Issue Mapping for an Ageing Europe

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We began with a series of statements about the coming times in Europe when the older outnumber the younger. The demographic prediction has placed urgent challenges on institutions and together with changes to retirement laws and pension schemes has transformed ageing from a matter of fact (biological process) into a matter of concern (issue). Questions that to some extent were already settled are now open to debate. For instance, when (and where) are people considered to be old, according to both the gender as well as the country? How should individual and state responsibilities be weighed? Also, new questions arise: Will privileged nations drain care workers from less privileged ones? Which places will become good ageing places and where will there be less care and other ageing resources?

In response to these anxieties, organizations across Europe are placing ageing items on their agendas. These include the European Commission which declared 2012 the Year of Active Ageing, an initiative aimed at working on the uncertainties, but also setting an agenda (2010). Seven sub-issues were put forward (accessibility, anti-discrimination, employment and active ageing, health, social inclusion, social protection, and solidarity between generations), and they brought together a network of national NGOs, represented in the AGE Platform Europe. The efforts inaugurated what we describe as a period where activity and interest around ageing were intensified and where its issuefication (or its becoming an issue) became even more perceptible, thereby prompting a mapping.

We have approached ageing with a layered methodology that allows us to describe the state of affairs around it, the actors involved in it, and their associations with it and each other. The choice of the theories and techniques was influenced by the development of the issue itself, and specifically, by the European Year. The terming of the year provides some footing for our choice to map ageing. First, the pairing of ‘ageing’ and ‘active’ gives a sense the processes of issuefication taking place around ageing. The otherwise too large and abstract idea of ageing was made public, relevant and graspable by assigning it liveliness. Second, by framing the initiative as a transgenerational concern and therefore extending the effects of ageing across ages, it was framed as a coming crisis and as a risk, in Ulrich Beck's terms. Finally, the issue of ageing was presented as a regional concern and specifically a European matter. As a result, we aimed to chart ageing’s
locations, and ultimately how those across Europe were made into ageing places.

In order to meet the needs of mapping an issue in the making, one that transcends generations and is cartographically situated in Europe, we selected three leading authors who have shaped the field in each of those sub-areas of issue mapping, namely, Bruno Latour (social cartography of lively issues), Ulrich Beck (risk cartography of intergenerational issues), and most recently, Jeremy Crampton (critical cartography with counter-mapping using online data and tools). We also include complementary work that provides further practical elaborations on each theoretical framework: Tommaso Venturini’s controversy mapping techniques, Gerald Beck and Cordula Kropp’s risk infrastructure mapping and Lisa Parks’s layer critique. Parks in particular provides a series of ringing critiques of mapping (as information interventions) that our practice would have to stand up to.

With ageing as a case study, and sets of mapping approaches, we sought operationalizations using digital methods and tools, mapping associations of actors using the digital traces they left behind, in the manner of Latour, and mining their data, seeking connections, and visualizing findings. We multiplied the maps, and also made sure to leave threads back to the original document or statement. The digital methods we used repurposed existing digital devices, such as search engines, so as to show which issues resonate with which actors (as the Lippmannian device is used), or which actors link to other actors, perhaps outside of one’s own country, as the Navicrawler (together with the GeoIP tool) provided. The work culminated in a series of case studies, where the purpose was to provide maps both for exploration as well as (for the most part) for description and storytelling. Who’s making ageing into which kind of matter of concern, and where?

5.1 Producing social cartographies of ageing: The Europeanization of ageing?

For the social cartography of ageing, we concentrated on three key concepts from Latour’s work: First, the redefinition of the social and its study as a controversy for mapping. According to Latour, the social is a trail of connections and a particular movement of re-association and re-assembling, always changing and moving. Second, the job of the social researcher is that of tracing the associations created by the actions of the actors involved in a controversy. And third, the inclusion of non-human actors is necessary, for anything that changes the state of affairs (that acts) is on the map (as a
mediator), even if it’s an object, such as Nordic walking sticks in Poland as well as tea and pens in the U.K. When applied to ageing, we are interested in tracing how the issue comes into being precisely by the interaction of the actors who find themselves concerned with it, together with their positions, and opinions. We are interested in the vocabularies, channels, formats, and the sources of authority through which ageing is currently being defined. In practical terms, we use the controversy mapping model proposed by Venturini, occasionally adapting it by changing the order of the pathways, or choosing only a few instead of the entire set of steps for each mapping. The analyst starts by identifying the variety of competing statements that animate a controversy, and subsequently deploys the associations between these statements so as to capture and visualize the interwoven literatures. As extant literatures are surrounded by institutions, human beings and technologies that animate them, they will lead the analyst towards actors of various stripes. Hereupon she can visualize how these actors associate with other actors and form networks, inquiring into the ideologies or common beliefs that hold them together. Venturini, following Latour, calls these cosmoses. Finally, the analyst can attempt to consider the development of cosmopolitics, or how a common world is built, given the disagreements.

