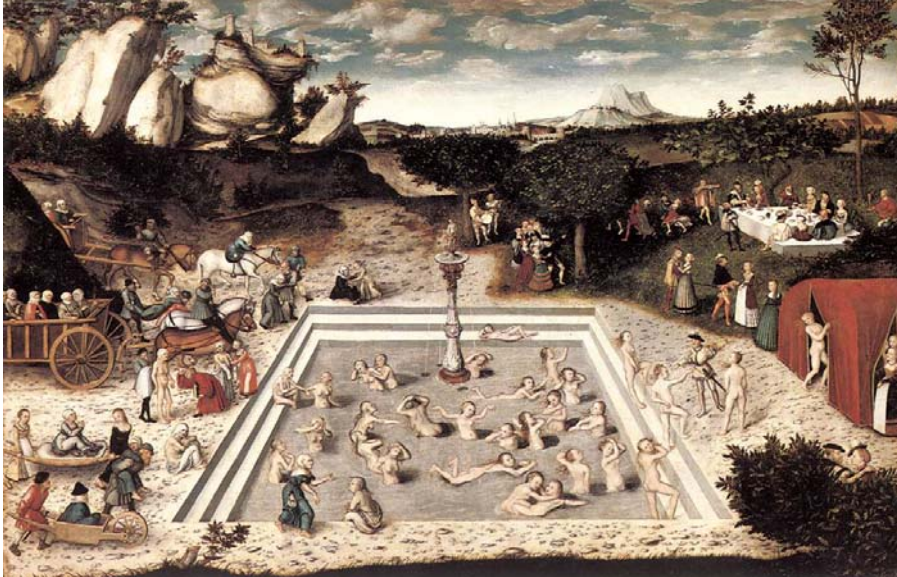


Figure 3: *Fountain of Youth* (1546) by Lucas Cranach the Elder  
 Staatliche Museen Berlin (<http://www.wga.hu/index.html>)

The Fountain of Youth depicts people (naked *women* - what a surprise) standing to the left of the fountain being examined by physicians before entering the water, to emerge on the right-hand side as rejuvenated beauties. This may be interpreted as a myth: 'since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse' (Barthes, 1972, p. 109). The myth in this case is that of 'eternal youth'. We all want so badly to stay young that we are susceptible to images invoking 'eternal youth'. It is no coincidence that the refrain of a popular song went:

*Forever young, I want to be forever young.  
 Do you really want to live forever, forever, forever?  
 Forever young, I want to be forever young.  
 Do you really want to live forever?  
 Forever young.*

There is just one problem: our mortality. This, however, would appear to be solved with the concept of the 'third age', that precedes the 'fourth age' (Laslett, 1991).<sup>11</sup> Our increased life expectancy means that we will spend a long time in the 'third age', the period of retirement, while the 'fourth age' will be reduced to a

<sup>11</sup> See also van Tilburg (2005).

short, painful descent into decay. It is striking that in the Netherlands especially public authorities make use of the concept of the 'third age'. The '*third age*' receives ample mention in policy memorandums, while the '*fourth age*' is quietly ignored. Hence the study published in 2007 by the Ministerie van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer [Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment] was given the title *Dynamiek in de derde leeftijd* [*Dynamism in the Third Age*]. Other examples are the *Verkenning levensloop - Beleidsopties voor leren, werken, zorgen en wonen* [*Life Course study*], published in 2002 by the Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid [Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment] and the study entitled *Mogen ouderen ook meedoen* [*May Seniors Participate, too*] carried out by the Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling [Council for Social Development] in 2004, in which the term 'third life phase' is used.

It is no surprise that the desire to be forever young is commercially exploited by private organisations, with images that reinforce this myth (see also Bonstein & Theile (2006) for several examples of such images and Gullette (2004) about the debate over "Positive Aging"). But using the concept of the 'third age' (or 'third life phase') also enables public authorities to combine a positive message (most citizens will live longer in good health) with a warning (you yourself are in the first place responsible for compensating the loss of resources in later life<sup>12</sup>). Such discursive practices of both private and public authorities have served to keep the myth of 'eternal youth alive', which has allowed the dominant discourse coalition of the *eternally youthful seniors* to develop.

