

**DRAFT SCOMS**  
**19 AUGUST 2021**  
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Title:

**How growing old apparently became a threat  
to the welfare state**

Subtitle:

Coverage of the Ageing Society in three Swiss-German newspapers

**Abstract**

Switzerland is growing old fast. Like most European countries, it has become an ‘Ageing Society’ with a rapidly ageing population, a growing share of older persons and a decreasing share of younger persons. While many aspects of this situation have been thoroughly investigated, there is little empirical knowledge about how news media cover this demographic development and its effects on our everyday life. This study adds to the internationally existing knowledge by investigating the coverage of the Ageing Society in three Swiss-German newspapers; quality newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), tabloid *Blick* and free newspaper *20 Minuten*. First, a qualitative content analysis has identified the labeling, topics and news frames related to the Ageing Society. Subsequently, the frequencies of the news frames were assessed, to determine which frames occurred dominantly. The findings propose that the Ageing Society is mostly portrayed as a threat for the public budget and health system. This approach leaves other, more opportunity-oriented aspects of the Ageing Society underrepresented. Moreover, by mainly citing professional experts (e.g. politicians, researchers, etc.) as sources for the coverage, the Ageing Society is constituted as a topic especially professional experts have knowledge of - and less so the individually affected citizens.

**Keywords:** Ageing Society, demography, newspapers, framing, qualitative content analysis

## 1. Introduction

“The fact that people don’t die anymore **-is** that a bad thing?”, asked Ulrik Haagerup, former news director of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, once rhetorically (as cited in Torben-Nielsen, 2016, p. 140). No doubt, the fact that most of **us** live longer and healthier lives is a **ground for celebration**. **But** the fact that we, as a population, grow ever older, does pose new and tremendous challenges to our economies and welfare systems. Therefore, the Ageing Society was coined “one of the most significant trends of the 21st century” by the United Nations (UN, 2012a, p. 3), as early as a decennium ago. Former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon added that “the social and economic implications of this phenomenon [the Ageing Society] are profound, extending far beyond the individual older person and the immediate family, touching broader society and the global community in unprecedented ways” (UN, 2012a, p. 3). Most western countries, among them Switzerland, have now become Ageing Societies; i.e. societies with a growing share of older persons and a decreasing share of younger persons. Such changes in the age structure of a society are caused by a combination of three factors: life expectancy, fertility rate and migration (**United Nations, add source phd or nieuwer**). In the western world, better living circumstances and major medical developments have led to a higher life expectancy, contraceptives have given **control over the fertility rate**, and **the** migration currently has no juvenating effect (**source phd**). Together, this combination has led to a fast ageing of **the population**.

These demographic changes paved the way to various new study topics, also in media research. Although the news media’s coverage of ‘older people’ has been extensively studied over the last decennia, the coverage of the ‘Ageing Society’ itself (as a societal **phenomenal**) is still a relatively young branch in media research (**L&L or newer**). The implications of the

Ageing Society **however** directly affect the lives of most people: e.g. a possibly higher retirement age, double **belasting** of families taking care of both younger (children) and older generations (parents), necessity of life-long learning to adapt to a changing labour market, or the growing individual responsibility for retirement **finances**. Still, **the** empirical knowledge about how the Ageing Society and **such** implications are covered in news media, remains rather restricted to date. This study attempts to overcome this knowledge gap and presents first-time empirical findings about the coverage of the Ageing Society in three Swiss-German newspapers.

## 2. Aim and research questions

The aim of this paper is to provide **first-time** insights about the Ageing Society-coverage in the Swiss quality newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), the tabloid **Blick** and the free newspaper **20 Minuten** over the period mid 2014 – mid 2017. This is **done** by investigating the manifest text content of newspaper articles. Following research questions **have been examined**: How is the Ageing Society labeled? Which topics **are brought into connection** with the Ageing Society? Which (sub)frames do the newspapers apply when covering the Ageing Society? Which sources are used for the Ageing Society coverage? In answering these questions, the study aimed at generating innovative Swiss empirical insights. As this study has been interested in the news coverage itself, it did not examine how readers possibly react **on** the news coverage, or how the news coverage affected their opinion.

