An Ageless State of Mind

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the question: Can Experience Design be applied to create a perception shift from elderly as a burden to elderly as a resource for society?

This is done by researching the social norms about ageing and the aged in Swedish society. To conduct this research I put together a focus group of 7 people with different professional backgrounds and ages ranging from 23 to 74. In four workshops I used design-led research methods to research these “mental models”. Using participatory theatre techniques we investigated the personal view of the ageing process. And through discussions and design thinking we articulated the often unspoken social norms.

In the workshops we defined our current social norms regarding ageing as Aged Thinking. A counter philosophy was developed called Ageless Thinking. In order to create a change in mindset from Aged Thinking to Ageless Thinking a tool was developed called the Enticon. With this tool people can show what their focus is in life right now regardless of their chronological age.

The Enticon was introduced at the Konstfack Spring Exhibition 2013 and also as a web based application.

Keywords

social norms, ageing, aged thinking, ageless thinking, chronological age, experienced age, the enticon.
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1. Introduction

Can society see elderly as a resource instead of a burden? Through Experience Design and design-led research this project critically investigates the social norms about ageing that exist in our society and how we can see elderly as a resource instead of a burden.

The project aims at proposing a set of new social norms that will enable a society that is inclusive towards people of all ages.

The research question is: Can Experience Design be applied to create a perception shift from elderly as a burden to elderly as a resource for society?

My name is Max Kleijberg, I am a designer from the Netherlands and I believe that design can create wishful change in the way we live our lives. I received my Bachelors degree in Industrial Product Design from the The Hague University in the Netherlands. Next to my studies I’ve worked for 9 years in a nursing home for elderly in Rijswijk, the Netherlands. The elderly I worked with are dependent, in different levels, from help with their daily life activities like eating, cleaning and dressing. I also worked with people with early and far developed forms of dementia.

The job provided me with some pocket money and it gave me a nice break from the Math and Science classes at university. It was energising to work together with my colleagues to provide care to the residents and to bring some joy to their repetitive days. I learned many life lessons over a cup of coffee with 80-something year olds, it was a rewarding job.

From my experience the elderly home felt like a bubble secluded from the life outside. A place where people live that are not seen as integral part of society. Why is it like that? Can’t we see the value of the elderly? I started to wonder how I could apply my design skills to improve the situation of the elderly in our society.

This project is situated in Sweden. When I write about “our society” I refer to the Swedish society. In my thesis I draw parallels and comparisons to societies in the United States, the Netherlands and Singapore because they deal with similar issues related to a changing demographic.

In our society the word elderly is commonly interpreted as an individual that has an age of 65 or older, throughout the thesis I will hold to this definition.

Changing demographics
Governments in Europe, the United States and different countries in Asia like Japan and Singapore are concerned with an ageing population. We all hear the numbers of a changing demographic
frequently in the news. There is a growing fear amongst politicians that there are not going to be enough resources to be able to provide care for the elderly in the future as we do today.

The healthcare systems need to be reformed in order to continue to deliver high quality care in the future. Social services are being privatised. Governments like those in the Netherlands and Sweden, started to pull away from the responsibility of providing healthcare. The patient will increasingly depend on care provided by their social circle. In preparation for an ageing population in times of an economical crises, the Dutch government has the following plan: “Frail elderly, the sick and the disabled have to organise their healthcare themselves from now on. The government will only open up a budget to pay for professional care in case the family, friends and neighbours really cannot provide the care themselves. (...) It seems that the government is leading on to a new motto that should help to cope with the ageing population in the decades to come: help each other.” (translation from Dutch, Herderscheê, 7 Feb. 2013)

From my experience I know that a lot of families are already involved in providing care to their sick or frail loved ones. There are of course differences, but many families make sure that grandma can live as long as possible at home before asking assistance from healthcare organisations. Can we demand even more from this group of people, or can we use other or create new networks that support the frail individuals in our society?

“Active ageing”
Active Ageing is a buzzword that is used worldwide by governments and organisations. We want our elderly to stay active so they can live longer at home which should reduce healthcare costs. We also need this group to be active participants in society to maintain our economical growth. Though as soon as you hit the retirement age (around 65 in northern Europe) you’re dismissed as incompetent senior citizen. One could argue that different rules apply only due to your age. The same society that promotes you to stay “active” is the society that takes away your tools to be active.

Staying active at a older age is not only about being medically healthy. It’s about the ability to realise ambitions at any stage of life. Some of us want to go on a holiday, others want to start a new career or would like to learn Spanish. When doctors help us vitalise physically, society should help us vitalise socially.

It’s not just the demographic that is ageing, we are all ageing
A perception shift is needed, we need to start recognising the power of elderly in society instead of dismissing them as incompetent citizens. The Singaporean writer Koh Buck Song notes: “As the world’s population continues to age rapidly, Singapore has taken many steps to prepare for a very
different future with a higher proportion of older people who will live longer. But is enough being done? Is a paradigm shift needed to change mindsets from “aged thinking” to “ageless thinking”? (2012)

Through my research I defined Aged and Ageless Thinking like so: Aged thinking is the believe that age determines your behaviour and what you value in life. Ageless Thinking is the believe that age does not determine your behaviour or what you value in life. Aged thinking distorts our understanding of what it means to age, it links to ageism. Ageism, coined by Robert Neil Butler in 1969, is “the institutional and interpersonal subordination of young and old to the imperatives of capitalist patriarchy. As we discuss, ageism is rooted in the institutions of society (the family, the economy, and the educational system) as well as in the character structure of human beings.” (Katsiaficas, Kirkpatrick 1987: 261)

Ageism stems from an obsolete idea that we have of what it means to be “old”. It is a form of discrimination that devalues an individual because of their chronological age. It has a harmful effect that is often not acknowledged. People lose their job or are refused service because of their age. Individuals are qualified or disqualified for tasks, work or social status according to their age. One particular feature of ageism sets it apart from most other types of prejudice: we are all its potential victims. (Kirkwood 1999: 17).

Aged Thinking brings forth ageism and supports a society that excludes and marginalise its members on the base of their age. Ageless Thinking enables an Ageless Society: a society that is inclusive towards people from all ages. Can Experience Design be applied to create such a shift of perception?

In order change the collective mindset towards Ageless Thinking we need to address the root causes of ageism, namely the current social norms and prejudices about ageing and the aged.

**Why this project in the field of Experience Design?**

The issues related to an ageing population have been and are addressed in many different fields. Politicians are rewriting policy of for example retirement regulations. Entrepreneurs create start ups that target the growing elderly consumer market. Healthcare institutions are having to reorganise their services to be able to provide high standard care with less resources. Industrial designers develop products and services that older people can use. But the problem of the separation of age groups in our society is ambiguous. It asks for a transformation on the level of the the way we think and act, in the way we experience ageing and the aged in our society.

In order to address this problem methods like design and systems thinking should be explored in an interdisciplinary way. Experience Design uses those methods and includes also
future forecasting as a tool to aim for a future vision. Interdisciplinarity together with systems thinking and design, target the root of the problem at hand. The framework of Experience Design provides me with the freedom to research the issue free from political or economical agendas. It allows me to develop change through prototyping and trying out.

A designed experience then, is a tool to instigate a transformation of mental models, in this case the social norms to do with ageing and the aged. A transformative experience for an individual can lead to the transformation of common understanding and mental models in society. But change is not only instigated through individuals. Experience Design has the possibility to bring forth concepts for change at political level, or at the level of established companies etc.

Design in general but Experience Design especially, has the tools to address and solve ambiguous problems. This project deals with such ambiguous problem. I allow myself therefore to question the problem as stated in order to create an understanding of the underlying factors and find a strategy to create change.