Obviously, other voices may also be heard in our society expressing concern about the quality of life in old age. Apparently the Beatles worried about the same thing when they sang:

*Give me your answer, fill in a form.  
Mine for evermore.  
Will you still need me, will you still feed me?  
When I'm sixty-four?*

This opposing view derives from a different discourse coalition, namely that of the *frail needy seniors*. The realisation that ageing comes with decay is part of our heritage and, in the past, was frequently aptly depicted as the so-called 'steps of life'<sup>13</sup>:

<sup>12</sup> See the story-line uttered by the Dutch policy memorandum which will be discussed below.

<sup>13</sup> See Covey (1989) for the ways old age (including decay) was portrayed in art and literature from the Middle Ages to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



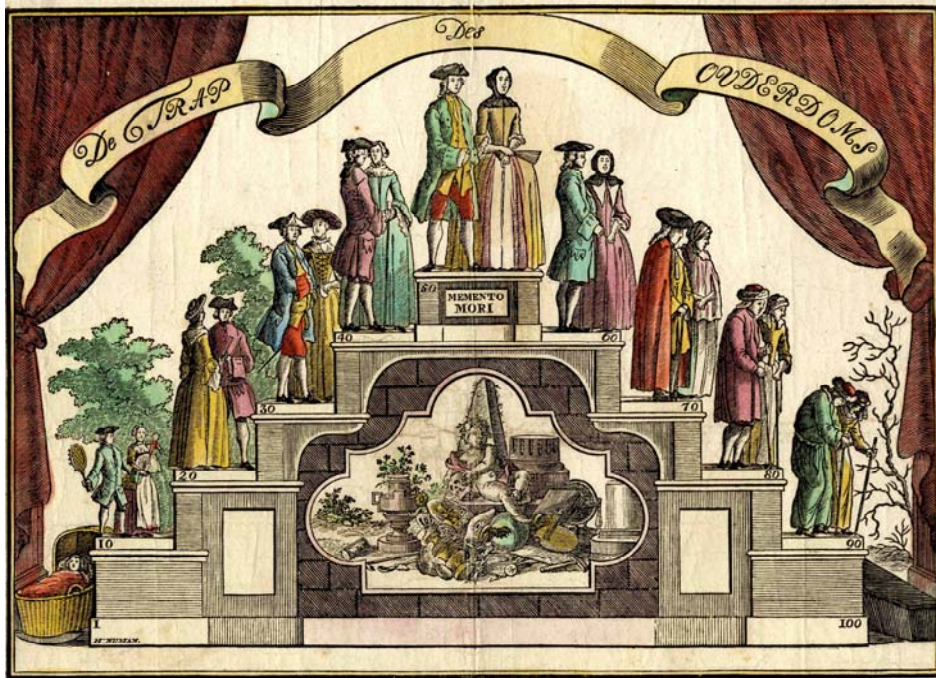


Figure 4: *The steps of life*, a woodcut by Hendrik Numan (around 1780)

There are also institutions, mostly health service organisations, that present this less agreeable side of ageing. For example, the publications of the NIZW [Netherlands Institute of Care and Welfare]<sup>14</sup> and Vilans<sup>15</sup> carry cover images of senior citizens using wheeled walking frames to draw attention to this specific target group.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example Penninx (2005) and Willems & Alsem (2006).

<sup>15</sup> The website of Vilans offers a wealth of information in this area: <http://www.vilans.nl/smartsite.dws?ch=&id=108065>



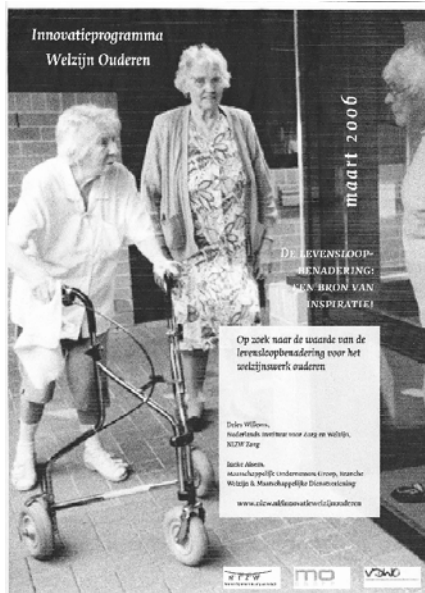


Figure 5: Cover of the Vilans' publication (2006)  
*De levensloopbenadering: Een bron van inspiratie*  
 [The life course approach: a source of inspiration]

Such organisations utter story-lines such as: growing older means a higher chance of becoming frail, but our organisation is there to help you by offering you prevention, care and cure; story-lines, which are embedded in institutional discursive health practices and actions.

