

# Chapter 20

## Social Policies for Old Age: A Story of Shifting Images and Time Lag

Kathrin Komp

### 20.1 Introduction

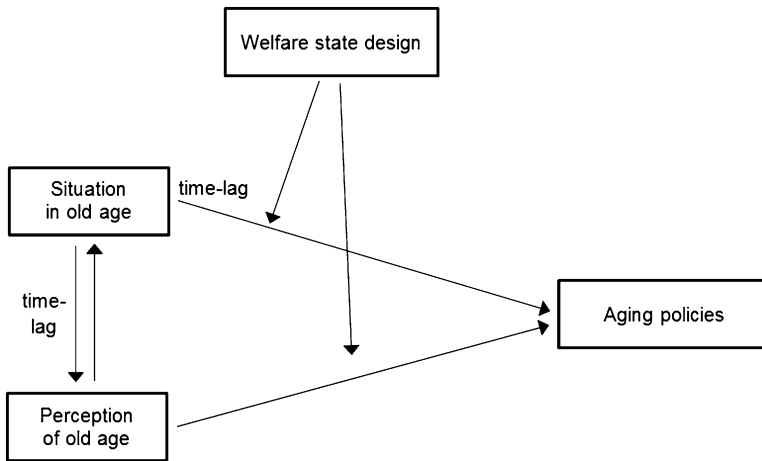
Population aging pushes aging policies up the political agenda. People now live longer than ever before, and life expectancy is still increasing (United Nations 2009). Moreover, the proportion of older people is increasing across Western countries (Destatis 2011). As a consequence, old age becomes a more prominent part of life, and policy-makers have to pay more attention to it. The attention of policy-makers is further attracted because population aging puts pressure on public budgets, especially those for pensions, health care, and long-term care. Policy-makers need to intervene to balance these budgets and to ensure the sustainability of social provision in times of population aging (Komp and Béland 2012). Additionally, the demographic shift means that electorates are aging, and parties considering the interests of older people might gain more votes in elections (Sinn and Uebelmesser 2002). This combination of financial and strategic considerations puts a twofold pressure on policy-makers to engage with policies for older people.

As populations age, social policies for older people receive additional attention. These policies tackle questions of welfare, social participation, and standard of living in old age (Marshall and Bottomore 1992). They do this, for example, by ensuring the provision of pension benefits and long-term care services. The goal of social policies to address current social problems drives their need for reform in times of population aging. On the one hand, policy-makers need to ensure a sound financial basis for public services to older people (Komp and Béland 2012). This task is challenging, because the growing need for social services for older people coincides with a decreasing number of middle-aged people who contribute to these services financially, and with the ongoing economic crisis which further decreases public budgets. On the other hand, policy-makers need to adapt policies to reflect the

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**Fig. 20.1** Influences on aging policies

changing character of old age. This changing character arises not only from the increasing number of life-years in poor health at the end of life but also from the increasing number of healthy life-years immediately after retirement (Laslett 1996). This means that older people not only need support in case of frailty but they also have the potential to be active and productive. Policy-makers could strive to tap into this potential to benefit the families and communities of older people. Additionally, today's older people differ from their predecessors in terms of their preferences and life-styles (Gilleard and Higgs 2002), which means that policy-makers need to address them in a different way. Hence, social policies for old age have to be recalibrated as populations age (Komp and Béland 2012).

When we look back at the development of social policies for old age, we can indeed see such recalibrations alongside the progression of population aging. Interestingly, when developing these policies, policy-makers do not only draw on empirical facts as guidelines but they are also guided by their perceptions and images of old age and by the design of the welfare state. Population aging can therefore lead to a range of possible policy reforms (Béland 2005; Komp 2010). Moreover, it takes some time until changes in the lives of older people are reflected in political discourse. Therefore, policy reforms might lag behind changes in the lives of older people (Komp 2010; Riley et al. 1994). This intricate network of influences on aging policies is portrayed in Fig. 20.1.