**Researching social norms**

*Social norms (norms) (sociology)*

*Common standards within a social group regarding socially acceptable or appropriate behaviour in particular social situations, the breach of which has social consequences. The strength of these norms varies from loose expectations to unwritten rules. Norms (such as those for social roles) are internalized in socialization. Functionalists emphasize that society, its institutions, and social order depend on social norms, but within a society different social groups also have their own norms.*

(Chandler, Munday 2011)

For my thesis project, I worked with an interdisciplinary focus group of 7 “Experts” to research the social norms about ageing and the aged in Swedish society. The Experts have diverse personal and professional backgrounds. Over the course of 1,5 months I conducted 4 workshops that I developed with the aim to investigate this topic and co-design the principles of an Ageless Society. In the workshops, I have used and developed methods from the Theatre Arts and participatory design practice.
Goals of the workshops:
1. To create an interdisciplinary group of people that works together and learns from each other.
2. To investigate the social norms about ageing and the aged in our society currently: the Age Society (aged thinking).
3. To develop the principles of an Ageless Society (ageless thinking).
4. To explore what types of services, activities or experiences we might want to have in an Ageless Society.

In the coming chapters I will first explain the development of the human life span and the effect this has on how we experience age and the ageing process. Then I will elaborate on the formation of the focus group, the development of the workshops and the outcome of my research.

**Part I: Background Research**

**2. Old Age is a New Thing**

Definitions:
Traditionally old age is defined as starting from sixty-five years. There is, however nothing magical or scientific about this or any other number in defining old age. (Butler 2008: 13)

**Life expectancy** is based on the average number of years that each sex can expect to live, under specific conditions.

**Life span** is the genetically determined length of life of a specific animal species under the best of environmental circumstances.

(Butler 2008: 4)

**Life expectancy**

Life expectancy has been increasing since the early years of human kind See figure 1. For a long period we barely had time to reproduce ourselves, the average age of death was 18 years. The continuation of our species highly depended on individuals that would be able to live long enough to reproduce and raise the children. The extension of human life expectancy was made possible when humans started using tools and later developed medicines.
The phenomenon that most individuals get to reach old age is quite a recent development in human history. “For the first time in recorded history we are beginning to see the entire life cycle unfolding for a majority of the population in developed nations. Infancy, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle age, and old age have become expectable stages in the lives of nearly all.” (Butler 2008: 14)

Medicine became increasingly successful in defeating diseases that humans would previously die from. This resulted in public health measures and healthy lifestyles. Over the last decades also education and rising wealth contributed to a significant acceleration of the lengthening life expectancy, this is expected to continue.

The future of longevity

There are scientists that stepped up claiming that they can master our evolution. Among them is Aubrey de Grey, a charismatic British researcher who says that ageing is curable. According to him the first human being who will live up to 1000 years has already been born.

For many it is a provocative idea that ageing isn’t inevitable. Most of us are born and raised with the idea that we will die one day, our grandparents are our role models for how we would be when we reach their age. It is difficult to imagine that all of that might change dramatically.
De Grey sees ageing as a disease that should be cured. His plan is to defeat the different factors that cause human tissue to age. He calls this approach Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senscence (SENS). (Sens Web.)

But the science community is divided in its opinion. In 2005 the MIT Technology Review announced a $20,000 prize for any molecular biologist who could demonstrate that biogerontologist Aubrey de Grey’s “strategies was “so wrong that it was unworthy of learned debate.” The purpose of the challenge was to determine whether de Grey’s proposals were science or fantasy. (Technology Review 2006)

The judges of the “SENS Challenge” received five submissions, but none won the prize money. The judges concluded “SENS exist in a middle ground of yet-to-be-tested ideas that some people may find intriguing but which others are free to doubt.” (Technology Review 2006)

“At root, the reason I’m not in favor of aging is because I like life as I know it.” de Grey 2003

It is unclear if there is any truth in de Grey’s ideas. But whether or not we will be able to defeat ageing and ultimately death, a fact remains that human life expectancy is increasing every day. What do we do with all this bonus time on our hands?

3. The Separation of Age-Groups

Name giving and labels
We divide our lives in periods for the different age groups. Maybe this is our way of coping with our very long lives, to understand what is expected of us and our behaviour when we reach certain ages.

The lengthening of the human life expectancy brought about the invention of new words and terms related to age and ageing. Every period in life is given a name that is associated with the age group:

Adolescence (1904, G.Stanley Hall): the period following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult.

Teenager (1920s): a person aged from thirteen to nineteen years.

Youth (1960s, Kenneth Kenniston): the period between childhood and adult age (young people considered as a group).

Empty nest (1960s): the period in parents’ midlife when children grow up and leave home.

Prime of life generation (1960s): applied to those between fifty and sixty-four years of age.

Young-old: applied to those between sixty-five and seventy-five years of age.
Old-old: seventy-five and above.
The two last terms were initially coined by Bernice Neugarten to differentiate among healthy and less well-functioning older persons.
(Butler 2008 and New Oxford American Dictionary)

Already in the way we speak about age and the different stages of life we separate age groups. This might be one of the reasons why many of us don’t like to celebrate their birthday: it is a reminder that sooner than later, we will belong to the “old-old”.

The way we use words extends in how we look upon other people. This is why we see not only a separation of age groups in linguistics but also in every day life. The different groups often work, live and are social together, but not across age groups. The youngest and oldest in our society rarely get to meet each other.

Figure 2.
Intergenerational conflicts

Besides the separation of age groups we also see a separation of generations in our society. Generations are often categorised and given a name, for example:

1925-1945: The Silent Generation
1946-1964: The Baby Boom Generation
1965-1979: Generation X
1980-2000: Generation Y or Millennials
2000-present: The New Silent Generation or Generation Z

Figure 3. This picture and many different versions of it circulate on social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

It seems to me that these terms are invented to not only show the characteristics of a group of people with the same age, but also to point out the difference between them. And differences might lead to conflicts.

Butler writes: “Intergenerational conflicts are part of world history. In 1968, worldwide youth uprisings marked the beginning of modern generational politics. Since then, politicians and
journalists periodically have warned that a new and awesome clash of the generations is in the making because older people are draining society’s resources at the expense of the young.” (...) “If such a confrontation should indeed arise, it will result from poor planning, economic disparities, political manipulation, or media hype. So far there is no evidence of significant intergenerational conflicts in American society or elsewhere.” (2008: 31)

The danger of “Apocalyptic Demography”
This attitude towards ageing and the aged in our culture might lead to “Apocalyptic Demography”. This “is the catastrophic projection of the burden to society of an increasing aging population abound. The prevailing belief is that an increasing dependent aging population means increasing demands on the resources of society, including health care resources, in the face of competing interests and diminishing, or at best finite, resources.” (Robertson 1990)

Some politicians have worked especially hard to push the idea that the old are benefiting at the expense of the young. (Butler 2008: 32). In 2004 the Swedish minister of Finance Pär Nuder, introduced a new label for the Swedish generation born in the 1940s. Nuder called this group “köttberg” which translates to “meat mountain”! This new label caused quite some controversy in Swedish politics and media. The word originates from the term “beef mountain” that is used in European politics to denote an overproduction of meat. The beef mountain is the amount of beef that the market cannot digest.

What Nuder meant was that there will be so many older people in the near future that it is unclear what their role in society is and how we will deal with this change in the demography. The name Köttberg implicates that this age group is an economical burden for the Swedish society. There is no place for this age group on the labour market and there is no money to support them. The statement that there is not enough means to support the social security of the elderly is questionable: people from all ages receive the benefits of a social state.

By using this word, Nuder made his standpoint very clear, there could potentially be a large number of people sharing this standpoint. It clearly represents the worries many of us have about the ageing society. The label Köttberg is still used in the media as a point of reference to the economical problem that Nuder pointed out in 2004.

This is an example where a politician represents the interests of specific age groups, in this case the interests of the younger generations of Swedish society. In reaction to this other politicians or political parties will defend the rights and interests of the older age groups. Thus the emergence of apocalyptic demography.

I argue that apocalyptic demography is a way to win votes rather than solving real social issues related to an ageing population. If we hold on to these political and cultural structures we
maintain a society that separates age groups. Instead of provoking intergenerational conflicts we should remodel our society in order to enable people from all ages to contribute their value to the community.

4. Mental Models and Ageism

I claim that it is our social norms about ageing and the aged that keep these political and cultural structures in place. Our “Aged Thinking” leads to misconceptions about people in other age groups and can lead to ageism: marginalising people because of their age.