However, the actors in the discourse coalition of the *frail needy seniors* are no match for the discourse coalition of the *eternally youthful seniors*, as evidenced by a recent readers' survey carried out by the magazine of the ANBO, the largest Dutch association for senior citizens, which revealed that many readers were annoyed by advertisements for Up Easy chairs and wheeled walkers (van den Berg et al., 2010, p. 11). Both discourse coalitions invoke violent emotions. Criticism of the *eternally youthful seniors* can be heard from De Lange (2007, 2008) and Dorrestein (2008), while Laslett (1991) has sought to redraw the image of the *frail needy seniors*. My point is the implications of this for the design of digital information sources for senior citizens in our digitising information society (see one of the last but one section of this article).

The dominant discourse coalition is that of the *eternally youthful seniors*. The narrative it tells has deep historical roots (painting Fountain of Youth) and taps into the universal yearning to live a long and healthy life. '(...) we constantly 'import signs from other contexts (another era, social group, culture) into the

context in which we are now making a new sign, in order to signify ideas and values which are associated with that other context by those who import the sign.' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 10)

Moreover, discourse coalitions are characterized by their strategy of appropriating parts of other discourse coalitions. For example, the Beatles song I quoted earlier is printed on the cover of the policy memorandum *Ouderenbeleid in het perspectief van de vergrijzing [Ageing population policy within a greying population perspective]* published in 2005 by the Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport [Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports]. This shows that the government is aware of the fact that thunderclouds may be gathering, but abides by the solution described by the following story-line: there is a problem (ageing), but if we intervene on time and the citizens also take their own responsibility, we can expect a rosy future. The then Dutch State Secretary of the Ministry, Clémence Ross-van Dorp, wrote to the Dutch House of Representatives in the report that accompanied this policy memorandum:

People are in the first place themselves responsible for compensating the loss of resources in later life. Everyone hopes to grow old, so no one can argue that he did not see this coming. For those people who are not capable of taking adequate individual measures for their later life stages, solidarity in society is essential to safeguard the sovereignty of every senior citizen with respect and dignity. [translation]

Stone (1997, pp. 142-143) calls this a 'story of helplessness and control':

'It usually runs like this: "The situation is bad. We have always believed that the situation was out of our control, something we had to accept but could not influence. Now, however, let me show that in fact we can control things.'"

Story-lines of this kind are a superb illustration of how a discourse coalition works: an actor (a governmental institution, in this case a Ministry) utters a story-line (the peril of a greying population that may be averted by a timely intervention by citizens themselves) which is embedded in discursive activities and actions (description of the measures to be taken, again by citizens themselves). In this way, the actor in the discourse coalition of the *eternally youthful seniors*, as it were, takes the wind out of the sails of the discourse coalition of the *frail needy seniors*.

I have shown that insurers of pension plans, and public authorities, such as ministries, make use of the myth of the eternal youth and utter story-lines like: act now, avoid the hazard of old age by buying our product (such as supplementary pension or health insurance). Such story-lines are embedded in discursive practices (e.g. in commercials<sup>16</sup>, information brochures, policy memorandums<sup>17</sup>) and actions: the senior

<sup>16</sup> See, for example research conducted by Suokannas (2005), van Selm, Westerhof & De Vos (2007), Williams, Ylänne & Wadleigh (2007) and Ylänne, Williams & Wadleigh (2009) on the representation of older people in commercials and advertising.

<sup>17</sup> See also the policy memorandum discussed above, which states that 'People are in the first place themselves responsible for compensating the loss of resources in later life.'

citizen is a client who has to be seduced into buying their 'anti ageing product' (see also Bonstein & Theile (2006) and Gullette (2010)).

In the next section, I will analyse whether Dutch senior citizens' organisations have also jumped on the bandwagon with images of vital older people designed to appeal to (the majority of?) their members.

### **Empirical study: the visual representation of older people on the websites of the three Dutch senior citizens' organisations**

The above demonstrates that insurers selling retirement plans, and public authorities offer good examples of actors who are part of the discourse coalition formed by the *eternally youthful seniors*. The Dutch discourse coalition of the *frail needy seniors* appears to play a far less prominent role, with only a few health service organizations, including Movisie and Vilans (successors of the previously mentioned NIZW that shut down on 1 January 2007), that explicitly act on behalf of this target group.<sup>18</sup> The discourse coalition of the *eternally youthful seniors* currently easily dominates in the Netherlands.