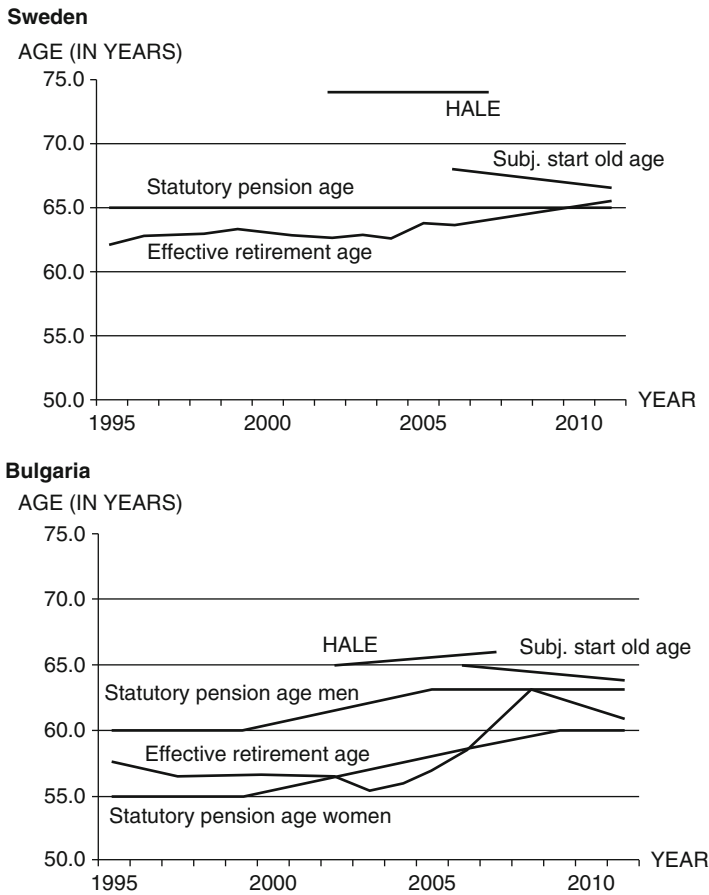
This chapter takes a closer look at influences on policy-making for old age. It starts by elaborating on the different understandings of old age, based on objective and subjective indicators. It then identifies various influences on aging policies and highlights differences between countries. Next, it explains how time lags cause difficulties in policy-making for old age. Finally, it reflects on the implications of all these considerations.

## 20.2 Understanding Old Age Through Numbers and Perceptions

There is plenty of debate among both researchers and the public about what it means to be old. When does someone start to be old? What are the characteristics of older people? There is no straightforward answer to these questions, but instead we find multiple opinions, definitions, and understandings, some of which contradict others. The reason is that aging is a multi-faceted, continuous process, and not a state that one reaches between one day and the next. Aging starts at the moment of conception, and continues at varying speeds throughout life. This aging process progresses in different dimensions side-by-side, including physical decline, psychological developments, changing social roles, and an evolving self-image. As a consequence, people understand old age in different ways (Bowling 2008; Komp and Aartsen 2013). The prevailing understanding of old age sets the path for the design of aging policies.

The range of understandings of old age can best be captured in two ideal types. Ideal types are constructs that combine characteristics in a simplified and exaggerated way (Weber 1980). The ideal type that developed first is labeled the “fourth age” or the “old old.” It depicts frail old individual who needs help and support. This ideal type was the center of many discussions in the 1970s and 1980s. According to this ideal type, old age starts at the age of 65 years, which is assumed to coincide with retirement and the onset of poor health. From the 1990s, however, the second ideal type of old age became more prominent. This type is labeled the “third age” or the “young old.” It portrays old age as a time of good health, activity, and freedom. It emerged alongside the expectation of living a healthy life for longer, and at a time when people started to retire early while receiving generous pension benefits. Both ideal types currently coexist, and a common understanding is that people in their later years transition the third age before they enter the fourth. This means that people typically spend some life-years after retirement in good health, before their health declines and they become frail (Komp 2013; Laslett 1996; Neugarten 1974).

While the interplay between the two ideal types of old age seems clear, the reality is more complex. The ideal types are sometimes hard to distinguish when looking at real people, and there are pronounced differences both within and between countries (Börsch-Supan et al. 2013; Jönson 2013). An additional complication is that the ongoing economic crisis is remolding social structures and pushing lives into new directions. As a consequence, both the lives and image of older people are currently shifting again, although it is still too early to determine what the final outcome of this shift will be (for a more detailed review see Komp 2013). To illustrate the variety of possible understandings of old age, the following paragraphs set out some empirical data. These data reveal that different markers for the onset of old age lead to different results, that facts and perceptions diverge, and that definitions of old age reflect both the past and the social context.