In order to render the notions of associations and traces, and Venturini's pathway technique, into more concrete formats we employ digital methods, both as a conceptual framework and methodology. Our data become the traces gathered by digital devices, including linking, key word usage as well as news archives on NGO websites. To mine the content and render visible traces we combine manual analysis and software tools; an especially relevant tool is the Lippmannian Device, with which we query actors' websites for issue resonance. What follows are the main questions that social cartography helped us formulate and digital methods allowed us to answer.

How does the agenda proposed by the EU relate to the agendas of the national NGOs involved in the European Year of Active Ageing? Through our mappings we were able to visualize how the agenda put forward by the European Year of Active Ageing differs from the local agendas of the national NGOs involved in the initiative. We consulted the news reports archived during the year 2011 on the websites of the NGOs involved in the initiative and manually extracted the issues mentioned in each report. The result was a collection of about 163 unique issues or statements. Next, we ran the lists through a word cloud generator, which allowed us to visualize the distribution and importance of each issue amongst the members of the group. We interpreted these results as an organized set of statements (in the controversy mapping sense) or matters of concern. The top ten
most visible issues on the group agenda, or the issues that received most media attention, are pensions, Alzheimer's, active ageing, IT skills, health, care homes, healthcare, dementia, NHS Reform, and technology. When comparing them with the seven sub-issues proposed by the EU we identified similarities and differences. And when inquiring into the drivers behind these top issues, we were able to describe country groupings (actors and actor-networks) around shared concerns. Countries not new to the EU (non-newcomers) tend to be more active in the issue space, thus influencing the distribution of issue visibility inside the group agenda and had greater affinity with other main issues of the EU. Western European countries, such as the U.K., Spain, France, or Portugal, were the drivers behind the issues of Alzheimer's and dementia. And it was only newcomer countries (the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, and Latvia) that seemed to be adopting the EU issue language of active ageing. Issues that were unpopular and perhaps only important to individual actors but not often reported on, provided insight into the local character of the debate, and a sense of ageing place. For example, the Nordic countries supported creativity, writing, elderly emotion, table tennis, and recreation, while Southern and Eastern regions addressed violence, World Day to Combat Violence Against the Elderly, emergency care and assistance. Here we note there is a variety of local sub-issues regarding ageing and an alternative set of actors organized around them that are not necessarily being addressed by the EU initiative. This leaves as an open question the fate of the smaller and more local issues in the debate, such as Polish ageing issues.

Is the Polish agenda on ageing becoming Europeanized? The language used by the newcomer country, Poland, suggested a process of adaptation (or Europeanization) to the AGE Platform Europe’s EU Year agenda, however one that appears less in sync with the concerns that are explicitly held as relevant by the local Polish network working with ageing. While only two Polish NGOs are included in the AGE Platform Europe, we were able to locate through engine queries a larger umbrella association of Polish NGOs working locally on ageing. Among the Polish NGOs, only one appears to engage with the issue of Alzheimer’s. The marginality of the issue in Poland supports findings made earlier with respect to the lack of resonance of Alzheimer’s as well as dementia in Eastern and Southern Europe. We also found little cohesion among the Polish NGOs working on ageing. Polish ageing NGOs do not interlink, and no two link to the same international NGO or association, indicating a lack of shared partnerships and collaborations, and perhaps a fragmented local issue space. They also rarely mention each other, and if the NGOs are mentioned together it is largely through their
sitting on the same panel at an ageing event, including those of the European Year. The question is the extent to which European ageing initiatives unify (if only temporarily) the Polish NGOs.

We subsequently mapped the issue agenda of the local Polish NGO network, so as to compare it to the European one. We searched for the issues (or 'statements' as they are termed in controversy-mapping language) that according to their websites (or literatures) were relevant to them; we grouped them using a word cloud generator and ordered them by frequency (moving from literatures to actor-networks in terms of shared substance). We revisualized the cloud as a heat list so as to be able to put the agendas side by side, comparing the seven-issue agenda put forward by the AGE Platform Europe (in the EU Year) with the Polish NGOs’. We arrived at two main conclusions. On the one hand, the similarity of certain language suggests a degree of agreement and adoption. For instance, activation, agreement between generations, and the prevention of discrimination are terms used by Polish NGOs that resonate with those employed by the AGE Platform Europe. On the other hand, ageing framed as a women’s issue, the one most frequently emphasized by Polish NGOs, appears to be unique to the Polish actors. The finding becomes more poignant when one takes into account that one of the two Polish NGOs participating in the AGE Platform Europe is dedicated to women’s rights. The other Polish issue absent from the AGE Platform Europe is education for older people, which found expression in the Polish support for the University of the Third Age, a name which is not only absent from the agenda but which appears infrequently on the AGE Platform Europe website.\(^{14}\) The Polish NGOs, finally, also reformulated ‘active ageing’ as one not necessarily implying working longer.