I would like nonetheless to make a last-ditch attempt to examine whether the three Dutch senior citizens' organisations (ANBO, PCOB and Unie KBO<sup>19</sup>) might possibly also be considered actors in the discourse coalition of the *frail needy seniors*, to provide a counterbalance to the dominance of the discourse coalition of the *eternally youthful seniors*. As images play a key role in our society, and websites are being used as information resources by an increasing numbers of people, I conducted a case study on images of older people displayed on the websites of these senior citizens' organisations. In order to ensure that any differences in the images displayed on the websites could not be attributed to current social developments, the images were all downloaded on the same day (6 March 2012) from the websites in question.

Older people by no means constitute a homogenous group (also see footnote 2, about the 'heterogeneity of ageing'). It is important to ensure that different groups of senior citizens are able to identify with the images used in digital sources of information, as these are images that are supposed to be representative of who they are. The images should therefore do justice to their sex, household composition (do they live alone or with a partner?), the degree of vitality and their cultural background. To investigate this, all the images of senior citizens were analysed to establish who was pictured as being a 'man/woman' and 'alone/together'. Next, I looked at the way vitality and frailty were represented, and finally at differences in the cultural backgrounds of older people.

<sup>18</sup> See also Penninx (2005) and van Campen (2010, 2011) for more facts and figures about fragile older persons in the Netherlands.

<sup>19</sup> PCOB's main target group are Dutch citizens with a protestant background, Unie KBO focuses on catholics and ANBO aims at all senior citizens.

*Older people depicted alone or together as woman/man?**Table 1: Representation of 'older people alone or together and 'man/woman' at websites of ANBO, PCOB, Unie KBO (06.03.2012)*

	<b>ANBO</b>	<b>PCOB</b>	<b>Unie KBO</b>
Older woman alone	3 (15%)	2 (11.1%)	4 (21.1%)
Older man alone	3 (15%)	5 (27.6%)	5 (25.3%)
Older woman with vague person (sex not clear) at the background	0	1 (5.6%)	0
Older person alone (sex unclear)	1 (5%)	0	1 (5.3%)
Older woman and men as a couple	5 (25 %)	3 (16.7%)	3 (15.8%)
Older woman and men (no couple) <sup>20</sup>	2 (10%)		
2 older couples (man-woman)	0	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.3%)
2 older women and 1 older man	1 (5%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.3%)
2 older men and 1 older women	0	1 (5.6%)	
2 older men	1 (5%)	0	0
1 older woman and 1 young man	0	0	1 (5.3%)
Mixed group of older persons ( no couples)	3 (15%)	2 (11.1%)	1 (5.3%)
Older woman and (grand)- child	0	0	1 (5.3%) [girl]
Older man and (grand)child	1 (5%) [girl]	1 (5.6%) [boy]	1 (5.3%) [girl]
Total	20 (100%)	18 (100%)	19 (99.3%) <sup>21</sup>

Approximately the same number of senior citizens was pictured on all three websites (20, 18 and 19, respectively). On the whole, the differences between the websites regarding who was displayed in the images were not that large.

<sup>20</sup> The picture of an older man taking a photograph of an older woman on the cover of an ANBO brochure.

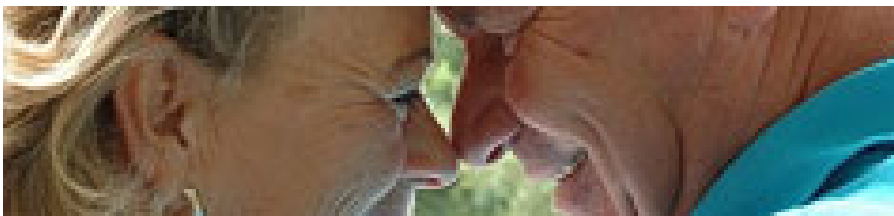
<sup>21</sup> Percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding in various categories.

The depiction of older people alone and older people together appear to be a reasonable balanced representation on the PCOB and Unie KBO websites (respectively 53.7% and 44.3%. But on ANBO's website older people alone are a minority (30% ).