Robert Butler introduced the word Ageism in 1969, the word is now part of the English language. “Ageism takes shape in stereotypes and myths, outright disdain and dislike, sarcasm and scorn, subtle avoidance, and discriminatory practices in housing, employment, pension arrangements, health care, and other services. Older persons are subject to physical, emotional, social, sexual, and financial abuse. They are the focus of prejudice regarding their capacity for work and sexual intimacy, which Freud described as the two most important human activities. Taking away the validation of work or purposeful activities and demeaning the capacity for love are surely the most profound forms of age prejudice.” (Butler 2008: 40)

In the case of the “meat mountain” example, this is very clearly discriminating a certain group of people. “Some studies suggest that older persons prefer to be called older persons, not the elderly. Nor do they generally like euphemisms such as senior citizens and golden agers.” (Butler 2008: 57)

I believe that the effects of ageism on individuals is underestimated. The older person feels ignored and not taken seriously. Ageism can cause depression which leads to sickness. “Older persons may turn ageist prejudice inward, absorbing, accepting, and identifying with the discrimination.” (Butler 2008: 41).

It is alarming that we don’t see the parallels between ageism and other forms of discrimination. In effect we are discriminating against ourselves. But maybe this makes sense when we read what Butler says about this: “Behind ageism is corrosive narcissism, the inability to accept our fate, for indeed we are all in love with our youthful selves, as is reflected in the yearning behind the expression “salad days”.” (Butler 2008: 44) Many of us are in denial about our personal ageing process. It seems so far away, we won’t become “old-old”.

An interesting example of ageism is that many believe that older persons are feeling lonely. Research proves this to be wrong. There are more youngsters that feel lonely than elderly people
(see figure 2). This might have something to do with that people change when they grow older. There are different needs. Younger people impose their own fears upon the elderly.

Loneliness decreases significantly with age.

![Percentage of people that feel lonely.](image)

Figure 4. Source: AARP. Loneliness among Older Adults

**Ageism on T.V.**
The media is for a great deal conditioning us in how we perceive older persons or the process of ageing. Some facts:
Less than 2 percent of prime-time television characters are sixty-five or older, although this group is 12.7 percent of the population.
- According to one study, approximately 70 percent of older men and more than 80 percent of older women seen on television are portrayed disrespectfully, treated with little if any courtesy, and often looked at as “bad”.
- Although Americans who are forty and over are 42 percent of the American population, more than twice as many roles are cast with actors who are under forty.
(Butler 2008: 42,43)

**Transforming cultural sensibility**
Butler says “We can treat the psychosocial disease I call “ageism” by working to transform cultural sensibility and legislative initiatives. But ageism remains both gross and subtle, and omnipresent, despite the fact that prejudice against age is a prejudice against everyone. We all chance to become its ultimate victims as longevity increases.” (Butler 2008: 53)

Through this MFA thesis project I aim to create an understanding of the personal experience of ageing. I research how Experience Design can hack the system that holds the current social norms in place.
5. System Thinking: Design-Led Research of Social Norms

We have seen that the continuously growing life expectancy changes the way we experience older age. Older people are increasingly actively part of society, but feel excluded from society because of the separations of age groups.

I have discussed that economical, political and cultural structures keep these patterns in place. I argue that the underpinning reason for this are our mental models. Using the iceberg model we can see a system emerging that explains that the increasing longevity challenges our existing social norms about ageing and the aged (see figure 5).

![Figure 5. The iceberg model](image-url)
6. Researching Social Norms: Focus Group

In order to research the social norms I put together a focus group. The participants, or experts, were selected on the basis of their professional and personal backgrounds. To challenge our current social norms and start thinking in terms of a society that is inclusive towards people from all ages the experts were also selected on age: the age range of the experts is from 23 to 74. One of the aims of the workshops was to create a mini version of an Ageless Society.

My intent with the workshops is that the Experts learn from each other through their professional expertise but also through their personal experiences. I had them fill in a questionnaire that had the aim to understand more about their personal background and ideas for this research topic.

The professional background of the participants:
1 Bioentrepreneur with Biomedicine background
1 Bioentrepreneur and Chemical Laboratory Technician with Microbiology background.
1 Urban Planner
1 Social Worker
1 Curator and Writer
1 Physiotherapist and Health Informatics specialist
1 Mime artist

The success of the project comes in conjunction with the degree of success of the interdisciplinary focus group. My role in the workshops is that of a facilitator of the interdisciplinary work. I therefore outlined criteria for a successful interdisciplinary focus group for this project:
- The experts participate equally in the workshops.
- The experts learn from each other.
- The experts inspire each other to think critically.
- The experts are exploring the topic together.
- There is an exchange of knowledge, experience (and perhaps wisdom) amongst the experts.
- Through discussion, visualisation and performing (doing and acting) arrises a working language that all participants understand and feel comfortable with using.
- The group is successful if it brings fort a micro version of an Ageless Society.
7. Process and Methods

The workshops are developed to facilitate an exchange between the designer and the participants (See figure 6).

1. The designer designs the experience of the workshop for the participants.
2. The participants take part in the experience during the workshop, they learn from the exercises and from each other. They are creative and develop opinions regarding the research topic.
3. The outcome of the exercises of the workshops provide the designer with tools that he uses to continue his design process, to refine the goals of the project and to define the aims for the next workshop.

It is a continues loop over the course of 4 workshops.

Scripts are made for all the exercises and activities in the workshops. They are attached to this paper as reference in the appendix.

The workshop space

The workshops will take place at Konstfack. In a rectangular space that is normally used for meetings and lectures. For the purpose of the workshops the space is cleared from most of its tables and chairs. There is just a seating corner with a couch and a low wooden table. There is a table with coffee, tea and sweets. There is a whiteboard, and according to the purpose of the workshops there will be materials to work with.

The main priority is that everybody feels comfortable in the space. During some of the activities the participants might be asked to move things in the space around to reorganise. The participants are supposed to make tea and coffee for themselves. The space will look similar in all workshops. If things need to be adapted for exercises the participants will be helping me doing that.
This should support the feeling of ownership of the space, it will be our safe place to work in. The workshops are documented through video and audio. The participants are made aware of this.

**Process**

The process follows the double diamond structure that is often used in design research projects (see figure 5)

![Double Diamond Process](image)

Figure 7.

Workshop 1 (W#1): Social Norms, the bodily experience.
In this workshop we discover our personal attitude towards ageing by i.a. going through exercises that allow us to act from our feelings rather than rationalising our opinions.

Workshop 2 (W#2): Social Norms, the linguistic experience.
In this workshop we use i.a. design thinking to define an aspect that we will further investigate.

Workshop 3 (W#3): Ageless Thinking
In this workshop we develop a philosophy of what it means to think in an Ageless way.

Workshop 4 (W#4): Ageless Thinking in Context
In this workshop we research how Ageless Thinking can be put into the context of our current society.
One rule
I imposed only one rule that should be obeyed in the workshops: don’t ask anyone their age. In order to realise a society that doesn’t judge people by their date of birth we need to start somewhere. I have lived by this rule also in my personal life. Every time I wanted to ask someone’s age I held back and asked myself why I wanted to know.

It turned out that most of the time when I wanted to know someone’s age, their physical appearance didn’t match their behaviour. Meaning that the behaviour they performed was not what I expected. Their appearance was either younger or older than their behaviour. Apparently in my mind behaviour has an age too.

Another major motivation for me was to compare myself to the other. If I would know that this person is way older or younger than me I knew where I would stand in comparison to the other in the spheres of intelligence, social status, life achievements or physical appearance.

Developing a language to cross borders
The start of a project is a crucial moment in the creating of an interdisciplinary group. From my experience of being part of interdisciplinary teams, the project usually starts with introducing yourself. This moment sets the tone for the rest of the work, it is the first impression that everybody gets from each other. First impressions are lasting impressions so this moment often feels laden.

What people tend to do when they introduce themselves in these situations is to introducing their professional self. This is apparently the way we feel most comfortable. We feel safe in our discipline, we know the rules and we know the language.