**Fig. 20.2** Indicators for the onset of old age, Sweden and Bulgaria 1995–2011. *Note:* HALE healthy life expectancy. (*Sources:* European Commission 2012; International Social Security Association 2013a, b; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013; own analysis of data of the European Social Survey; World Health Organization 2006, 2009)

Figure 20.2 shows different indicators for the onset of old age in Sweden and Bulgaria between 1995 and 2011. These two countries are very different when it comes to aging. Swedes have the oldest retirement age in Europe and remain healthy the longest after retirement (Komp and Aartsen 2013).

Bulgarians, by contrast, have one of the earliest retirement ages in Europe, and also one of the earliest deteriorations in health (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013; World Health Organization 2009). A comparison between Sweden and Bulgaria therefore gives us an impression of the range of situations of older Europeans. The indicators shown in Fig. 20.2 are: the statutory pension age, the effective retirement age, the healthy life expectancy (HALE) (that is, the expected number of years of healthy life, as opposed to total life expectancy),

and the subjective perception of when old age starts. The statutory pension age is the age set out in law as the date of retirement. It is sometimes considered the most important element shaping our understanding of when old age starts (Kohli 1991; Komp 2011). Lately, however, this understanding has been challenged by the fact that people retire earlier, which is shown by the indicator “effective retirement age.” Another challenge to the traditional understanding of old age is that people remain healthy for longer, which can be captured by the indicator “healthy life expectancy.” Whether or not these facts relate to how the public understands old age can be read from the indicator “subjective perception of when old age starts.” This last indicator shows when people think old age starts.

Figure 20.2 reveals that old age can indeed be understood in many different ways. The impactful indicator of the statutory pension age was 65 years in Sweden throughout the period, and increased from 55 to 60 years for Bulgarian women and from 60 to 63 years for Bulgarian men. This indicator has the advantage that it can easily be determined, and the disadvantage that it is ambiguous for two reasons. First, statutory pension ages are not the same for everyone: for example, people in physically demanding occupations have lower statutory pension ages, and from 2001, Swedes had the right to continue working until age 67, if they wished to do so (International Social Security Association 2013b). Second, the values in Bulgaria are gender-specific and they change over time. Compared to the statutory pension age, the effective retirement age gives us a more accurate picture of when people actually retire. It is, therefore, a better depiction of how individuals experience retirement on a personal level, which means that it is relevant for how the public sees the onset of old age. In Sweden, the effective retirement age increased from 62 to 66 years from 1995 to 2011. In Bulgaria, the effective retirement age was more volatile. It was 63 years in 1995, then decreased to 56 years, then increased again to 63 years, and then dropped to 61 years. This volatility, on the one hand, reflects the timeliness of the effective retirement age as a marker for the onset of old age. On the other hand, it also renders this indicator a challenging choice for comparisons over time. By comparison, the HALE is more stable over time. It was 74 years in Sweden between 2002 and 2007, and increased from 65 to 66 years in Bulgaria over the same time period. This indicator for old age is interesting for researchers studying life-phases and the changing structure of later life. Life-phases are longer lasting situations within a person’s life that center on specific activities. Old age was for a long time understood as a life-phase that started with retirement and centered on coping with declining health. However, because of early retirement and an increasing HALE, this definition no longer holds true. Therefore, some researchers suggested splitting old age into two consecutive life-phases: the third and fourth ages. Some researchers argue that the third age contrasts so drastically with the traditional understanding of old age that it could be seen as an extension of mid-life instead of a first period of old age (Komp 2013). Following this argument, the HALE signals the onset of old age as a period of frailty in later life.

The fourth indicator shows at what age individuals perceive old age to start. It therefore shifts attention away from objective measures and instead focuses on the subjective dimension. Swedes pinpointed the subjective onset of old age at 68 years

in 2006 and 67 years in 2011, whereas Bulgarians identified it as 65 years in 2006 and 64 years in 2011. The subjective start of old age is therefore later than both the statutory pension age and effective retirement age, and earlier than the HALE in both countries. In addition, all indicators for the onset of old age point to later ages in Sweden than in Bulgaria.