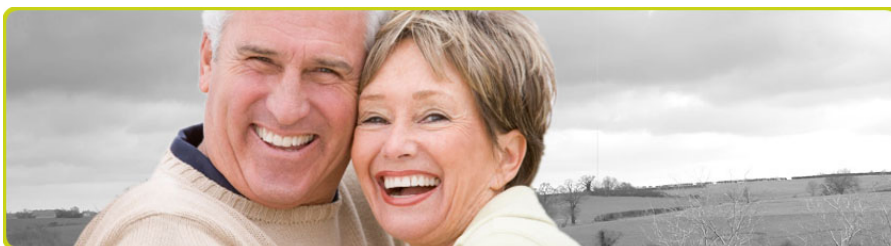
Pictures of an 'older woman and man as a couple' are shown 5x (25%) on the ANBO website (see for example Figure 6a), versus 3x (16.7% and 15.8%, respectively) on the PCOB (see for example Figure 6b), and Unie KBO websites. In the pictures of individuals on the ANBO website, images of 'older men alone' occur just as often as 'older women alone' (15.8% of all images). But on the PCOB and Unie KBO websites respectively 27.6% and 25.3% of all images of individuals are pictures of 'older man alone' versus respectively 11.1% and 21.1% 'older woman alone'. See Figures 7a/b for illustrations of individuals.

The most common category of pictures on the ANBO website was that of 'older woman and man as a couple' (25%); on the PCOB and Unie KBO websites, this was 'man alone' (27.7% and 25.3% respectively).

A salient finding was the infrequent occurrence of images of senior citizens with (grand)children: 3x an older man with (grand)child (2x girl, 1x boy) on all three websites, while a single picture of an older woman with (grand)child (1x girl) was found on the PCOB website. It would be interesting to study the websites of other organisations to find out whether images of (grand)children occur equally infrequently there, as well, and to ask the creators of the websites why this should be (do they think that a picture of a girl is cuter than a boy?).



*Figure 6a: Woman and man as a couple (ANBO website, 06.03.2012)*



*Figure 6b: Woman and man as a couple (PCOB website, 06.03.2012)*



Figure 7a: Woman alone (PCOB website, 06.03.2012)



Figure 7b: Man alone  
(Unie KBO website, 06.03.2012)

#### *Older people depicted as being vital or frail*

In order to analyse how older people's vitality and frailty are represented on the websites of senior citizens' organisations, let me first explain the criteria I used to ascertain whether an image depicted either a vital or a fragile older person. Older people depicted "in action" (walking, exercising) were identified as being vital (see, for example, Figures 8a/b/c and 9a/b), while those who were shown as being dependent on the help of others, e.g. in the setting of health institutions or depicted with Up Easy chairs and wheeled walkers were to be classified as being frail. Let us now have a look at Table 2 for the results of the analysis.

*Table 2: Representation of older people's vitality and frailty on the websites of ANBO, PCOB, Unie KBO (06.03.2012)*

	<b>ANBO</b>	<b>PCOB</b>	<b>Unie KBO</b>
Total number of pictures on the website representing older people	20	18	19
Vital older woman	0	1 (5.5%) (biking) 1 (5.5%) (running)	
Vital older man	1 (5%) (playing tennis)	1 (5.5%) (out driving the car)	
Older person (sex unclear)			1 (5.3%) (sailing)
Vital older woman and man (couple)	1 (5%) (active at sea)	2 (11.1%) (active in the outdoors) (5.6%) 1 (out driving in the car)	1 (5.3%) (active at the beach) 1 (5.3%) (walking) 1 (5.3%) (biking)
2 vital older couples (woman-man)	0	1 (5.6%) (walking)	1 (5.3%) (actively enjoying the waterside)
2 vital older women and 1 vital older man	0	1 (5.6%) (walking)	0
2 vital older men	1 (5%) (walking)	0	0
1 vital older man with met (grand)child [girl]	1 (5%) (gardening)	0	0
1 vital older man with (grand)child [boy]	0	1 (5.6%) (playing with a model airplane)	0
Mixed group of older people	1 (5%) (biking)	0	0
Total number of vital older persons	5 (25%)	8 (44.7%)	5 (26.5%)
Total number of fragile older people	0	0	0

On the ANBO website, in 25% of the cases senior citizens were explicitly depicted as being full of vitality. There were no pictures of frail older people. There were images of an older woman with a handkerchief, an older woman wearing reading glasses and a stylized image on a poster for a vision test, but these did not



meet the earlier mentioned criteria of frailty. In terms of vitality, there were far more images of older men than of women on the ANBO website.