## 3. Theoretical background

### 3.1 Impact of ageing in Switzerland and Europe

Ageing societies are societies with a rapidly ageing population, a growing share of older persons and a decreasing share of younger persons (Author 2016). The age structure of a society is determined by three factors: fertility, life expectancy and migration (European

Commission [EC] 2012a). Today, the implications of the population ageing are already affecting most European countries, even if the changing 'old age dependency ratio' between people in working age and in retirement age has not reached its projected peak yet (Eurostat, 2019). As early as a decade ago, international organizations such as the United Nations (2012), the World Health Organization (e.g. in Beard et al. 2011) and the European Union (European Commission 2012, 2015) have expressed severe concern about the multiple implications of the Ageing Society for economies and welfare systems. Although the ageing of the population has been projected for many years, many countries were not taking sufficient measures in time to address the implications of this the demographic challenge (Klingholz 2012). The age structure of a country directly affects its socio-economic situation. For instance, countries with younger populations may spend more on education, whereas countries with older populations should allocate more resources to the elderly care sector. As the implications of the age structure thus affect the entire population, the Ageing Society is not only a concern for older people, but **-against common assumption-** instead for all age groups (United Nations 2012). To identify challenges and to create policy responses, demographic projections are used; **for instance**, to revise a retirement program, modify city planning, or develop measures for the shrinking labour market (Denton & Spencer 2019; Jedwab, Pereira & Roberts 2019). These demographic projections **can also make** policymakers aware of trends affecting the economic development (Population Reference Bureau, 2001) and support intelligence services in foreseeing conflict potential (CIA, 2015, para. 1). The strongest age-related pressure on the European Union is foreseen for the period 2015-2035, when the babyboom generation enters retirement (**Age Report 2020, see lit list Impulse**). Also, the number of persons in working age is projected to drop in most of Europe over the next decennia (Klingholz 2012; Shamash 2011).

Switzerland is, like other Ageing Societies, characterized by a high median age, a growing proportion of older- and oldest persons (**aged over 65 and over 80 years old**) and an

increasing old age dependency ratio (European Commission 2014). Although information about how the population ageing will affect the future Swiss age-related expenditure is not publicly available, it may be assumed that Switzerland parallels the European tendency of an increasing age-related expenditure for pensions, health care, long-term care and education (European Commission, 2020). The allocation of the public resources may therefore become –possibly more so than today- the inset of intense political and public debates, also between various age groups.

Even if there is a broad body of knowledge about the demographic projections and future age-related challenges, there are much less empirical data about the media coverage of the population ageing. As such, the interest in the media representation of the Ageing Society and its implications is comparatively young (Davidson 2013; Lundgren & Ljuslinder 2011). Previous findings suggest that the implications of the Ageing Society are mainly represented in the media as societal risks and economic problems (Author 2018, Lundgren & Ljuslinder 2011, Evans et al. 2001). Earlier studies have also proposed that adults over 65 years old are often stereotyped and portrayed in a negative way, if they are featured at all (e.g. Ainsworth & Hardy 2007; Fealy & McNamara 2009; Martin 2009).

### 3.2 Ageing Society in the media

Media coverage is for most people an important source of information (Lin et al., 2004 **NEWER**). it influences the public sphere, as it affects how persons identify themselves and others, and how they judge the resources allocation in society (**INSERT NEWER** Lundgren & Ljuslinder 2012; McCombs 2005; Milner et al. 2011). Agenda-setting scholar McCombs (2005) observed that when media describe items as important, they transfer this perceived salience to their audience, thus paving the way for the construction of the public opinion. This connects with the cultivation theory, which argues that repetitive, consistent exposure to common media patterns cultivates widely shared “images of life and society” (Gerbner 1998: 181). It is **thus** proposed that recurrent consume of media “influences beliefs about the real

world over time” (Vinney 2019, 2 al.). Along the same lines stated Rogers, Hart and Dearing (1997: 234) that “the media’s emphasis on certain issues, and not other issues, determines which issues we as members of the public think are important” (also similar in Oppermann & Viehrig 2016). Framing a news topic may therefore be a strategy to “identify main causes and responsible agents, make moral judgments, and finally, to suggest policy responses to the event” (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008, p. 53-54).