These data show that old age can be understood in many different ways, that these understandings change over time, and that they differ between countries. The information also shows that there is a gap between objective facts and perceptions, despite these being interrelated. One reason for this gap is a time lag, which will be discussed later in this chapter. An important implication for policy-makers is that they need to reflect on their own understanding of old age when designing aging policies (Komp and Béland 2012). Such a reflection will help them to filter the information relevant to them out of the broad debates on old age. It will also help them to communicate the reasoning behind their policies to the public and to other bodies of government. A second implication is that policy-makers need to address both facts and perceptions when designing aging policies. While objective facts seem a sound basis for the design and implementation of political intervention, subjective perceptions play a big role in how the electorate reacts to political intervention and policy reforms (Kohli 1991). Policies that are factually justified but perceived as unjust can meet resistance, whether in the form of protests or as losses at elections. Policy-makers, therefore, need to consider both objective and subjective aspects, when designing aging policies.

### **20.3 Aging Policies at the Crossroads Between Facts and Images**

Aging policies demand a balance between facts and perceptions, but these are not the only demands on them. Policy-makers do not act in a vacuum, but are embedded in society. This means that society shapes the logic with which policy-makers approach older people, and policies therefore have to be concordant with society to be accepted (Edmondson 2013). The aspects of society that are particularly important for aging policies are the overall social structure, culture, values, and the design of the welfare state. These aspects culminate in two images that are major signposts for aging policies: one of old age, and the other of a “good society” (Esping-Andersen 2003). The image of old age combines the perceptions of when old age starts with further ideas and perceptions, for example, on the situation of older people and their activities, to obtain a multidimensional picture of older people (Edmondson 2013). The image of a good society combines ideas on how a society should ideally be structured and how such a structure can best be obtained. It therefore captures the logic guiding the design of welfare states and of social policies (Esping-Andersen 2003). Esping-Andersen (1990) suggested that these ideas of a good society can be captured in distinctive ideal types of welfare states, which he coined “welfare regimes.” When we view both the shifting images of old age and

the different welfare regimes, we see a broad range of frameworks for aging policies unfolding. These frameworks differ over time and between countries.

The shifting image of old age created three major strands of aging policies. The first strand is the earliest one, addressing older people as frail individuals in need of support (*fourth-agers*). It is based on the idea that people become old once they retire, and that their health and capacities for self-support decline from that time on. Consequently, policies of this kind try to make up for losses experienced by older people, and include, for example, pension policies to compensate for a loss of income, and healthcare services to address declining health. It was this kind of aging policy that sparked the discourse about population aging as a burden on welfare states, because it stressed the increasing need for support that an aging population might bring (Johnson et al. 1989; Komp and Béland 2012). The second strand of aging policies entered the scene during the 1990s, supplementing the aging policies already in place. This strand addressed a new cohort, meaning people who were born at a later date. This new cohort of older people has a longer HALE than its predecessor, and gave rise to the ideal type of the healthy “third ager” bringing new possibilities to society and to the welfare state. This new kind of aging policy underlines that paid work is not the only productive activity, and that other activities such as volunteering in organizations, grandparental childcare, and care-giving to kin also constitute valuable contributions to society and the welfare state (Morris and Caro 1997; Morrow-Howell et al. 2001). If older people engage in these activities, they might address social needs that publicly funded health and social care services would otherwise have to meet. These policies also try to strengthen the engagement of older people in such activities, primarily through increasing the mandatory retirement age and by encouraging older people to volunteer. In this way, they hope to give population aging a positive spin for the economy and for public budgets, which dampens the burden-centered discourse (Komp and Béland 2012). The third strand of aging policies emphasizes the idea that older people are individuals who should not primarily be categorized according to their age. Instead, individuals move through the different age-groups throughout their lives, and their situation has to be viewed from a longitudinal perspective. Therefore, this perspective, which started to gain momentum at the beginning of the twenty-first century, suggested that policies pay attention to life course effects (Esping-Andersen et al. 2003; Morel et al. 2012). The life course spans all life-years from cradle to grave, and it is characterized by an individual’s activities and experiences within that time (Grenier 2012). Proponents of life course effects argue that individuals’ experiences can have long-term effects, which influence the further progression of their life course, even years or decades into the future (Elder 1994). The education people receive during their youth, for example, can influence how working careers progress, and at what age people retire from work (Gouldner 2001). Aging policies that account for such life course effects, therefore, influence individuals during their youth and middle-age in order to achieve effects in old age. These policies intervene at critical periods throughout the entire life course, for example, during periods of unemployment or when health problems occur, and strive to steer the life courses of individuals in the desired direction. Typical goals of such policies are to facilitate the employability of older

people, to help them maintain good health for longer, and to ensure that people accumulate enough pension rights during their working careers to receive reasonable old age pensions (Komp and Marier forthcoming). Taken together, these three strands changed approaches and priorities of aging policies over time.