In interdisciplinary projects I find it often counterproductive when this happens. If the goal is to work in a team in order to learn from each other it is above all important to create an atmosphere in which all team members feel comfortable to share and ask questions.

This is especially relevant in this project because the topic is a very personal one. My main concern is to make the participants feel safe to share and be creative. Therefore I created a framework that allows everybody to be vulnerable and share something personal at the very first moment they meet. I did that by asking everybody to bring an object or picture that is dear to them. During the workshop I paired the participants up and asked them to share the story connected to the object. The person they shared their story with would then retell the story to the rest of the group.

The objects that they brought were of various nature. The sharing of the stories gave an immediate insight in the personalities interests and sometimes the professions of the participants. We were speaking from our personal language rather than our professional language, this was a good basis to start the project from.
Participatory Theatre

Social norms are embodied in our gestures and actions, they direct our behaviour. To investigate the social norms I wanted the experts to use their tacit knowledge, their intuition rather than letting them rationalising their opinions. I wanted to work with methods from the theatre arts to start researching the social norms around ageing.

I worked together with Sara Ribbenstedt, a student from the department of Mime at Stockholm’s Dramatiska Högskola to develop the exercises for this workshop. With her knowledge and experience with the theatre arts we developed Participatory Theatre exercises. Participatory Theatre (PT) is a research technique in which social problems are dramatically presented in order to collectively test potential solutions. Participatory Theatre has the aim to create new practical knowledge that is grounded in immediate experience and direct experimentation. (Quinlan 2009: 120)

We based the exercises on one simple principle: first do, then talk. The exercises were ultimately a lived experience that was shared by all the participants. We could then use this experience as a platform for discussion.

The PT exercises were used in the first workshop mainly to start exploring the topic and getting more clear with personal feelings about growing older. The discussions that followed the experience of the exercises were valuable for the research and a learning experience for all participants.

Design Thinking and Experience Prototyping

In order to envision a future, let go of the norm and think out of the usual patterns I used Design Thinking methods in the workshops. Brainstorm tools were an important part of this and proved to provoke valuable discussions in this particular focus group.

The beginning of each workshop was usually led by an Experience Prototyping session. In these sessions I tried out concepts or design proposals for Ageless Thinking. The result of these try-outs were then used to lead the rest of the workshop.
Part III: Results

8. “Ageing, what does it mean?”

An important outcome of the first workshop was the striking difference in the expectation of the experience of being 80, between the younger and the older participants. The exercise Pretending figure 8 (see also appendix), was about exploring personal expectations of physical behaviour when growing older. The participants were asked to simply walk around. They were then asked to keep on walking but imagining that they are twenty years old. After some suggestive comments from the exercise leader the participants came back to their present self. Then they were asked to walk around while imagining that they were 80 years old.

When becoming eighty the younger participants all slowed down, while the behaviour of the older participants barely changed.

In the discussion the younger participants explained that they used examples from their social network of people that were eighty. They supposed that their bodily behaviour would be much slower compared to their current age. The older participants explained that they don’t see themselves declining at all, in fact they see many possibilities for development at a later age.

Figure 8. A still from the documentation footage of the exercise “Pretending”.

“It is so far away that it seems as if it is never going to happen.”
Quote from one of the participants after exercise “Pretending”.

Of course it is much harder to imagine being old if you are so far away from that stage. Younger people don’t understand the process of ageing. That the body changes is something that we are all aware of, but this does not necessarily have to limit us in our ambitions at older age. In school we learn all about what happens when we go through puberty, but we barely learn anything about growing older. There is nobody to advice us so no wonder we have a wrong pattern of expectation of the process of ageing.

“You learn how to go to school and be young, but you don’t learn how to be old.”
Quote from one of the participants after exercise “Pretending”.

After the theatre exercises we realised that our perception of the ageing process is so strongly linked to our body, our physical appearance and our body functions. We live in a culture in which we want to look younger than our actual age, we want to appear youthful, strong, healthy and up to date. But what does it mean that we want that? Are we scared to age? One of the older participants noted: “It gives hope to younger people when they see an old person that looks young and happy.”

“When you’re younger you want to look older rather than younger. When you’re older you want to look younger rather than older.”
Quote from one of the participants after exercise “Pretending”.

9. Age ≠ Age

For the exercise “What’s my age?” the participants were randomly divided into pairs. One was the actor the other the guesser. The actor would get a piece of paper that had an age printed on it, e.g. 14 or 52. The actor had to embody this age. According to the body language and behaviour of the actor the guesser then had to guess the right age. The exercise was described to the participants in a very non specific way to let the participants free in their own interpretation.

The exercise had the aim to find out what the expectation is of the bodily behaviour of people from different ages and to let preconceptions come to the surface.

It turned out that the younger and older ages come with the most common preconceptions and were therefore easiest to guess, but everything between thirty and seventy was more difficult.
This exercise allowed the participants to emphasise their preconceptions about certain age groups. We found out that the younger participants commonly believe that elderly behave slow, have pain in their body and look unhappy. But these clichés are only true for the extreme old. The same goes for the cliché behaviour of people in their teenage years. Some of us think that teenagers have lots of energy, others think that teenagers behave lazy and uninterested.

When acting like someone between thirty and fifty, the participants explained that they focussed on expressing professional success and stability. And when acting between sixty and seventy the participants tried to express happiness, satisfaction and clarity of mind.

Figure 9. A still from the documentation footage of the exercise “What’s my age?”.

“I tried to look happy. Like, now I’ve taken my pension, and now life begins again.”

Quote from one of the participants after exercise “Pretending”.

In our discussions afterwards we realised that these feelings of stability, happiness and satisfaction that the younger participants expressed when acting like an older age, were not only based on their preconception of that age group, but also on how they would like to feel and live their lives when they reach those ages.

While we discussed our preconceptions about ageing that surfaced during the exercises we learned that there are many different ways of living life at different stages of life, we re-invent ourselves all the time, also at older ages. One of the older participants strikingly noted:
“I felt much younger when I was forty than when I was twenty.”
Quote from one of the participants after exercise “Pretending”.

One can feel young at different phases in life, so what does it mean to feel young?

Figure 10. After the workshops I asked the participants to reflect their thoughts on a piece of paper. Some of them wrote down a thought, quote or question, others made a drawing, or in this case a graph.

The results of these exercises was the realisation that we can be “old” or “young” at different stages in life. Apparently our “chronological age” (the number) does not define this experience of being or feeling old or young: Chronological Age $\neq$ Experienced Age

So which factors do define our Experienced Age? In the workshop the following factors were addressed:
Chronological: the number.
Physical: how old our body looks.
Functional: how well our body functions.
Emotional well being: how comfortable we feel with our emotional well being.

What answer is it we are asking for when we ask someone: how old are you? Do we want to know a number, do we want to know how well their body functions, do we want to know how their emotional well being is? And does the number gives us a sufficient answer to the question?

“Young” or “old” status is often accredited to individuals based on their chronological -, physical - or functional age. These types of age are most obvious in people, most visible. As a result of this many individuals feel that their physical age should match their psychological age. It is much easier then to get credit for your psychological age from people in your surroundings.
How can we turn this around and make the psychological, emotional, intellectual age visible? The idea is that the value of chronological elderly is more obvious when psychological, emotional and intellectual age are visible or manifested.

Summarising:
When chronological younger people are asked what they expect from ageing past the age of 80 they relate mostly to the chronological, physical and functional aspects of ageing.
When chronological older people are asked what they expect from ageing past the age of 80 they relate more to intellectual and psychological age.
When both chronological younger and older people are asked what they expect, or remember from ageing between the ages of (roughly) 35 - 65, they all refer to the emotional aspect of ageing.

10. Ageing and language

*Every human act takes place in language. Every act in language brings forth a world created with others in the act of coexistence which gives rise to what is human.* (The Tree of Knowledge, Maturana, Varela, page 247)

The way we talk and the words we use define social relations between people and groups of people. An important topic of the research of social norms surrounded by ageing is therefore linguistics. Previously I described that when we talk about ageing or aspects of ageing we use words that we haven’t clearly defined. In this part of the research I aim to get a more detailed insight in what we actually say when we talk about ageing and the aged.