Not only the framing and frequently of topics may influence the perception, also the label is of great importance. Research findings have suggested that the label which is provided to an issue simultaneously indicates how the latter is defined and understood (e.g. NEW in Russ-Mohl, 2003; Tator et al., 1998). Labeling refers to the process of giving names to events and issues, which simultaneously implies “a series of processes which involve decision-making” (Prus, 1975, p. 81). The label is merely the tip of the iceberg as it stands for a complete set of assumptions and ideas, argue Tator et al. (NEW 1998, p. 27). If for instance a certain event is labeled ‘a financial disaster’, then the broader frame will not focus on the benefits of that event. How something is labeled therefore also shows how it is being interpreted (Russ-Mohl, 2003, p. 90). Hereby, the wording of the label often includes a message to the public, albeit hidden below the surface (Russ-Mohl, 2003, p. 91). The label hence actively guides the understanding and possible reactions of the audience (Torben-Nielsen, 2012). Applied to the Ageing Society, its labeling as ‘triumph of development’ places the same demographic phenomenon in a very different light than e.g. the label ‘apocalyptic demography’; with obvious implications for its perception (UN, 2012a, p. 3; Milner, Van Norman & Milner, 2011, p. 25-27).

This is not to say that news coverage and news events are two different things. The framing and labeling may offer a certain shape for the events, but can not change those events, as Schudson noted: “For most practical purposes, it is reasonable to believe that there are events in the world we can shape, distort, reinterpret, but not fundamentally change.

President Kennedy was killed by an assassin. There are lots of ways to read this fact, but none of them restore John F. Kennedy to life. He really died” (Schudson, 2007, p. 257). Yet, framing and labeling do affect the audience’s perception as they highlight one interpretation while understating a less favored one (Rateau et al., 2012; Fealy & McNamara, 2009).

#### 4. Methodology

The research corpus consists of a representative sample of the Ageing Society-related articles, published in the period mid-2014 to mid-2017, in the Swiss-German quality newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ, politically center-right, published by NZZ-Mediengruppe, circulation X copies, WEMF 2020), tabloid *Blick* (left-liberal, Ringier, copies) and free newspaper *20 Minuten* (inclination, Tamedia, copies). The study’s timeframe (mid 2014 – mid 2017) specifically focuses on the beginning of the 2015-2035 period in which Europe will experience the highest age-related pressure (Age Report 2020, see lit list Impulse; also similar in European Commission 2015). Therefore, it enables new insights in the coverage of this topical demographical phenomenon.

The research corpus has been composed through a stratified random sampling method with constructed weeks, which lends itself particularly well for newspaper studies (e.g. NEW Cantrell Rosas-Moreno 2010; Fico, Lacy, & Riffe 2008; Payne 2009). A sample of six constructed weeks per year was created, leading (given the three year research period) to a total of eighteen constructed weeks. The sample included all edited written content of the newspapers, e.g. news articles, reportages, opinion articles and editorials. Not included in the sample were reader letters (no edited content), advertisements (their representation of older people is untypically positive; Author & Russ-Mohl, 2012), nor visual imagery (which would have required specific semiotic analyzing methods). All newspaper-editions published on the dates of the constructed weeks, both paper and online, have been screened for articles

covering the Ageing Society. The screening was conducted by use of related search terms, including variations of ‘demographic shift’, ‘Ageing Society’ and ‘population ageing’<sup>1</sup>.

Articles had to meet following inclusion criteria to be included in the sample: first, referring to the Ageing Society; second, focusing on the situation in Switzerland; and third, explicitly describing the link between the Ageing Society and the article.

This led to a total sample of 98 newspaper articles covering the Ageing Society and its implications. Of these, 78 articles derived from the quality newspaper NZZ, 13 articles from the tabloid Blick and 7 articles from the free newspaper 20 Minuten. This dominance of NZZ-articles may imply that the implications of the Ageing Society have been more important to the NZZ than to the other newspapers. However, more plausible is that Blick and 20 Minuten published articles about the Ageing Society’s implications as well (e.g. increasing retirement age), nevertheless *without explicitly linking* them to the Ageing Society. Yet, as this project was specifically interested in how the Ageing Society was covered, such articles would not have met the third inclusion criteria (describing link with the Ageing Society) and were therefore not included in the study.

The methodological design comprised a set-up with both qualitative and quantitative elements. This approach allowed the identification of new frames, while also facilitating systematic comparisons between the frequencies of the frames used. In a first step, the newspaper articles were subjected to a qualitative content analysis with both deductive and inductive coding. The deductive categories focused on various aspects that earlier international studies found to be prominent in the Ageing Society-coverage (Lundgren & Ljuslinder 2011 & 2012; Author 2016). Inductive categories, e.g. ‘wellness tourism’ or ‘volunteer engagement’, were additionally created along the coding process, ensuring all relevant Ageing Society content was included for further analysis (Mayring 2010 & 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> These terms have been searched for in the title, introduction and main text of the newspapers’ articles.

