Conflicting notions of citizenship in old age: An analysis of an activation practice

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A B S T R A C T

Ageing societies and increasing healthcare expenditures are inducing Western welfare states to reform their care arrangements. In a qualitative research project, we explored how citizenship in old age is constructed in a public innovative care practice situated in the southern part of the Netherlands: the shaping of 'life cycle robust neighbourhoods'. Life cycle robustness entails a further not formally defined ideal of age-friendly places, enabling older adults to live independently for longer periods of time. Participation is being presented as an important element towards life cycle robustness. We used ethnographic methods to understand different constructions of citizenship in old age. We analysed documents and interviewed local policymakers and civil servants, managers and directors in the fields of housing, care and welfare, professionals working for these organisations, and older adults living (independently) in these neighbourhoods ($n = 73$). Additionally, we observed formal and informal meetings and organised focus groups.

Our findings demonstrate conflicting notions of old age. Policymakers and civil servants, managers and directors, professionals, and even representatives of older adults share a belief an activation policy is necessary, although they differ in how they interpret this need. Policymakers and civil servants are convinced that societal and financial incentives necessitate current reforms, managers and directors talk about quality and organisational needs, while professionals mainly strive to empower older adults (as citizens). Simultaneously, older adults try to live their lives as independent as possible. We argue that, whereas old age became a distinct category in the last century, we now recognise a new period in which this category is being more and more de-categorised.

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Introduction

Ageing societies and continuous increases in healthcare expenditures are inducing Western welfare states to reform care arrangements (Bond, Peace, Dittmann-Kohli, & Westerhof,

2007). The Dutch national government is emphasising a need to shift from being a welfare society towards becoming a participatory society. Where participatory democracies encourage the democratic participation of citizens, a participatory society builds on neoliberal agendas that emphasise individuals' own responsibilities for their health and well-being, and an activation of people to help each other (Laliberte Rudman, 2015; Lamb, 2014; Newman & Tonkens, 2011). As part of these neoliberal agendas, an increasing amount of governmental and institutional responsibilities are being shifted to individuals (Dunn, 2005). The Dutch government

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expects that the inhabitants become more independent and active in society by taking care of themselves and their immediate environments. Governmental strategies include a redefinition of participation, as part of a broader aim to maintain an affordable healthcare system, as was already illustrated by Newman and Tonkens (2011). No longer considered as a civic entitlement, participation has become a strategical promotion of citizen's moral obligations. Using "*positive public moral*" citizens are expressively invited to play an active role in society (Tonkens, 2008).

Participation is considered to be an important parameter of modern citizenship and everybody has been asked to participate as much and as actively as possible (part of the yearly Dutch Speech from the Throne, Troonrede, 2013). Until recently, an active (social) citizenship was not expected of older (retired) adults, let alone the older old adults who were 75 years or over. Everybody was allowed, and sometimes even encouraged to pursue active citizenship and to volunteer in many societal roles, but an actual moral obligation was absent. Rather, people were supposed to enjoy their retirement days as much as possible. Expectations are now changing and even older adults are being stimulated to participate and to strive for self-sufficiency to realise a 'full' citizenship. By striving for self-sufficiency, governments mean that individuals should try to manage and regulate their own health and well-being (Lamb, 2014). If help is needed, people are pressed to find and arrange this within their own immediate, informal networks. The term participation is used to explicate the things citizens are supposed do for their immediate environments, such as keeping an eye on the safety of a frail neighbour, but also by actively contributing within the community, through participating in or organising social activities. Governments ask individuals to help other people and to do something in return. In other words, the rise of participatory societies is inducing new meanings of citizenship in old age, with an important role for active participation in society, while preferably 'ageing-in-place'.

To better understand further existing notions of citizenship in old age, we performed a scoping review of notions of citizenship and participation in six academic journals about ageing: *Age and Ageing, Ageing and Society, Journal of Aging and Health, Journal of Aging & Social Policy, Journal of Aging Studies* and *Research on Aging.* Our search for citizenship resulted in 528 studies that appeared to address citizenship, after which we narrowed our search down to 383 studies by adding the term 'participation'. This number of publications indicated that the relationship between notions of ageing, citizenship and participation has been studied thoroughly. However, it appeared that many studies mainly focused on specific issues, such as legal citizen entitlements of specific older minorities. Notions of citizenship in these studies took citizenship as a given construction of entitlements without any further obligations (Barnes, 2005; Gilleard & Higgs, 2000; Walker, 2008). Active, participative citizenship in old age as it is promoted nowadays, is occasionally mentioned and only as a voluntary achievement. The studies described older adults as being entitled to strive for an active, participative citizenship, with some public support if necessary (Craig, 2004; Isin & Turner, 2007; Wharf Higgins, 1999).

As current activation policies aim for active, participative older adults, notions of citizenship and participation change. It is no longer only about managing and regulating one's own health, but also about taking care of others and participating in the community. Drawing on a large body of literature, we conceptualised citizenship in old age. This paper adds to the literature on ageing, citizenship and participation as it unfolds new understandings of older adult's participation in society, building on a qualitative research in a public innovative care practice.

Contexts of citizenship in old age

Citizenship

In the context of the rise of 'participatory societies' the meaning of citizenship as well as citizenship in old age is being reconstructed, as it is increasingly associated with active participation. "Own responsibility", "own strength", "empowerment", and "to let loose [as a government]" are mentioned as ideals of a participatory society (Rmo, 2013; ROB, 2012; RVZ, 2012; RVZ, 2013; SCP, 2013; WRR, 2012). Some scholars have criticised these ideals and consider the introduction of 'active citizenship' to be a solution for assumed shortcomings in social cohesion, people's consumerist and antisocial behaviour, social exclusion, and a gap between the citizens and policymakers (Tonkens, 2008, p. 5). This debate pays little attention to the notion of 'citizenship in old age'. To understand how current developments affect older adults and perceptions on their citizenship, we need to know more about the evolution of the concepts 'citizenship' and 'old age'.

The concept of citizenship and its evolution is often described based on three main dimensions: legal, political and social citizenship (Huisman & Oosterhuis, 2014; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Legal citizenship, introduced in 1789, concerns sovereign citizens' rights. Between 1870 and 1945, a political dimension evolved with the introduction of a right to vote. Social citizenship, recognised and described by Marshall (1949), arose soon after the Second World War, and involves the idea that people who rightfully live in a city are automatically citizens and receive a social right to private and passive citizenship. In our study we have merely explored this social dimension of citizenship. Whereas legal and even political rights are often conferred to most people upon birth, perceptions on social rights are more sensitive to changes, as its demarcations are less agreed upon and can be the subject of negotiations in policy reforms. Van de Wijdeven, de Graaf, and Hendriks (2013) demonstrated how Marshall's social citizenship has enabled a development of active citizenship since the 1970s, encompassing three active citizenship generations: the acquisition of several participation entitlements introduced generations of 'voice' (first generation), coproduction and interactive policymaking (second generation) and a right within civil society to take initiative (third generation). Most recent developments are described using concepts such as 'do-democracy' and 'citizen power'.

Changing perceptions on citizenship have affected ideas about when a person is included as a citizen or considered to be 'a full member of society' (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Wharf Higgins (1999, p. 302) explained how "full citizenship (...) distinguishes participants from non-participants", and how citizens need to be empowered to be able to participate in the society (see also Marschall, 2004; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 38). Empowerment is considered to be necessary to support citizens in achieving a citizenship status at "the moment they become unemployed, fall ill or become too old to take care