**Aspects of ageing**

Natasha Vita-More, artist, lecturer and transhumanist, defined six aspects of ageing:
1. Chronological age: How we define our number of years in existence.
   Chronological age is at best only a rough indication of functional age. Because age norms imposed by society work to contain behaviour, behaviour at a particular age cannot be assumed to be a reliable indication for the possibilities of that age.
2. Biological or Physical age: How we view age by physical signs. Physical age is an indication that the body is breaking down.
3. Functional age: How we function as a subset of biological age. Functional age is determined by vigor, flexibility, cardiovascular(aerobic) fitness, strength of the immune system, ability to concentrate, memory.
4. Psychological age: How old we feel we are. Our psychological age can effect memory loss, depression, lack of sexual desire. (subjective age)

5. Emotional age: How we adjust to circumstances that cause us to be rational or irrational. How we handle conflict and resolve misunderstandings are markers for our emotional maturity. Emotional age may follow chronological age, or may lag behind, or be ahead.

6. Intellectual age: How we think critically about ourselves and the world around us. The ability to reason and think critically can benefit our life experiences. Staying updated, flexible and curious about life can help to develop a youthful level of intelligence.

Source: AGELESS THINKING Creating Positive Transhuman Attitude (Talk given at Resources for Independent Thinking 1996)
By Natasha Vita-More

Transhumanists commonly strive for staying young on all of these facets. Young defined as something positive and old as something negative or undesirable. But these definitions are discussable. What if we put all these aspects of ageing on a scale from young to old, how would this be interpreted?

To research this within the focus group I defined 7 aspects of ageing. I included the aspects described above but slightly adapted the definitions.

1. Chronological age: The number of years in existence.
2. Physical age: This is the biological aspect of ageing, how old we look.
3. Functional age: Our physical abilities.
5. Intellectual age: Self development and curiosity.
6. Social age: Social engagement. How involved we are in social activities.
7. Psychological age: How old we feel we are.

I left the definitions open for interpretation. Obviously, the words young and old mean something different in the different aspects of ageing. For example an old physical age has a negative connotation while an old emotional age has a positive connotation. I researched how these were interpreted by the focus group.
The participants filled in the scales and I asked them to change words or definitions according to how they interpreted them or how they wanted to interpret them. As a result they defined the word “age” differently across the different scales. When comparing how the participants defined the scales we found significant differences between them.

We could all agree that chronological age has a linear scale: from 0 to death. (Un)Fortunately we can’t travel in time yet, so there is no way of going back to a younger chronological age, or skipping a few years. But it became more complex for the other aspects. What does it mean to be socially young or old for example. Or what does emotional age really mean?

The participants expressed that it felt liberating to be able to express age in a kinetic way. The different aspects of ageing are continuously changing, back and forth, up and down. As a result of this the Experienced Age is always changing, kinetic.

The Experienced Age is incomparable to a linear scale like that of the chronological age. It is undefinable by just a number. As a result of this a defined Experienced Age is a snapshot that represents the Experienced Age in a particular moment in time.

Figure 11. Scales of ageing.
But in order to create a system that allows people to express their experienced age, not in a number but in a kinetic way, we need to create a system that can compare the experienced age between individuals.

The idea arose that the Experienced Age is a state of mind or a place in life rather than defined by the young - old scale. In order to move away from age being defined by a number or labels like “young” and “old” we need to change the scales and leave chronological age out of the equation.

Three main questions:
How to create a system that can compare Experienced Age.
How to visualise this kinetic view on the development of an individual over the course of their life.
How to create a definition of the Experienced Age of an individual: a snapshot of the development of an individual.

Names and Labels
As discussed in the background research we have several different names and labels that we use in relation to our chronological age. Once an individual is classified as old it is difficult not to fall prey to the stigmas that belong to that label.

![Figure 12. Portraits from “Exactitudes” Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek.](image)

The above pictures with labels were used in the workshop about linguistics to provoke reactions and associations. The actual synonyms for the words old, retired and elderly are not very powerful, happy, or enabling, to say the least.
Old (adjective) refers to people being old
Definition: advanced in age
Synonyms: aged, along in years, ancient, broken down, debilitated, decrepit, elderly, enfeebled, exhausted, experienced, fossil, geriatric, getting on, gray, gay-aired, grizzled, hoary, impaired, inactive, infirm, mature, matured, not young, olden, oldish, over the hill, past one’s prime, seasoned, senile, senior, skilled, supernuuated, tired, venerable, versed, veteran, wasted.
Antonyms: fresh, new, young, youthful

Retired (adjective)
Definition: having withdrawn from active life
Synonyms: elderly, emerita, emeritus, in retirement, resigned, superannuated, discharged, humble, inactive, secluded, shy, withdrawn.
Antonyms: active, employed, working

Elderly
Definition: in old age
Synonyms: aged, aging, ancient, been around, declining, gray, hoary, long in tooth, lot of mileage, no spring chicken, old, olden, on last leg, over the hill, retired, tired, venerable.
Antonyms: young, youth.
Source: thesaurus.com

What is the effect on individuals when we appoint them labels on the basis of their chronological age? And if we were to design new labels, what do we want those to resemble? In several brainstorm sessions I investigated the meaning of words like old, retired and elderly. We also discussed the meaning of the Swedish word köttberg.

The older participants expressed not to identify themselves with these labels. They don’t feel part of those groups, even though they are addressed like that by others. They are not defending themselves because they are mature enough to realise that they are not part of a group if they don’t want to be part of it. The participants expressed that the labels create distances between age groups. Older people don’t want to belong to “the old people”. And younger people don’t understand that not all older people are “old people”. The participants agreed that these labels are too generic. Calling people old, marginalises them and has a negative connotation. So, what do we want possible alternative labels to say about us? Below a selection of the brainstorm output.
When we analysed the results of the brainstorms we realised that, regardless what age we have, we want others to perceive us as: Caring, wise, Loving, Loyal, Straight and Honest, Open Minded, Clever, Flexible, Fun, Cool, A Life Changer, Unique, Source of Ideas, Accepted, Empathetic, Reliable, Clever, Able, Sounding Board.

Labels that say something about our chronological age, disable rather than enable fruitful social relationships across ages. We want labels that we can be proud of no matter what age we have. We want the labels to say something about who we are, and what we do, instead of how we are “supposed to be” according to our age.
Part IV: Ageless Thinking

11. Aged Thinking: Ålderstrappa

A beautiful symbol of Aged Thinking is the Ålderstrappa: “Staircase of life”. It was used in the workshops to exemplify a chronological perception of ageing. In many Swedish households it is, or was, a familiar picture on the wall. It depicts the life of a man from his birth (0 years) until his death (100 years). Every step resembles a decade, with the 5th decade on the top of the staircase. Every step resembles a certain life status, we see a playing child, an adolescent in love, a family in the third decade of life, then career comes into focus and the family disappears. After the fifth decade the man loses his strength and descends the stairs. As the man descends the stairs he loses prestige and authority - the proudness of the man on top of the stairs stands in contrast to the miserable depiction of the man on the lower steps of life.

Figure 15. Foto Hans Koegel, Nordiska museet

This picture was regularly painted in various executions from the 17th to the 19th century. It reminds the viewer of the certain phases we “have to” go through in life. It should remind us of where we come from and where we go, it shows an obvious Christian background.

Ever since the 1970’s the picture has been rightfully critiqued because it depicts an outdated traditional society. Not only because of the outdated division of roles for men and women (the
woman only enters the picture when she gives the man a family). But also because of the outdated perception of what it means to grow older: Do we really descend the stairs, do we lose prestige and ambition?

Through the workshops we understood that this picture, that was painted hundreds of years ago, is unfortunately still an accurate depiction of how society perceives elderly: at the bottom of the staircase, secluded from active life and ready to die. We can say with certainty that the life expectancy at the time when this picture was painted was far below ten decades. What did the painter and the viewers really know about being aged like that? Now that people actually reach ages up to a hundred years and beyond, we notice that there are lots of different ways of growing old. The concept of a chronological age/life development like that on the Ålderstrappa is no longer justifiable. People want to reinvent themselves, start new careers, get a divorce at seventy years of age, remarry when they are eighty, go through spiritual journeys or educate themselves on later age.