Country-differences between aging policies come about because of, for example, the different welfare regimes. These regimes are typically described using three characteristics. The first characteristic is stratification, meaning the degree and kind of social inequalities it produces. The second characteristic is de-commodification, which describes the degree to which welfare provision allows individuals to shed their role as a commodity in the labor market at times of, for example, poor health. The third and final characteristic is the welfare mix, which means whether governments assign the responsibility for welfare provision to the market, the family, or the state (Esping-Andersen 1990). Esping-Andersen (1990) originally described three welfare regimes. The first regime is the social-democratic one, which is typical of Northern Europe. It favors strong state intervention that reduces social inequalities and allows individuals to maintain a decent standard of living even when they have to temporarily leave the labor market, for example, for health reasons or because of unemployment. The second regime is labeled as liberal, and it prevails in Anglo-Saxon countries. It strongly relies on the regulatory mechanism of the market, stresses the individual's role as a commodity in the labor market, and accepts the resulting social inequalities. The third regime is described as conservative, and it is common in continental Europe. It uses a mix of state and family responsibility for ensuring the citizens' well-being, its social insurances create social inequalities along occupations, and it allows people to maintain a livelihood when they cannot work (Esping-Andersen 1990). Scholars such as Ferrera (1996) and Leibfried (1992) added a fourth regime capturing the situation of Southern European countries to this typology, and they labeled it as rudimentary. This regime recognizes the family as the main player in welfare production, it reduces social inequalities only to some extent, and it provides only little protection against the risks of not being able to engage in paid work. Finally, there are currently discussions on whether Central and Eastern Europe constitutes a fifth, post-paternalistic regime. This regime offers little state protection against the risks of not being able to work, it produces social inequalities mainly between the generations that experienced the communist period and later generations, and it draws on a patchwork of players to provide welfare (see, for example, Aidukaite 2009; Cerami 2006; Fenger 2007). Table 20.1 summarizes each welfare regime according to these characteristics.

Like the design of welfare states, aging and the progression of aging policies can also be described according to the logic of welfare regimes. The countries of the conservative and rudimentary regimes have the oldest populations in Europe, whereas the countries in the post-paternalistic regime have the youngest populations (United Nations 2009). Similarly, the conservative and rudimentary regimes have particularly high numbers, and the post-paternalist regime has particularly low numbers, of third agers. However, people in the social-democratic regime spend a particularly long time in the third age (Komp 2010; Komp and Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik 2012). Countries across all regimes have policies that support frail older people, and



**Table 20.1** Welfare state characteristics, old age, and aging policies across welfare regimes

		Welfare regimes				
Examples		Social-democratic	Liberal	Conservative	Rudimentary	Post-paternalistic
Countries		Sweden, Denmark	United Kingdom, Ireland	Germany, France	Spain, Portugal	Poland, Czech Republic
<i>Welfare state</i>						
Stratification	-	+	+	+	±	+
De-commodification	+	Income-based		Occupation-based		Generation-based
Welfare mix	State	-	Market	±	Family	-
<i>Old age</i>						
Population aging	±		±	+	+	-
Third age	±		±	+	+	-
<i>Aging policies</i>						
Policies supporting older people	+		+	+	+	+
Policies activating older people	+	Mainly work	Work and volunteering	Work and volunteering	Work and care-giving	Mainly work
Life course policies	+		±	±	-	-

Aidukaite (2009), Arza and Kohli (2008), Cerami (2006), Esping-Andersen (1990), Ferrera (1996, 2005), Komp (2010), Komp and Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik (2012), Komp and Marier (under contract), Morel et al. (2012)

Note: In this table, + stands for “strong,” ± stands for “intermediate,” and - stands for “weak”