Subsequently, a framing analysis identified the various frames in the newspapers' (check spelling) narrative about the Ageing Society. Leaning on the classic frame identification system of Gamson et al. (1992), this study distinguished between the overarching 'issue-transcending frame' or main frames (e.g. health in the Ageing Society), and the smaller 'event frames' or subframes (focusing on a category of related events, e.g. rising health costs) and

As a final step in the analysis, it was assessed how frequent the individual frames occurred in the coverage of the Ageing Society (i.e. measured by number of articles<sup>2</sup>). This assessment showed which frames were used more often, and were thus considered especially relevant (e.g. Burke, Hoitash & Hoitash 2016; McCombs 2014). This shed light on how the Ageing Society was constituted in the coverage of the examined newspapers.

## 5. Findings

The content and frame analysis have suggested three main findings: first, newspapers use a variety of different labels to refer to the Ageing Society; second, the Ageing Society is mostly brought into connection with political-economical and health topics; and third, the three examined newspapers, although representing very different newspaper types, apply a similar style when covering the Ageing Society. Because of this similar covering style, the findings of the three newspapers are presented together below. When a certain finding occurred mainly in one specific newspaper, this is clearly mentioned.

Consequent wording: frames, topics or narratives.

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<sup>2</sup> The number of articles was chosen as measuring unit for the frame occurrences, since otherwise the number of frame appearances in a particularly long article would distort the results.

### 5.1 Myriad of labels for the Ageing Society

The examined newspapers typically labeled the Ageing Society by a variety of different terms, referring to the demographic process. Examples of such labels are ‘demographic change’, ‘overageing’, ‘demographic evolution’, ‘ageing population’, ‘demographic process’, ‘ageing society’ or ‘demographic situation’. Such direct labels made up approximately **two-third** (65 percent) of the labels for the Ageing Society. Less frequently, in roughly one-third of the cases (or 35 percent), the Ageing Society was labeled by longer, indirect descriptions, mostly referring to the increasing life expectancy, e.g. ‘ever more people are getting older’. Apart from life expectancy, the factors fertility rate and migration determine the demographic change. However, these two factors were very rarely (fertility rate) or not at all (migration) mentioned in the descriptive labeling of the Ageing Society.

Finally, **it should be mentioned that** overly negative referrals to the Ageing Society, as for example “the demographic time bomb” (Hehli, 2016, p. 12, NZZ), occurred very seldom, in 3 percent of the **labels**.

### 5.2 Top-Topics: politics, economy and health

The Ageing Society was mostly covered in connection with political-economical topics and health topics. Political-economical topics occurred in approximately half of the Ageing Society-related articles (55 percent, 54/98 articles), while health topics appeared in a quarter of the articles (ca. 25 percent, 25/98 articles).

Other topics occurred much less frequently in the coverage of the Ageing Society. The topic of housing, i.e. the changing requirements for accommodations due to the population ageing, was found in ca. 8 percent of the articles (8/98); while **the education topic**, highlighting the implications of the demographic changes for learning institutions, appeared in ca. 4 percent of the articles (4/98). Other issues as e.g. mobility or cultural products prevailed

only marginally (in two or less examined articles) in the coverage of the ageing Society, and were therefore not further studied.