The chronological age became less an indicator of:
- expected (social) behaviour and
- expected phase of life that people experience.
- expected values in life.

We live long and healthy lives and thus want to be able to “pull the strings” of our own lives, instead of having to conform to the social norms belonging to a specific age.

Ageless Thinking: your age does not dictate your behaviour or what you value in life.

12. Ageless Thinking: the Enticon

As discussed previously the way we constructed everyday life activities and social norms evolves around Aged Thinking. Ageless Thinking is a mindset has deep roots in our society. The workshops were a first attempt to change mindsets, namely those of the participants. It became clear that change happens in three phases:
1. The understanding of the current mindset.
2. The knowledge about another mindset.
3. A tool, and thus a choice to change your mindset.
The first two workshops were mainly about creating an understanding about our current mindset and the social norms that are derived from that. After that we have been working on creating a tool that will help us to change our mindset. We have looked at how we can express our experienced age. We moved then from expressing an “age” towards expressing our personal values and “life focus”. A goal was to create an understanding that life is not a linear path, and not everybody takes goes through the same phases in the same order. We want to describe live and its phases in a kinetic way rather than linear.

The tool that was developed through the workshops is called The Enticon. It identifies eight aspects of life that we value in our society and culture (figure 16):
- Professional career
- Family life
- Friends
- Spirituality
- Love life
- Social / Political engagement
- Care for the body
- (Self) Education and Curiosity

Figure 16. The Enticon
The aspects of life play significant or insignificant roles at different times in our life. We move up and down the scales over time. This journey is different for all individuals. There is no fixed pattern that people should follow, there is no descending of stairs. Instead we are able to reinvent ourselves along the way, we decide what strings to pull and when.

Thus our Experienced Age is not definable through a number but by showing what aspect of life is important to us at this moment in time. The word Enticon is a made up word, it comes from the Latin word entis which means: being.

In order to let people express their personal Enticon they fill for each aspect how important this is for them on a scale of 1 to 6 (see figure 17). 1 being unimportant, 6 being very important. This type of scale is called a Likert Scale. It measures subjective values, it is a snapshot and might be different for everyone.

![Figure 17. The different scales of the Enticon.](image)

During the workshops we used different versions of the Enticon to see what the effect is of using it (See Figure 18). It turned out not only to be a tool for Ageless Thinking but also a tool for tracking your personal development over time. It might as well be used to set future goals. Another important aspect is the sharing of your results. The participants liked to compare each other results and to discuss the meaning of the different aspects of life.
In the workshops we also discussed different ways of introducing the model for Ageless Thinking outside of our group. Two opportunities were identified:

1. The Konstfack Spring Exhibition.
2. Enticon, a mobile application.

The Konstfack Spring Exhibition is a place where the graduating students exhibit their final projects. I used this opportunity to create an interactive piece that engages people in participating in Ageless Thinking.

As in the workshops I wanted the exhibition to enable a change of mindset through the three different stages that I defined in chapter 12. My goals were thus:

- Make People aware of Aged Thinking.
- Present them with the Enticon as a tool for Ageless Thinking.
- Use the exhibition as a platform to research how people are engaging and using the Enticon.
The audience was presented with a picture series of ten pictures on which people are portrayed. On top of the pictures are glued labels that express a certain judgement about the age of the person (See Figure 20).

I asked people to fill in their personal Enticon and put it in the post box. On the post box it was written: The Enticon is a model for Ageless Thinking: Your behaviour and what you value in life is not dictated by your age.
If people provided me with their name I could then choose a colour of yarn that corresponds with that age and I would then weave a representation of their Enticon on the wooden frame on the wall (See Figures 21 and 22).

Figure 21. The colours of yarn were appointed to the different ages so that shades of blue would pass into more bright and strong colours.

Figure 22. I pick the colour of yarn according to the age of the person that filled in the Enticon and weave it up the frame.
The exhibition was a great success: after just four days I received 218 Enticons of which 75 I wove on the frame on the wall.

While observing how people engaged with the exhibition I could distinguish four different levels of engagement and experience:

1. Observing and passing: People would observe the pictures and the frame on the wall.
2. Observing and figuring out: People would observe the pictures and the frame on the wall and try to figure out what it all means and how it connects together.
3. Observing and discussing: In this level visitors would discuss the Enticon, Ageless Thinking and also the statistics that they tried to see on the Enticon on the wall. (See Figure 23)
4. Observing, discussing and participating: The visitors would not only discuss but also participate by filling in an Enticon of their own and thereby contributing to the project and the growing of the Enticon. (See Figure 24).

Figure 23. Observing and discussing.
The other opportunity to implement the model for Ageless Thinking that was defined was a mobile or web based application (See Figure 25.) A mobile application has endless possibilities, few possibilities that I wanted to explore were:
- Use of the Enticon on a mobile devise.
- Tracking of the personal development.
- Sharing of the personal Enticon.

A slightly different aesthetic was developed was developed for the mobile device. When the image is shared through social networks as facebook or twitter or instagram people can instantly see what aspects are important for that person through the size of the triangles.

Together with a sponsor a first web based application was developed that was also introduced on the exhibition.
The social object

The Enticon on the exhibition became a social object (see Figure 26). In 2005 Jyri Engström wrote: “I’m defending an alternative approach to social networks here, which I call ‘object centered sociality’ following the sociologist Karin Knorr Cetina. (...) Think about the object as the reason why people affiliate with each specific other and not just anyone. (...) The fallacy is to think that social networks are just made up of people. They’re not; social networks consist of people who are connected by a shared object.”

Social networks can form around social objects, the object is the trigger for conversation and networking. This was the case at the exhibition where the audience participated in discussions around the Enticon. A very important learning outcome of the exhibition was that people love statistics. People wanted to compare themselves to others, and they liked that they could show that they had a thread among all the other threads. A follow up feature of the web based application could therefore be a statistic tool that allows you to see your personal Enticon in comparison to others.
My research and project aim to initiate the transformation of cultural sensibility towards ageing and the aged. My research led me to researching social norms about ageing in general. As a result of the research outcomes I ultimately designed a model of thinking: Ageless Thinking. This model can help us to view age as a kinetic entity that is not definable by a number or outdated labels, but rather definable as a state of mind or a snapshot of the state of life.

Because this model for thinking disregards chronological age it includes people from all ages. People from different ages might share the same life status. This system could be the platform for people from different ages to meet on the basis of their life statuses. It allows people to make their own decisions of how they want to spend their life time regardless of their age.

As Jack Burnham already wrote in 1968 in his article *Systems Esthetics*: “Change emanates, not from *things*, but from the way things are done.” I’d like to add that change not only emanates from the way things are done, but also from the way things are thought and talked about. Referring again to the Iceberg model (see figure 27) we can see that mental models have influence on structures, patterns and events. Mental models need to change in order to create change that lasts over time and has a large support base. Though transforming mental models doesn’t happen over night, it happens gradually. If successful, it happens increasingly and people will adapt to a certain
philosophy until a tipping point is reached when the change really takes off and finds a broad support in our culture.

I developed a philosophy: Ageless Thinking. And a model or tool that supports a change of mindset: the Enticon. As described in the previous chapters I have experimented with this tool on several levels.

Looking back at my research I can now identify several fields in which the philosophy of Ageless Thinking could (and should) be applied. I will shortly describe a few of those below. By doing so I hope to show that the project has many facets and could be further developed in many different fields. I also hope to initiate an ongoing discussion about Aged and Ageless Thinking.

**Ageism in politics**

In politics, as described in the background research, language is used that divides people according to their age. For every case we have to judge if this is useful to address it or not. If the division of age groups leads to Apocalyptic Demography in politics, we need to use another way of grouping people that would change the perspective on the problem: an ageless perspective.
I’d like to see an economical debate on the question if elderly (defined as people being 65+) are truly a burden. With a growing elderly population not only due to the baby boomers but also because of increasing life expectancy we see:
- Increase need for support of older people, but older people are also more healthy.
- Increased pension costs, but older people are more capable to contribute to the economy.