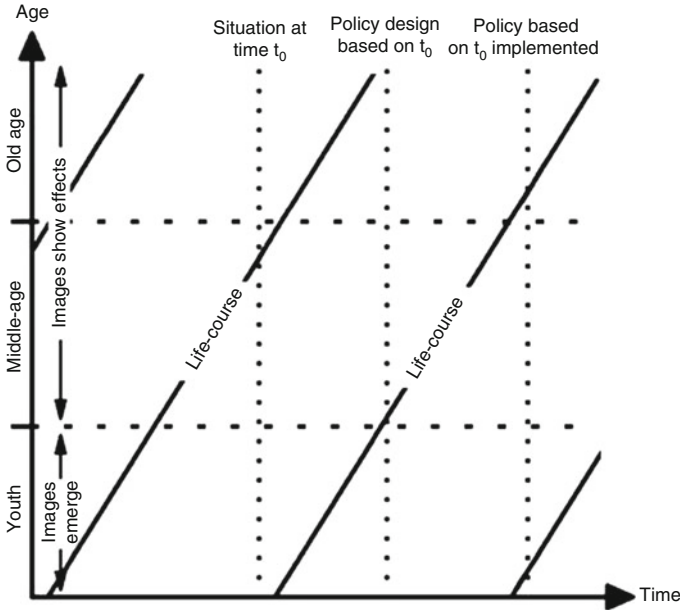
strive to engage healthy older people in the labor market, which usually happens through increases in the retirement age and reforms that block pathways to early retirement (Arza and Kohli 2008). Countries in the conservative and liberal regimes particularly strive to encourage older people to volunteer, and particularly countries in the rudimentary regime recognize and support the role of older people as caregivers to kin (Komp 2010). Life course policies, however, are more unequally developed across welfare regimes. The ideas behind these policies developed particularly early in the social-democratic regime, had gained some standing in the conservative and liberal regimes by the beginning of the twenty-first century, but were still in the background of political agendas in the other regimes at that stage (Komp and Marier forthcoming; Morel et al. 2012). One reason could be that welfare states work with smaller budgets in the rudimentary and post-paternalistic regimes, and therefore needed to wait longer to introduce these new policies.

## 20.4 The Emergence of Time Lags in Aging Policies

Aging policies are influenced by various factors, such as the situation and image of older people, and the design of the welfare state. However, these factors do not always have immediate effects. Instead, we often see time lags in the making of aging policies. Time lags describe situations with a delay between an event and its effect (Gollob and Reichardt 1987). In policy-making for old age, two kinds of time lags occur: one between the situation and the popular image of older people, and another one between the development of image of older people and the introduction of the policy. Figure 20.3 illustrates both time lags. It positions both time lags in the interplay between historical time and the aging process of individuals. In the figure, historical time is displayed on the horizontal axis, and the aging process on the vertical axis. To make the aging process easier to grasp, the vertical axis is divided into three sections: youth, middle-age, and old age. In this figure, life courses are presented as diagonals. These diagonals signify that life courses represent the aging of individuals while historical time progresses.

The first time lag shown in Fig. 20.3 refers to the influence of images on the activities of individuals. While the foundation for these images is laid during one's youth, one's actions during middle-age and old age still partly depend on them. In other words, one's actions are influenced by images that were prevalent at an earlier date.

Mannheim (1928) explained this time lag through the development process that people undergo as they grow up. During childhood and youth, he argued, people develop a perception of reality, a world view, and their personal way to absorb and categorize new information. These developments then serve as the basis for later activities and decisions. The work of Svallfors (2010) and Goerres (2008) is in line with Mannheim's explanation. They found that preferences for welfare policies and political parties are largely stable over the life course. This time lag has an important implication for aging policies. It entails that young people develop an image of old age, which will change later only with difficulty. Consequently, changes in the



(Goerres 2008; Komp and Johansson forthcoming; Pierson 2004; Riley et al. 1994; Riley and Riley 2000; Svallfors 2010)

**Fig. 20.3** The emergence of time lags in aging policies

actual situation of older people might not directly affect the image of older people held by society. Hence, the image and situation of old age might diverge. Older people might therefore find it challenging to forge a new role in society when their situation suddenly changes, as it has, for example, happened because of the economic crisis. It might take a longer period of time, possibly even an entire life-time, for older people to gain this new standing in society. In addition, the time lag entails that policy-makers do not approach policy-making with a blank canvas as a starting point. Instead, they draw on previous images and discussions about old age. Likewise, they have to convince their electorate, which is also influenced by previous images of old age, of the benefits of policies for today's older people. In these situations, the time lag in the effects of images of old age might lead to challenges and tensions, independent of the kind of aging policy chosen (Kohli 1991; Komp and Johansson forthcoming).

The second time lag is inherent in the process of policy-making. It takes a while until a policy becomes effective, and if this processing period is long enough, the original situation might no longer be valid. In Fig. 20.3, this fact is represented by the three vertical lines in the middle of the figure. The first line demarcates the situation at time  $t_0$ , which serves as the starting point for aging policies. Once this situation has been documented, it can enter political discussions and influence the policy-making process. Then, after a period, aging policies based on the situation at  $t_0$  might be designed.