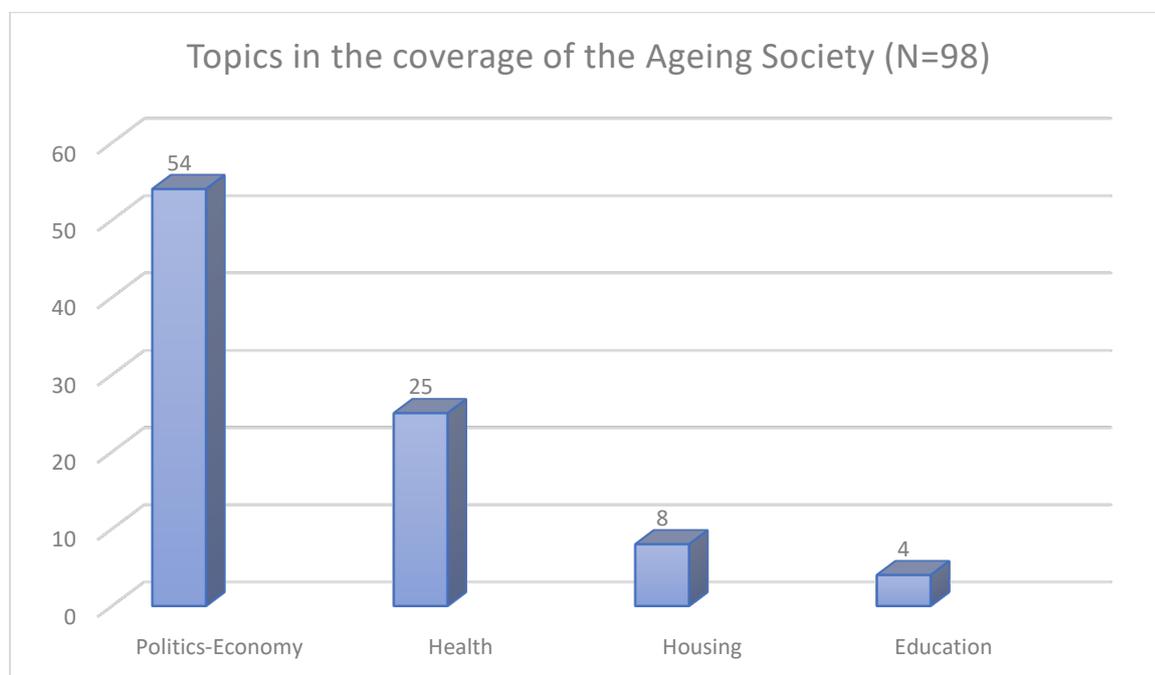


Figure 1 Overview of the number of appearances of the main topics in the Ageing Society-coverage of the examined newspapers; NZZ, Blick and 20 Minuten (N=98). Reading example: the political-economic topic appears in 54 of the 98 Ageing Society-related articles<sup>3</sup>.

### 5.2.1 Political-economic framing of the Ageing Society

The political and economic topics are often closely connected, while mutually affecting each other (cf Lundgren & Ljuslinder, 2011). Therefore, this specific political-economic approach in the coverage of the Ageing Society is considered a joint political-economic frame. Within framing research, Gamson (1992) has proposed a classical divide between overarching main frames (“issue-transcending frames”, add source & page) and smaller subframes (“issue frames” add source & page). Following Gamson’s framing division, it could be argued that the main political-economic frame of the Ageing Society consisted of three subframes: first,

<sup>3</sup> Note that the sum of the appearances in this figure does not lead to the total amount of articles (N=98), as some lesser appearing topics are not shown in this figure.

the pressured old age-benefits; second, the changing personnel management; and third, the upcoming business opportunities in the Ageing Society. To determine the weight of these individual subframes, it was assessed how often they appeared in the articles that applied the political-economical frame while covering the Ageing Society (N=54).

#### *Pressured old age-benefits system*

The first political-economical subframe, focusing on the challenged sustainability of the old age benefits (i.e. old age and survivors' insurance [AHV]), was the most dominant (appearing in 64 percent of the political-economical articles, or 35/54 articles). In this subframe, it was argued that the current retirement of the babyboomers puts a great pressure on the old age benefit-system: as more older people are leaving the labour market than younger people are entering the labour market, this leads to a situation where fewer working people must fund ever more retirees. Moreover, the retirement costs themselves are also increasing due to the rising life expectancy. The challenged old age-benefit system was also covered in relationship with political referenda and elections, pointing out which implications the proposed political initiatives (e.g. referendum 'Old Age Provision 2020' in 2017, or referendum 'Mass Immigration' in 2014) would have for the pressured system. Furthermore, the newspapers' coverage also focused on policy proposals that should remediate the challenged old age-benefit system. These proposals concentrated on an increase of the retirement age, the installation of a debt-brake, and the necessity of individual citizens to save more financial resources for their post-retirement life.

#### *Personnel Management*

The second political-economic subframe was smaller and concentrated on the changing personnel management in the Ageing Society (appearing in 29 percent of the political-economic articles, 16/54). Due to population ageing and the decreasing immigration, companies are expected to have problems to fill future vacancies, particularly in the medical sector. Therefore, they must adapt to the scarcer personnel resources, e.g. by also recruiting women for top positions and

by being attractive for older as well as younger employees. Furthermore, it is also proposed to fill vacancies by recruiting foreign employees -this however may not be an easy task, as improving working conditions abroad make an employment in Switzerland less attractive, and not all foreign employees may have a fitting education. Moreover, it is also argued that work-related immigration to Switzerland may not solve the deficits in the old age benefit-system, as these foreign employees are also entitled to old age benefits after retirement.