When we pass the age of 65, the system suddenly puts up obstacles that limit us in reaching a goal. For example your employer has the right to fire you after this age. Why is it like that if so many people want to continue working?

**Ageing in education**

As discussed before I believe that the school is a great platform to teach children the norms and values of Ageless Thinking. From an early age children learn their social skills at school. Later on in their education career they will learn through subjects like biology and physics what it means for the body to age. Children mainly learn what it means to go through puberty and there is sex education. But children don’t learn what it means to age.

Through the workshops we found a need for Age Education and the Enticon could be a tool. It could prepare for the changes that the body will go through when growing older. But it could also show that growing older does not mean a less active or exciting life.

A project for young children could be to ask their grandparents to map fill out the Enticon and present it in class. They will notice that most grandparents have different lives even though they are of similar ages.

Parents or other adults usually ask children: what do you want to be when you’re grown up? This question portrays a dated view of ageing, it refers to the model of the Staircase of Life where there is only time for one professional career that serves for supporting a family. Instead we can now use the Enticon to ask the children how they see themselves when they are the age of their parents or grandparents for example. This is more than looking at a professional career, it also looks at the other aspects of life like family, or love life.

The Enticon is just a proposed model for Ageless Thinking, it could and should be adapted for the purpose of the classes. The Enticon is a tool that breaks down different aspects of life in order to make them more visual and discussable which is an important tool for education.
Professional collaborating across ages

Ageless Thinking implemented in business philosophy of companies would enable collaboration across ages. Young and old can learn from each other.

Professor Carin Holmquist, head of the Department of Management and Organization at the Stockholm School of Economics is currently conducting a research with the title: Äldre som företagare - en lösning för individer och samhälle? translated: Elderly as entrepreneurs - a solution for individuals and society? Holmquist in her study sees age as a variable of importance for many aspects of entrepreneurial behaviour. One third of the entrepreneurs in Sweden have the age of 60+.

Holmquist also explores the question why we see so few collaborations with people across ages. She researches what the relation is between age and human, social and financial capital.

It seems to me that there could happen some very fruitful entrepreneurial collaborations across ages. Older people might have ideas that younger people would never think of. Younger people in return might offer skills that older people don’t have. Or visa versa of course.

How do collaborations across ages happen? How do people find each other? There seems to be a need for an ageless meeting space where people can shout out requests and offer their time and skills in order to get stuff done.

The future of the Healthcare Institution

What if Ageless Thinking would be implemented in the policy of healthcare institutions like hospitals, elderly care, or home care? Right now the healthcare system is mainly concerned with the health of the body. But what happens if the health of the body demands so much care that the other aspects of life that you would like to focus on are left behind?

We have to put more effort in providing sick and frail people with the tools to pursue their dreams. We need to put more effort in connecting people with each other. If the patient is approached in an Ageless manner, what kind of services would be needed?
15. Conclusion

I began this thesis work with the question: Can Experience Design be applied to create a shift in perception of elderly as a burden to elderly as a resource. This research question led me to researching social norms about ageing and the aged. I have described our current social norms as Aged Thinking and I developed a model for Ageless Thinking: the Enticon.

In the workshops we first explored our personal attitude towards ageing, through bodily behaviour and language. Then we developed a philosophy of what it means to think in an Ageless way. After that I developed a tool that has the aim to help us to think ageless.

Looking back at the research I believe that the original research question can be rewritten as following: Can Experience Design be applied to create a change of mindset from Aged Thinking to Ageless Thinking.

In my research I have learnt that people change themselves, but Experience Design can develop the tools for change, it can also design how and where to implement those tools.

With my findings and experience of the workshops I defined three steps that should be taken in order to create a perception shift:
- Learn about our current mindset.
- Learn about a new mindset and realise that we can choose between the two.
- Use a tool to change our mindset:
  - Unlearn the old mindset.
  - Learn and stick with the new mindset.

Here we learn that changing a mindset is an active choice. We are raised with the norms and values so they are rooted deeply in our culture. It is hard to unlearn them. Transforming mindsets takes time, it does not happen overnight. I see parallels in different forms of emancipation where marginalised groups fight for a change of mindset. This change happens, but incrementally.
- The first step would be to show our current mindset and what it may lead to: Aged Thinking.
- The second step is for us to learn about a new mindset and realise that we can choose between the two: Ageless Thinking.
- Thirdly we need a tool that helps us to unlearn the old mindset and stick with the new mindset. The Enticon is an example of that.

With this project I opened up the discussion about the social norms about ageing, I am eager to continue this discussion.
Thanks

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Picture credits
All figures are the writers ownership, except for:
Figure 3: origin unknown
Figure 12: Portraits from “Exactitudes” Ari Versluis and Ellie Uyttenbroek.
Figure 15: Hans Koegel, Nordiska Museet

Bibliography


Appendix

Script workshop 1

Social norms: the bodily experience

The exercises for this workshop that are described here were developed by Max Kleijberg and Sara Ribbenstedt.

Goal for the workshop

Building the group.
Introducing the topic: Elderly are a Resource for Society

This workshop aims to explore our personal bodily expectations of the ageing process and our preconceptions about the physical capabilities of the aged.

This will be done from the following perspectives:
- Personal: exploring what the bodily expectation of the participants is of the process of ageing. Detect possible fatalism and/or ageism.
- Relational: exploring what the preconception is of the bodily experience of elderly, i.e. how the participants perceive elderly people. How do we judge peoples physical fitness. Detect possible ageism.
- Future: define how the participants want to be perceived, from a bodily perspective, when they reach the old status. Included or excluded from society.

A selection of the Exercises:

Exercise: Representing each other
Max.
Max and Sara participate

Keywords: Responsibility, Empathy, Power
You are a very diverse group of people. I selected each one of you because of your personal and professional background, I believe that everyone here has something valuable to contribute. We will get plenty of time to get to know each other.

But for a first introduction I asked all of you to bring an object or picture that represents something you love or care about.
I will match all of you up in pairs.
You get 6 minutes time to share the story of the object to each other.
The person you shared your story with will then retell your story to the rest of the group.
Remember to exchange names and introduce your partner to the group.

Document all the objects/pictures and place them on altar.

**Concentration exercise: Cloud thoughts**
Sara. Max participates

Key words: Warm up, focus, self awareness, body awareness, present time

Just close your eyes and relax on the chair.

Without changing your body, just focus on your left foot. How does your left foot feel today? Is it relaxed? Is it tensed? How it touches the floor? And without judging, just notice how your left foot feels today.

Without changing your body, just focus on your right foot. How does your right foot feel today? Is it relaxed? Is it tensed? How it touches the floor? And without judging, just notice how your right foot feels today.

Without changing your body, just focus on your left knee. How does your left knee feel today? Is it relaxed? Is it tensed? And without judging, just notice how your left knee feels today.

Without changing your body, just focus on your right knee. How does your right knee feel today? Is it relaxed? Is it tensed? And without judging, just notice how your right knee feels today.
Without changing your body, just focus on your bum. How does your bum feel today? Is it relaxed? Is it tensed? How it touches the chair? And without judging, just notice how your bum feels today.

Without changing your body, just focus on your hands. How do your hands feel today? Are they relaxed? Are they tensed? How they touch your lap? And without judging, just notice how your hands feels today.

Without changing your body, just focus on your belly. How does your belly feel today? Is it relaxed? Is it tensed? And without judging, just notice how your belly feels today.

Without changing your body, just focus on your breathing. How does your breathing feel today? The speed of your breathing? The deepness? And without judging, just notice how your breathing feels today.

Without changing your body, just focus on your head. How does your head feel today? Is it relaxed? Is it tensed? Is it filled with thoughts? Picture yourself being in an open blue sky. Whenever a thought comes up in your head, just notice it. Picture that you put this thought in a cloud, and let the cloud float away. And whenever another thought comes up in your head, just put it in another cloud and let float away.