The PCOB website contained numerous images of vitally alive senior citizens: 8 of the 18 pictures. Here again, frail older people were conspicuous by their absence. There were a relatively equal number of pictures of older men and older women who were portrayed as being full of vitality.

On the Unie KBO website, like the ANBO website, approximately a quarter of the images showed older people radiating vitality. There were also two pictures showing a vision test, but, as previously indicated, these did not count as images of frailty, a category that scored a grand total of zero on this website, as well.

The senior citizens were all unanimously still enjoying the 'third age'; the 'fourth age' was nowhere in evidence. Everyone was practicing sports or leisurely cycling wherever the fancy took them (Figures 8a/b/c and 9a/b). The question of whether these organisations have consciously created this image in order to please their members is beyond the scope of this article.

The picture that emerges regarding the subjects' sex is not unequivocal. On the PCOB and the Unie KBO websites, the number of vitally alive older women and men pictured is almost the same. But the ANBO website contains far more pictures of vital older men than vital older women.



*Figure 8a: Active older people (ANBO website, 06.03.2012)*



*Figure 8b: Active older people (PCOB website, 06.03.2012)*



*Figure 8c: Active older people  
(Unie KBO website, 06.03.2012)*



*Figure 9a: Active older woman (PCOB website, 06.03.2012)*



*Figure 9b: Active older man  
(ANBO website, 06.03.2012)*

*Older people depicted as coming from a different cultural background*

Criteria such as skin colour, exotic objects (food) and picture caption are used to determine whether the senior citizens in the picture are represented as coming from a different cultural background. What does Table 3 show us?

*Table 3: Representation of older people coming from a different cultural background on the websites of ANBO, PCOB, Unie KBO (06.03.2012)*

	<b>ANBO</b>	<b>PCOB</b>	<b>Unie KBO</b>
Total number of pictures representing older people at the website	20	18	19
Older woman	0	0	0
Older man	1 (5%) (dark skin)	1 (5.6%) (dark skin)	0
Older woman and man (a couple)	1 (5%) (Indonesian appearance) 1 (5%) (dark looking – multicultural dossier)	0	0
Older woman and a younger man	0	0	1 (5.3%) (dark skin - solidarity fund Unie KBO)
Total number of older people as coming from a different cultural back-ground	3 (15%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)

The picture is clear. Older people from a different cultural background appear a number of times in pictures on the ANBO website (see e.g. Figure 10) and just once on each of the websites of the other two senior citizens' organisations.



Figure 10: Cover ANBO Multicultural Dossier  
(ANBO website, 06.03.2012)

### **Towards designing for dynamic diversity**

At the start of this article, I stated that our information society is not only confronting the rising trends of digitisation and greying, but that it is also inhabited by women and men, living alone or together, who are full of vitality or in fragile health and coming from different cultural backgrounds. *The eternally youthful seniors* and the *frail needy seniors*, which I discussed in the light of Hajer's concept of 'discourse coalition', are merely two sides of the same coin.

The looming danger of euphoria and stigmatisation should be avoided by using a mix of images that do justice to the diversity within the older population group by adopting the principle of 'designing for dynamic diversity'. Gregor et al. (2002, p. 152) use this concept to make designers of computing systems aware of 'the decline in the cognitive, physical and sensory function [of older people]'. In this article I focussed on the role of images for the identification processes of a various group of senior citizens and the implications for accessible digital information retrieval.

Finally, I will now illustrate how the principle of 'designing for dynamic diversity' can be applied to website design. Senior citizens' organisation ANBO has inserted a bar across the top of the homepage that functions as a photo gallery. A variety of senior citizens is depicted there:

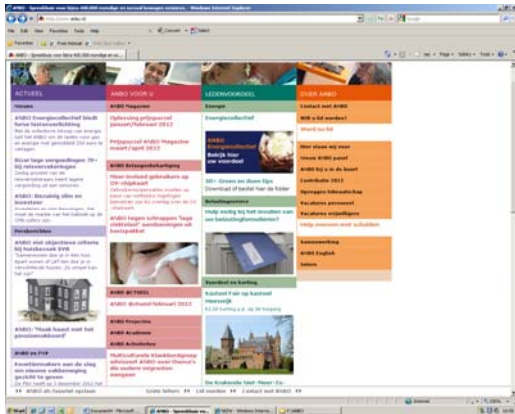


Figure 11: Homepage ANBO website (06.03.2012)