This act of designing policies is represented by a second vertical line in the figure. However, the policy-making process is not yet complete at this stage. Instead, it usually takes a while until the newly designed aging policies come into effect. This second delay is partly due to the mode of operation of government bodies, and partly to possible transition periods included in the policies. The time when the policy comes into effect is represented by a third vertical line in the figure. These processes can add up to a period of several years between a situation and the coming into effect of a policy addressing it (Komp and Johansson forthcoming; Pierson 2004). Depending on the speed of social change, the time lag can be unproblematic or it can cause complications. If the social situation changes slowly, as for example, the HALE does (Salomon et al. 2012), the time lag is unproblematic. However, if the social situation changes quickly, as it happened, for example, with the effective retirement age (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013), the time lag can cause a problem. In the latter case, the social situation might have changed by the time the policy comes into force, and the policy is already outdated before it has any effect.

## 20.5 Discussion and Conclusion

Population aging demands a new set of aging policies, and governments developed a range of policies to meet this demand. Some of these policies address older people's need for support, some strive to activate healthy older people, and some frame older people as individuals independent of their age. However, when designing and implementing such policies, a number of challenges arise. One major challenge arises from a possible gap between the situation of older people and the popular image of them. Policy-makers need to address both aspects in their aging policies. Another major challenge arises from time lags that are inherent in the process of policy-making and the effects of images. These time lags underline the importance of the temporal dimension in policy-making (Pierson 2004), and they require precise planning and evaluation steps whenever policies are being designed and implemented. How the influence of images and time lags plays out, however, cannot be generalized, because it is largely specific for countries and periods of time.

The insight in this chapter has implications for active aging policies. Such policies became more common over the past few years, as a reaction to population aging and the increasing HALE. They strive to improve the quality of later life, following the maxim that one should not only add more years to one's life, but also add more life to one's years. Within these policies, "active aging" is understood as the "process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. [...] The word 'active' refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labor force" (World Health Organization 2002, p. 12). Hence, policy-makers have various starting points to

facilitate active aging, and their dedication to this goal became clearly visible when the European Union designated 2012 the “European year for active aging and solidarity between generations” (Eurostat 2011).

Active aging policies can be placed in the overall framework of shifting images and time lag. The growing attention focused on active aging policies indicates that the image of older people as healthy and resourceful individuals is gaining ground. Moreover, it shows that these individuals are considered to possess unstructured time, and that they could increase their activity level. This development marks a first shift in the image of old age (Komp 2013; Moulaert and Biggs 2013). However, the shift is taking place at a time of economic crisis, meaning one of fundamental social restructuring. Because of the economic crisis, older people’s financial situation is deteriorating, and they therefore have to work longer, sometimes even beyond retirement age. At the same time, family networks and intergenerational transfers are becoming more important, which means that older people are taking on a more prominent role as providers of grandparental childcare, as care-providers to frail spouses, and as active participants in the household economy (Aartsen et al. 2012). Thus, the lives of older people are changing. There are an increasing number of demands on older people, and older people have to be active in order to ensure their own livelihood and to provide for their family. This development reduces the leeway that older people have in deciding on how to spend their time, and makes them essential pillars for the well-being of their kin. Consequently, the image of older people will probably shift again in the future. However, because of time lags, we are currently drifting into a mismatch between the situation of older people, their image, and the policies addressing them. This mismatch combines a situation of very active and involved older people, an image of heterogeneity between frailty and the potential for activity in old age, and policies that strive to activate older people.

In conclusion, this chapter illustrates the complex background of aging policies. These policies not only need to account for the growing number of older people but they also have to consider the changing character and image of old age and the country-specific welfare state design. When doing this, they have to balance all these aspects and then navigate them through time lags. This challenge gives the process of policy-making for old age its own dynamic and logic. Welfare state responses to population aging must, therefore, not only be based on statistics of demographic change and welfare state expenditures but they also need to consider the qualitative and cultural aspects of aging. Consequently, researchers would benefit from triangulating qualitative and quantitative methods in their studies on aging policies. Moreover, policy-makers addressing aging should keep in mind that they are intervening in matters of culture and traditions at the same time as they are steering social provisions and balancing out public budgets.

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