*Which issue formats lend themselves to domestic debates on pension reform?* We tested how the debate around pension was framed and animated in the national political debates in the U.K. At the time of the mapping there was increasing activity in the U.K. political scene around the proposed public sector pension reform. A number of actors opposed the idea that future pensions would be calculated on the basis of a career-average scheme rather than on final salaries and an increment of the retirement age. A strike was organized as a response to the changes and it involved labour unions and political parties. A set of names of those involved in the strike led us towards the websites (literatures) of the actors, where we identified a common vocabulary associated with the debate, including terms such as ‘wheelchairs’, ‘bills’, ‘tea’, ‘pens’, and ‘walkers’. Some of these objects were employed ideologically in comments sections, on forums and in other digital spaces, where users vocalized (ideological) disagreement, thereby making
them into cosmos-objects. For example, the word ‘tea’ acted as a class indicator, of those that do well in public service, and it was also associated with lack of willingness to fight against the reform. On the other hand, ‘pens’ were used to refer to the power and perhaps fiat of those wielding them, including high-ranked government officials, and bureaucrats. Furthermore, when viewing keyword output per set of actors, instead of collectively, two other terms stood out specifically for Labour parties: ‘pay more’ and ‘women’s pensions’. ‘Public sector strike’ only returned results from smaller parties such as the Scottish National Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party (Northern Ireland), and the Green Party. In this sense, unions are tied to fringe party issues with their use of strike language such as ‘picket line’, ‘public sector strike’ and ‘pension strike’. The mapping of cosmos-objects allowed us to describe the U.K. pension reform debate in terms of competing ideologies and as framed by actors in terms that resonate with a class struggle. When performing a similar mapping with the Polish pension debate as a case study, we again encountered an emphasis on ageing as a women’s issue, as there is disagreement regarding the proposal to have the same retirement age for both men and women. The general importance of the pension debate and the differences in framing indicates that the issue of an ageing Europe is being addressed within the national borders, opening up questions regarding the relationship between the proud nations (and their ‘methodologies’, to use Beck’s term) and the transnational assemblage of NGOs working in the EU Year format.

5.2 Producing risk cartographies of ageing: Winner and loser places

The second layer of our methodology is dedicated to a mapping of ageing as a risk. We use Ulrich Beck’s ideas about contemporary world risks and cosmopolitics in order to formulate research questions to map our case study of ageing. World risks are a special type of risk that is resistant to the calculations, prediction, and compensation systems developed during modernity. They are global threats (climate change, terrorism, financial market meltdown, and to a degree ageing) not limited in space or time. Because of the uncertainty that inheres in world risks, they are subject to a constant struggle of definition (ontological insecurity) and regulation. Given competing definitions and speculation they exist often as contradictory versions of the future, staged in media. Furthermore, Beck proposes that a globally shared risk does not lead to the balanced distribution of
responsibility, but instead to inequality. Some of the actors involved will act as decision-makers, while others will experience the consequences of such decisions with little room to intervene. To this condition there is an exception: world risk, because it is unprecedented, also can be a catalyst for a ‘cosmopolitan moment of enlightenment’ if national interests melt away, in favour of a balanced distribution of responsibility and power. When applied to the case study of ageing, the concept of world risk allows thinking about the scenario unfolding around ageing as composed of inequalities, of winners (decision-making actors) and losers. Who will suffer the consequences of those decisions? Which voices are unheard in the debate? Where will one age poorly, and where will others age well?

In order to work practically with the notion of world risk and operationalize it into a mapping methodology, we engaged with risk cartography techniques and took up a methodology (by Beck and Kropp, with similarities to Venturini’s) that invites researchers to identify a series of risk actors and elements together with the associations between them. They are the protagonists (Who is involved?), matters of concern (What is at stake?), statements (What are the knowledge claims, and what are they afraid of?), and things (What can be done?). Here we discuss the findings we have made using risk cartography techniques and the questions they help us to answer.