#### *Business opportunities*

The third and minor political-economic subframe considered the business opportunities in the Ageing Society (occurrence in 12 percent of the political-economic articles, or 7/54). Due to the growing wish for autonomy at a later age, the demand for various forms of assisted living is expected to increase. This may be realized e.g. with support of (non)medical care at home or by a permanently engaged professional careprovider. Companies catering these needs may profit from these business opportunities. Because of the ageing of the population, also certain medical sectors are expected to experience a great increase, as for instance physiotherapy or ophthalmology.

For the coverage of the political-economic aspects of the Ageing Society, the newspapers relied on various sources. These sources were (as may be expected) mainly politicians and economic players, as e.g. an industry think tank, labour union or labour sector organizations. Yet, responsibility for the implementation of the policy-suggestions was not only attributed to politicians and economic players (e.g. firms), but also to individual citizens -either as employees, or as responsables for their own financial post-retirement resources.

**Summary pol-econ:** The newspaper coverage brought the Ageing Society mainly into connection with political-economic and health issues. Other age-related issues, e.g. housing or

education, occurred less frequently. Within the political-economic framing of the Ageing Society, the challenged sustainability of the old-age benefits system (AHV), the personnel management in a demographically changing labour market and the businesses opportunities related to the demographic changes were important subframes. Among the political-economic policy proposals were the rise in retirement age and the integration of vacant personnel resources from women and elder employees, to accommodate to the shrinking labour market. The sources for the political-economic coverage of the Ageing Society were dominantly politicians and economic players. Yet, responsibility for the implementation of the policy suggestions was not solely attributed to these political and economic instances, but also to individual citizens.

#### 5.2.2 Health framing of the Ageing Society

Apart from the dominant political-economic frame, the observed newspapers also frequently applied the health frame to cover the Ageing Society. Generally spoken, the health frame occurred in approximately one fourth (ca. 25 percent) of all examined Ageing Society-articles.

Nevertheless, the distribution of health-articles over the various newspapers was clearly unequal: the quality newspaper NZZ applied the health frame much more often (in 28 percent of its Ageing Society-articles<sup>4</sup>) than both tabloid Blick (15 percent<sup>5</sup>) and free newspaper 20 Minuten (14 percent<sup>6</sup>).

The main health frame was composed from four smaller subframes: first, the rising health costs; second, the growing number of chronic patients; third, the employee shortage; and fourth, the rising wellness tourism.

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<sup>4</sup> NZZ: health frame in 22/78 of its Ageing Society articles.

<sup>5</sup> Blick: health frame in 2/13 of its Ageing Society articles.

<sup>6</sup> 20 Minuten: health frame in 7/20 of its Ageing Society articles.

### *Rising health costs*

The first, dominant health subframe focused on the rising costs in the sector (appearing in X percent, fussnote absolute nummers of the Ageing Society-health articles). The vast babyboom-generation born between 1950 and 1970 is projected to evolve from healthy employees to elderly seniors over the next decennia. This is presented as one of the reasons for the rising health care costs: “This development will lead to a clear increase of persons in need of care. Even when we assume that these people age healthily, it will lead to a strong increase in the costs” (NZZ; Kutscher 2015: 27). Moreover, the medical high-tech possibilities are mounting and with them the number of people wanting to make use of them, thus leading to a volume growth in the care sector. Simultaneously, the population ageing is expected to cause an increase in the health insurance fees and in the individual financial responsibilities of the patients.

### *More chronic patients*

The second health subframe (occurring in X percent, fussnote absolute nummers of the health articles) concentrated on the increasing number of patients with chronic illnesses. While the coverage roughly distinguished between dementia and other chronic diseases (e.g. cancer, diabetes or heart- and circulation ailments), it suggested a similar cause for their increase: in an ageing society, ever more people reach an age in which chronic diseases may occur. “Due to the higher life expectancy, the number of dementia patients rises” (NZZ; Vögeli 2014a: 15). Furthermore, patients more often ‘survive’ their illness and thus grow older, which again increases their risk of suffering of various chronic diseases simultaneously. To accommodate the larger number of (chronic) patients, a renewal of the infrastructure has been suggested: “The demography is changing. This forces ever more urgent adaptations of the medical infrastructure” (NZZ; Jankovsky 2016a).