Keep your eyes closed...
Now, put focus on your feet. In your own speed, slowly start to move your feet.
Now, put focus on your knees. In your own speed, slowly start to move your knees.
Now, put focus on your bum. In your own speed, slowly start to move your bum.
Now, put focus on your hands. In your own speed, slowly start to move your hands.
Now, put focus on your belly. In your own speed, slowly start to move your belly.
Now, put focus on your head. In your own speed, slowly start to move your head.

Stay on the chair. And then, whenever you want to, you can open your eyes. If you feel like you need it, you can stretch your whole body in different directions.
Exercise: Pretending
Sara. Max walks around as well but observes more than participates

Main question: social norms, what is my personal expectation of my physical behaviour when I grow older.
Keywords: Knowledge versus Expectations, Empathy with the future self, Personal

Be yourself walk around.
Imagine that you’re 20, walk around.
Be yourself walk around.
Imagine that you’re 80 walk around.

We are walking around in the room. Fill up the small spaces where there is no people, so that you all are spread out as much as possible. Keep on walking around in a comfortable speed. Be aware of the room, and the people that you see.

Now, keep on walking, and imagine that you are 20 years old again. How does that feel in your body? How does your feet touch the ground? How are your legs moving? You can stop, look around at things in the room and then continue walk around again. Notice your speed. Notice your breathing. Notice your posture. Go back to walking around as yourself. Just notice what changed in your body. From yourself as 20, to yourself as today.

Now, keep on walking, and imagine that you are 80 years old. How does that feel in your body? How does your feet touch the ground? How are your legs moving? You can stop, look around at things in the room and then continue walk around again. Notice your speed. Notice your breathing. Notice your posture. Go back to walking around as yourself. Just notice what changed in your body. From yourself as 80, to yourself as today.

Ask the participants:
- What happened?
- How did it feel to walk around as if you were 20?
- What changed in your body?
- How did it feel to walk around as if you were 80?
- What changed in your body?
- Would you want anything to feel differently?
- Why did you make those choices?

- How could this experience be helpful to us?

I use open questions to provoke conversation and find interesting quotes that reveal the expectations people have of their physical experience when they are 80 years old.

**Exercise/Game: What's my age?**
Max, Sara, and Max observe

Main question: social norms, what do I expect of the bodily behaviour of people from different ages?
Keywords: Guessing versus Expectations, Empathy, Reacting, Judgement, Relational, Association, Prejudices.

Max makes teams of two: X and Y.
Both sit on a chair facing each other. The groups may spread out.
X is the actor.
Y is him/herself.
X randomly picks a card that has a certain age written on it.
X embodies this age like we practised in the previous exercise.
X is just embodying: sitting/standing/moving on place. It is not allowed to mime an activity or use props or other people.
Y tries to guess the age of X just by observing.
Y can guess three times.
The guess doesn’t have to be exact but should be close enough.
I am not going to be any more specific than this, I want you to think for yourself.

When everybody guessed we make a circle and follow up.

The ages that say on the card: 14/35/52/68/79/90

Questions:
- How did it feel?
- Guesser: What was your first guess, and what happened?
- Guesser: How did you make your guess?
- Actor: What did you do?
- Actor: What did you think of? (references?)
- Actor: After a wrong guess: what did you change?

The roles switch and the exercise is repeated.

Script workshop 2

Social norms: the linguistic experience

Aged thinking and ageless thinking

Goal for the workshop
This workshop will focuses on linguistics and name giving. The language we currently use when we talk with or about elderly but also how we talk to ourselves about getting older. The following perspectives are used to explore this:

- Relational: explore when we say that someone is old or young and what that means. How do we judge the old/young status of an individual. (Detect possible ageism.)
  This relates to the preconceptions and the attitudes we have in relation towards people that we see as old which we explored in W#1.
- Personal: explore when we think we feel that we are young or old ourselves. How do we judge our personal old/young status. (Detect possible fatalism.)
  This relates to the expectations we have about growing older that we explored in W#1.
- Future: define how the participants want to be perceived, from a linguistic perspective, when they reach the old status. What is a more wishful way of using words that enables a more inclusive society.

Aged thinking: thinking that associates characteristics with a certain age.
Ageless thinking: thinking that is free of associating characteristics with a certain age.

Exercise: Associate to current labels
Aim: Opening up the mind for creative thinking. Research if the association that come up are similar to the synonyms in the thesaurus. Does anyone in the group wants to be labelled like this one day?
Method: design thinking, word association

Space: All together at the whiteboard.

Give everybody a pen and post its and let them write down associations with the pictures of chronological older people that have a word written on them that is oftentimes used in the media to describe their age group.

When the creative energy dies, switch word.
Take pictures of the result.

Question: how would you feel if you would get this label?
Ask people to help gathering the post its and group them on A3 aper.

Exercise: The seven aspects of ageing

Aim: Defining the aspects of ageing that form the structure of experienced age. Defining the scales on which the different aspects of experienced age change over time.

Method: Experience Prototyping

Place: First at the sit corner, then move to whiteboard.

- Everybody fills out the 7 aspects of ageing for themselves.
- Let everybody show how they used it and filled it in.

Then we move to the whiteboard, I put up the big version of the seven scales. Brainstorm around the following topics:

- Should we add different scales, take them away or change their name or definition?
- Young, old, high, low. Should there be other scales, should some scales not count for experienced age.
- Can we define different groups of people?

Exercise: The words we use

Aim: Developing an Ageless Language: a language that is based on Experienced Age rather than Chronological Age.
- All participants were asked to bring text, written or spoken related to the topic.
- Ask everyone to read / say their text.
- Then ask why they brought it.
- Is it about chronological age or experienced age, or a specific aspect of ageing?
- Transform the quotes to something that we feel more comfortable with keeping in mind the experienced age.
- What words can be used?
- The person that brought the text should write the final translation and attach it to an A3 paper.

**Exercise: New labels**

Aim: finding new labels for experienced age groups.

Space: at the board.

Design thinking.

- Brainstorm on new labels.
- What should the new labels express?
- Who should identify themselves to the new labels?
- What can we ask instead of “How old are you?”

**Script workshop 3**

**Ageless Thinking**

**Exercise: Test the Ageless Thinking revised system**

Method: Experience Prototyping

- Compare.
- Discuss the system.
- Should anything be different?

Implement improvements on the spot.

Series of brainstorm / design thinking sessions:
What events in life are regulated by age?
This is the central question for the first brainstorm.
- Make categories
- Pick useful ones and discuss them in detail.

How do they transform in the Ageless Society?
- Brainstorm around this.

What could be the effect of this?
What type of changes would this bring about in the new Ageless Society?
- Status on facebook
- Senior discounts
- Pension
- Economy
- Social status

What kind of activities, experiences and services would exist in an Ageless Society.

Script workshop 4

Ageless Thinking in Context

Exercise: Test the Ageless Thinking system
Method: Experience Prototyping
Aim: what is the effect of repeating the measurement of the system?

Goal: Change Social norms by establishing collaborations across ages.
Collaborating: working together on a shared goal or using each others competencies and/or input to achieve something. The “goal” here can be anything, from setting up a business to washing a car. The collaboration needs to be facilitated.
Example: Co-living like community Färdknäppen.

Two ways to facilitate collaboration across ages:
1. Through policy change, inside companies (write down on whiteboard).
2. Through changing patterns, starting something new, creating a trend, a hype, facilitating collaboration.

**Ingredients for collaboration**

- People with ideas
- A place to meet
- A shared goal
- The need for each other competencies and input

**The Brainstorm changing patterns: setting up a platform.**

- **Who should “meet”?** Think of Amalagrams as target groups. Who would benefit from collaboration across ages. Local versus global.

- **What goals do they have?** Mash up the target groups and match them together to see what goals they could have. Think of situations.

- **How do they find each other?** Can the Amalagram be useful to group people? What is the next step? How to target very specific requests or needs.

- **In what kind of “space” can the people meet?** Frame the platform. What is the name of this platform?

- **How do they enter the platform and why would they? Would you?**

- **Build a scenario.** From beginning to end, what happens?