Which age-related concerns do European actors prioritize? Which ones remain isolated? Using the news reports produced and archived by the NGOs in the AGE Platform Europe we identified the different protagonists, matters of concern, statements as well as things in each news entry from 2011. They are linked, clustered and visualized in a mind map, showing that certain institutions are dominant, and ageing issues have hierarchies. The most prevalent sub-issue was the manner in which ageing is straining the welfare state and the difficulty for older people to gain employment. As a response to the dramatic change in the population there is the suggestion of extending working life, where there would be a loosening (or elimination) of a compulsory retirement age and extended training for the elderly to remain in the labour market. Supporting these ideas are protagonists such as the head of AGE Platform Europe and the representative from the European Parliament’s Employment & Social Affairs Committee. On the other hand, there are isolated issues that received less attention, including elderly discrimination, and specifically of older women. Among the protagonists to give visibility to the issue is the European Alliance of Families. Also the issues concerning the need for healthy ageing, the impact of ageing on family policies, the difficulties of implementing local approaches to policies on ageing, and the absence of collective redress legislation within
the EU appear to be isolated. Generally, the map shows concerns for a lack of flexible EU legislation to tackle the shifting population demographics and for the culture of extreme budget cuts and their effects. Ultimately, however, the map indicates that the productivity of older people is privileged over all else.

Migration of care workers: Where are the winner and loser places as the European populations age? The U.K. government recognizes the need for a cosmopolitan approach to the ageing of its population by regulating the recruitment of international health personnel from specific regions, and thereby helping to prevent these areas from finding themselves with insufficient resources and care workers to attend to their own populations. By placing the focus beyond governmental affairs, however, our mappings provide a sense of how the issue of care drain remains a footnote in the debate around ageing and its consequences. Other (non-European) ageing places are not recognized. First we explored to which extent the U.K. network on ageing is ‘cosmopolitan’, employing link analysis as well as a GeoIP tool. Using as a starting point the website Age U.K. we visualized a network of 376 connected websites concerned with ageing, finding that the U.K. network remains bounded by national and language borders. The rest of the world, and the far-flung source places of care workers, were not connected. The second strategy implied testing if there was any degree of recognition of the issue of care drain in the 376 websites. We learned that it is an ancillary issue in the debate, touched upon only briefly in sub-sections of documents structured around larger topics and formatted in presentation slides and PDFs that circulate amongst very specific audiences. When mentioned it remains a placeless issue, not associated with specific regions or countries. Care drain is not a mainstream issue in the ageing debate.

5.3 Producing critical neo-cartographies of ageing issue layers and resource maps

The third layer of our analysis is dedicated to a critical cartographic mapping of the ageing issue, deploying Jeremy Crampton’s call to ‘map, or be mapped!’ Crampton provides insights about how to consider place-making activities (the map as rhetoric, serving interests) and how to produce alternatives (counter-mapping). From a practical standpoint counter-mapping is a realization of critical cartography that appropriates the techniques of the cartographer in order to produce alternative cartographies that have the power to compete or contest others. The ideas of counter-mapping
and of appropriation become more concrete with neo-cartographic tools (the online mapping devices), especially the layer. Through platforms such as Google Maps and Google Earth (but also others) a user can annotate a map and create mash-ups and layers of information that can be shared and circulated. To further elaborate on this point, we refer to Lisa Parks who wrote a critical response to the ‘Crisis in Darfur’ layer, one of the Global Awareness layers available in Google Earth, especially taking aim at the notion of mapping as ‘information intervention’. Parks’s ‘layer critique’ is multilayered itself, pointing to issues such as the multi-temporality of the ‘Crisis in Darfur’ layer, whereby there is a lack of specificity of the dates accompanying the images. For Parks the when is as important as the where. By presenting a collection of past images a map can become a space of ‘mourning’ rather than a platform for action, or intervention. Additionally, Parks advises engagement with the modes of intervention suggested by digital satellite images, which are a part of the layer. The distance provided by the satellite image could allow for the events on the ground to unfold in the language of patterns, structures, movement, flows, recurrence, quantity as well as proximity of one act of violence to another that could work as an invitation for the user to interpret social situations in ways distinctive from the mournful gaze. We approached Parks’s layer critique as both an admonition as well as a guide. Will our maps withstand Parks-like critique, and how may we add to maps with the use of layers? The results of our work are a series of critical mappings on ageing that take the form of cartographic issue layers, placed atop maps to visualize the different manners in which locations across Europe are being crafted into places with ageing issues.