### *Employee shortage*

The third health subframe (appearing in X percent, fussnote absolute nummers of the health articles) focused on the employee shortage in the health care sector. Although the acceptance of the Mass Immigration-referendum (2014) has made it harder for foreign employees to enter the Swiss labour market<sup>7</sup>, the Ageing Society is considered the main cause of the personnel shortage: while there are more older people in need of care, there are less younger people on the (health) labour market. In addition to this, especially female professional health care workers tend to make career breaks to dedicate more time to family tasks, which makes the personnel situation even more challenging. It has been proposed to address the employee shortage by engaging volunteers (also in 20 Minuten-article “Milizdienst”, and Blick-article “Blutspende”: add quote).

Furthermore, various policy suggestions were presented to improve the position of care worker: more and longer education, higher salaries and more flexibility to combine job and personal life.

### *Rising wellness tourism*

The fourth, and smallest, health subframe (occurring in X percent, fussnote absolute nummers of the health articles) was thematically deviant. Instead of focusing on the challenges attributed to the Ageing Society, this last subframe concentrated on an opportunity in the health sector: the rising wellness tourism. Hereby, guests combine their holiday with medical consultations or an operation and recover afterwards in relaxing surroundings. “The trend seems to go towards treatment options for senior adults with accompanying medical services, or home care services in hotels” (NZZ; Jankovsky 2016b). This upcoming tourism branch simultaneously offers economic growth and jobs to tourism regions. To attain success, the regions must nevertheless invest in the proper medical infrastructure, cooperations between hotels and hospitals, and develop marketing campaigns.

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<sup>7</sup> Also in Paragraph 5.3 Political-economic framing of the Ageing Society.

Concerning the sources that came to word in the health-articles, these were mainly sources from the medical field (e.g. association of medical doctors) and economic realm (e.g. health insurances, health economist, trade unions). When policies were proposed, responsibility for the implementation was attributed to these same players medical and economic players, as well as to employers, health education institutions, tourism organizations and individual citizens.

**Summary health:** The health frame of the Ageing Society concentrated on the rising health costs, the increasing number of chronic patients, the employee shortage, as well as the rise in wellness tourism. Medical and economic parties appeared as main sources in the health frame. The responsibility for the execution of health policies proposals was mostly appointed to the medical sector, politicians, health insurance companies and educational institutions.

### 5.3 Similar coverage in different newspapers

When comparing the quality newspaper NZZ, tabloid Blick and free newspaper 20 Minuten, the findings suggest that these differently typed newspapers shared a similar style when reporting about the Ageing Society. All three newspapers mainly featured ‘hard’ topics (e.g. economy, labour market, finance), while in contrast the so-called ‘soft’ topics (add nieuwe bron over JNL; e.g. society, fashion, culture, sport) were seldom presented in relation to the Ageing Society. With regard to the sources that were consulted for the coverage of the Ageing Society, all three newspapers relied dominantly on so-called ‘professional experts’. These are persons with a formal education or profession in a related field, e.g. doctors or economists, but also politicians, journalists or researchers. Whereas the focus on hard topics and professional experts is a typical approach for a quality newspaper, it is much less so for tabloid and free newspaper. A distinct difference however in the approach to the Ageing Society was that quality newspaper NZZ chose the health perspective twice as often as did tabloid Blick and free newspaper 20 Minuten. In other words, NZZ established the Ageing Society much more as a health topic than the other examined newspapers.

## 6. Discussion

In some language regions, the Ageing Society is consistently labeled by a few, ever-occurring terms (e.g. in English by ‘ageing society’ and ‘population ageing’). This contrasts with the situation in the examined Swiss-German newspapers, where the Ageing Society is labeled by numerous different terms. It could be argued that the absence of a clear, consistent label may hinder the readership in perceiving the various implications of the Ageing Society as connected. For instance, when one article describes how **the** ‘overaging’ leads to an employee shortage, and another how ‘the evolution that we all get older’ results in more chronic patients; readers may not immediately realize that both implications trace back to the same demographical phenomenon, i.e. the Ageing Society. When the investigated newspapers labeled the Ageing Society through its causes, ‘life expectancy’ was dominant. Fertility and migration, the two other causes of the population ageing, were on the contrary less present - indicating their perceived lesser importance for the demographic evolution.