Older people are represented as an individual (woman, man), as a couple or in a group and a couple with another cultural background can also be seen. So, the use of this photo gallery is a step in the right direction, but fails to represent the *frail needy seniors*. However, this can be remedied. ANBO asked a photographer for pictures portraying the diversity of the ageing population in the Netherlands. These portraits have been saved in a stock photo file. Adding the next photo from this file to the row of pictures in the gallery at the top of the homepage, would possibly be a way of doing justice to the group of *frail needy seniors*:



Figure 12: Stockfoto ANBO (photograph: Bas Moerman)

### Conclusions and discussion

We can now answer the three questions presented at the start of this article:

1. To what extent do the three Dutch senior citizens' organisations represent their members in their use of images of *eternally youthful* or *frail needy seniors*?

This paper has shown us that the discourse coalition of the *eternally youthful seniors* seems to be dominant in the Netherlands. Even the three Dutch senior citizens' organisations have jumped on the bandwagon with images of vital older people designed to appeal to (the majority of?) their members.

Larger scale research is required though, in order to collect empirical data in both the public as the private domain before any (policy) conclusions can be drawn. For this paper, discourse coalitions have proved to be useful as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the images representing older people shown on the websites of the senior citizens' organisations ANBO, PCOB and Unie KBO.

2. Are their members represented as a homogeneous or diverse group?

From this case study it may be concluded that the distribution of men and women in the images of older people included on the websites of the senior citizens' organisations PCOB and Unie KBO is a relatively fair one, though ANBO's website contains far more pictures of vital older men than vital older women.

The distribution between images of vital and images of frail older people the websites of all three senior citizens' organisations shows us a different picture. If we are to believe the websites of *all three senior citizens' organisations*, the Netherlands is extremely fortunate in having a senior population consisting only of senior citizens who are full of vitality. In 2010, there were close to 700,000 frail older Dutch people in the Netherlands, yet not a single image of such a frail older person can be found on any one of the three senior citizens' websites examined. Physical decay, as portrayed in art and literature (see the final steps of life as discussed earlier and Covey (1989, p. 697), is completely ignored on the websites of the three Dutch senior citizens' organisations. Senior citizens from different cultural backgrounds are portrayed several times on ANBO's website (see e.g. Figure 10) and just once on each of the other two senior citizens' organisations.

It will be necessary to analyse more images of senior citizens' organisations on radio and TV, in press releases and traditional posters before concluding that there really is no room for *frail needy seniors*, which would mean that the senior citizens' organisations are among the actors in the discourse coalition of the *eternally youthful seniors*, in which the 'third life' plays a central role.

3. How can creative use be made of the various images of senior citizens - following the principle of 'designing by dynamic diversity' - to achieve an accessible homepage?

Figure 11 is an excellent example of the way the principle of 'dynamic diversity' can be applied to website design by using a variety of pictures. The question of whether pictures like the one in Figure 12 are

stigmatising (why an older woman and not an older man?) and whether pictures in a photo gallery showing various senior citizens indeed make it easier for the target group of an organisation to identify with this organisation, might be answered by conducting focus groups with a variety of senior citizens from all categories: woman, man, alone and together, vital and fragile and from various cultural backgrounds.

If we want to ensure that senior citizens can identify with the image presented in the information sources, it is important that information does not solely project an image of either the *eternally youthful seniors* or the *frail needy seniors*. This could hinder the access of certain senior citizens to information. If we adopt the principle of 'dynamic diversity' in designing information sources, keeping in mind the role played by images in the identification process of senior citizens, we can prevent them from being excluded from crucial information. In this way, *all* senior citizens will continue to have access to relevant information about the services and products that are relevant for them, and they will continue to be able to participate in full in our society: '*Full participation* by all members of a group, socially, culturally, economically and affectively in that community's affairs is a *sine qua non* for that group to flourish. That includes a commitment to values regarded as central for maintaining social cohesion. That in turn requires full access to semiotic, cultural, social and economic resources.' (Kress, 2010, p. 18)

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