How is ageing creating care worker abundant and care worker deficient places? The private employment sector, through job agencies and job portals, are actively recruiting Polish care workers to work in Western European countries. These actors actively define Poland as a source and provider of care workers, opening up questions regarding consideration for the local ageing population as well as the winner and loser states in an ageing Europe and amongst the participants of the Year of Active Ageing. For the mapping we used the Polish care worker migration issue, and its places. We searched the Polish local domain Google search engine (google.pl) for job portals and the respective openings for care workers. On the day of the query there were 27 job offers for Polish nationals to work in Poland, while in Germany there were a total of 266 openings, United Kingdom 56, Belgium 19, the Netherlands 17, Switzerland 17 and Austria 4. We also collected the names of employment agencies (in the jobs portals) that were acting as brokers, together with their locations, adding them to the care worker mediator map.
Needless to say the demand for Polish care workers was greater outside of the country than inside, and there are what one could call recipient countries, especially Germany and the U.K. Here we raise the question of the map issue-fying EU care worker migration, one which could encourage EU policy, facilitated by the occasion of the Year of Active Ageing and the AGE Platform Europe. We sought to put the issue on the European map.

How are locations across Europe defining themselves as resourced, ageing places? We repurposed search engine results in order to provide an exploratory description of how places across Europe are defining themselves as ageing places. Here we consider Europe as a resource for ageing and its issues, and in doing so ask about a place’s contributions or offerings to the scenarios of an ageing Europe. We queried the terms [ageing] using the local search engines of 22 European countries, retained the first set of results for all countries, and selected and visualized striking ones on an annotated resource map of an ageing Europe, in the manner of a country’s or region’s map of natural resources or products for export. For example, an organization working in Spain asks, what do you want to be when you grow old? In Italy we found the Grandmother Hypothesis, which suggests that the number of grandmothers is proportional to the well-being of a nation (for they care for the young), while in the Czech Republic there are cooking courses on anti-ageing cuisine. Finally, taking into account that food has been a recurrent theme, we performed more queries, where we again treat European places as resources, providing us with clippings for what could become an anti-ageing cookbook. The food mapping could be seen as a contemporary means of filling in the notion of ageing place. Where ageing places, in name, once concerned the secrets of diet and social life in locations where people grow the oldest, now they are everywhere, or at least all over Europe, with issues as well as diets.

That is, we compared our approach to studying European ageing places to that of those exceptional locations where people grow unusually old – the Greek, Japanese and Italian islands as well as the Costa Rican peninsula. The tradition of portraying the longevous stems from the 1973 National Geographic article, ‘Every Day Is a Gift When You Are over 100’ (Leaf, 1973). In the article Alexander Leaf and the photographer, John Launois, made portraits of the longest-living people (at that time considered to be in Abkhazia in the Caucasus mountains, the Vilcabamba valley in Ecuador and the Hunza region of Pakistan), leading to further work into the places and secrets of old age. We contrasted our approach to studying ageing places by first pointing out a difference in emphasis between ageing as biological fact, being overcome in certain places, and as matter of concern, as witnessed.
by the activity around the European Year of Active Ageing as well as the European national debates and legislation concerning the retirement age on the rise. Another difference in emphasis is that we are not highlighting the discovery of special ageing places and the extraordinary personal achievement of advanced lifespan in the style of the *National Geographic* article. Yet we have learned from the work into exceptional longevity. We took Europe and its ageing places as ones with resources, anti-ageing tips, shopping lists and cuisine. As we pointed out, people ageing across Europe are not necessarily the homogeneous cohorts with the shared environments of the respective mountains, islands, valleys and peninsulas studied to date. Rather, together with a diversity of ongoing concerns, there could be said to be a normalcy to ageing well in Europe that results from the issue mapping at hand.

Ultimately, the mappings produced using the three methods (social, risk and critical neo-cartography) offer descriptions of the state of affairs around the ageing of Europe, and raise issues, too. Does the European Year, and its related initiatives such as platforms, ‘Europeanize’ the ageing issue agenda, lending lesser urgency to national and local concerns such as women's issues and third age education in Poland? Are issue hierarchies, produced by a mapping of dominant actors, useful inputs in the debate opened by the Slovenian newspaper about the genuflection of newcomer states to a European project? Like the social cartography, the risk cartography also focused on the power of decision-makers and victim states (in Ulrich Beck's vocabulary). Should the European Year address care worker migration as a European ageing project, and such consequences as better and lesser ageing places? The critical cartography not only provides us with sensitivity towards describing any issue-mapping project as an information intervention, especially when producing an archive over a monitor, when they also could have as their goal a humanitarian intervention. The online mapping tools, or the neo-cartography discussed in tandem with critical cartography, offer means to annotate, mash-up, and remap, particularly with so-called layers. By creating layers, we experimented with resource maps, and gazetteers, showing the contributions of ageing places, at once embracing as well as redoing the European project of making ageing into an issue.