With regard to the topics in the coverage of the Ageing Society, political-economic topics were featured in approximately half of the Ageing Society-articles, and health topics in a quart of all articles. The newspapers thus established the Ageing Society mainly as a political-economic and health subject, while highlighting financial aspects. This financial focus in the coverage of the Ageing Society aligns with results from international newspaper studies (Autor, 2016; Lundgren & Ljuslinder 2011, 2012). Lundgren and Ljuslinder suggest that the political move towards neo-liberalism has led to an economization of social phenomena, e.g. the economization of the Ageing Society. The coverage of the Ageing Society in the examined Swiss-German newspapers thus fits the general Western discourse about it, which is largely **economy-** and finance driven. From this perspective, the Ageing Society is considered a **time-bomb** under the labour market and the health- and retirement systems. As such, the Ageing Society appears in the newspaper coverage as a clear threat to the welfare state.

This approach leaves other, more opportunity-oriented aspects of the Ageing Society underrepresented. The support between various generations, within families also often monetary support, the voluntary engagements of people of all ages, the transfer of knowledge between various generations are but a few positive implications of the Ageing Society which are seldom featured in the newspaper coverage.

In contrast, the pressured sustainability of the old age benefits system (AHV) was a dominant topic in the Ageing Society-coverage. This great concern in the newspapers matches the results of the annual Swiss-wide ‘Sorgenbarometer’-survey, in which Swiss citizens assessed the future of the AHV as the main societal challenge for three years in a row<sup>8</sup> (CS Sorgenbarometer, 2017-2018-2019). This reflects a shared importance by both the media and the public. This notion touches upon agenda-setting and cultivation theory, which propose that when the public is frequently exposed to a topic in the media, it will perceive this topic as important (e.g. Busselle & Van den Bulck, 2019; McCombs, 2014; Gerbner, 1998).

Regarding the sources in the Ageing Society-coverage, the findings suggested that the main sources were professional experts, e.g. politicians, researchers or industry-representatives. Even when the topic was not strictly economic, the sources nevertheless often had an economic background; e.g. for the coverage of health-topics, economists were consulted assources. This, again, reflects the importance of the financial perspective in the coverage. Also, by dominantly citing professional experts, the newspapers constitute the Ageing Society as a topic that especially experts are knowledgeable about. The newspapers gave much less voice in their Ageing Society-coverage to not-professional experts, i.e. people with everyday experience instead of a formal education in the field, such as for instance caregiving relatives or volunteers. This approach parallels international findings of the Ageing

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<sup>8</sup> In 2020, the Swiss considered the old-age benefits system AHV the second-greatest concern; right after the corona-pandemic which hit Switzerland that year.

Society-newspaper coverage (e.g. Sweden, Lundgren & Ljuslinder, 2011; Belgium, Torben-Nielsen, 2016).

However, the examined Swiss Ageing Society-coverage also showcased some typical Swiss characteristics. The focus on the vacant female potential for the shrinking labour market (also in Shamash, 2011) echoes the frequent Swiss family constellation of the ‘male breadwinner model’, in which the male partner is the dominant earner and typically works full-time (Blom & Hewitt, 2019). As the female partner is more involved in the care for family members, there is a vacant potential for a (larger) paid position on the shrinking Ageing Society-labour market. Furthermore, the distinctive Swiss political system of ‘direct democracy’ resonated in the political reporting about the Ageing Society as well, while covering the referenda regarding the old-age benefit system and migration. Finally, the attention for the growing wellness-tourism may be rooted in the longstanding Swiss tradition of health sanatoria and the large existing hotel accommodation.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the question how the Ageing Society is represented in three Swiss-German newspapers. The findings propose that all examined newspapers present the Ageing Society dominantly as a challenge for the welfare state, constituting the Ageing Society mainly as a political-economic and health issue, about which especially professional experts have knowledge. In most Ageing Society-coverage, there is a financial focus; also for topics which are not-financial in nature, such as for instance health. This dominant financial approach leaves other, more opportunity-oriented aspects of the Ageing Society underrepresented.

These study results allow for future comparisons, both with other Swiss news media outlets and international news media. This study has some clear shortcomings though: a

newspaper case study in a relatively small country is undeniably restricted in scale and generality. Also, the examined content has been limited to edited text content; not included were reader letters, images and advertisements, which would have complemented the results. These omitted aspects may hopefully inspire other scholars to enlarge the knowledge in future studies.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research has been funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

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