

# Demographic Change and the 'Thrillseeking Society'

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# A perspective from ageing research

Three features define the world we live in at the start of the twenty-first century – and they are interconnected:

- Ongoing climate change
- Rising economic inequality
- Accelerating population ageing

Country after country is seeing their population greying  
– but why is the ageing world increasingly unequal?  
What does this mean for ageing people?

# A perspective from ageing research

People in later life usually experience more illness, disability, and dependency than younger adults do, but the timing, meaning and images of being old change

- Delayed bodily and cognitive declines
- New lifestyles
- Health and living with disease
- Improved educational and economic resources
- Shifts in working life and retirement

Tourisms is one out of many tools for active and healthy ageing

Demographic  
change

Tourism

The 'New Old'

**What challenges and opportunities does  
the ageing population have in store?**

# A short history of demographic change

Demographic change is a global topic since long

- Since ancient times, most people did not reach old age
- Dying took place in all age groups (LE at birth in Rome: 22,6 years)
- Shifts since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 20<sup>th</sup> century: growth, 21<sup>st</sup> century: ageing

# A short history of demographic change

It is a topic for individuals and social networks

- Planning for longer lives:  
Retirement saving, loneliness, caring burden...
- Provision for life in general:  
Career planning, health behaviour, family formation, partnership, gender relations...
- Everyone wants to live long...who wants to be ‘old’?

# Demographic change as a success story

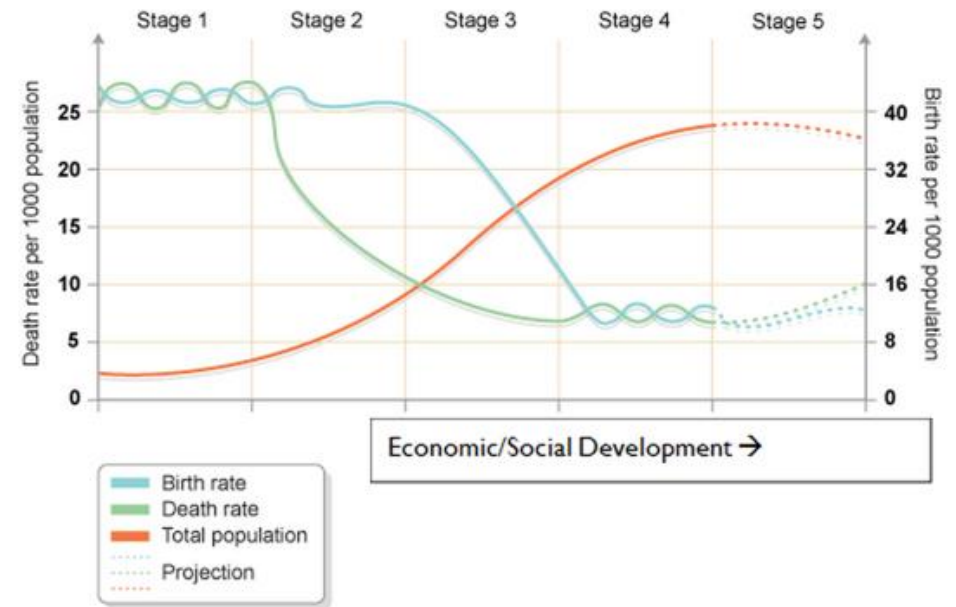
Population ageing is a triumph: For the first time in history a long life is a common experience

- Not all added years are healthy years (but some are)
- It is unequally distributed within and between societies
- It goes hand in hand with an overall increase in population size
- It leads to challenges and opportunities for societies, markets and individuals
- It is a result and cause of social change

# Structure and pace of demographic change

Population ageing from a demographic perspective:

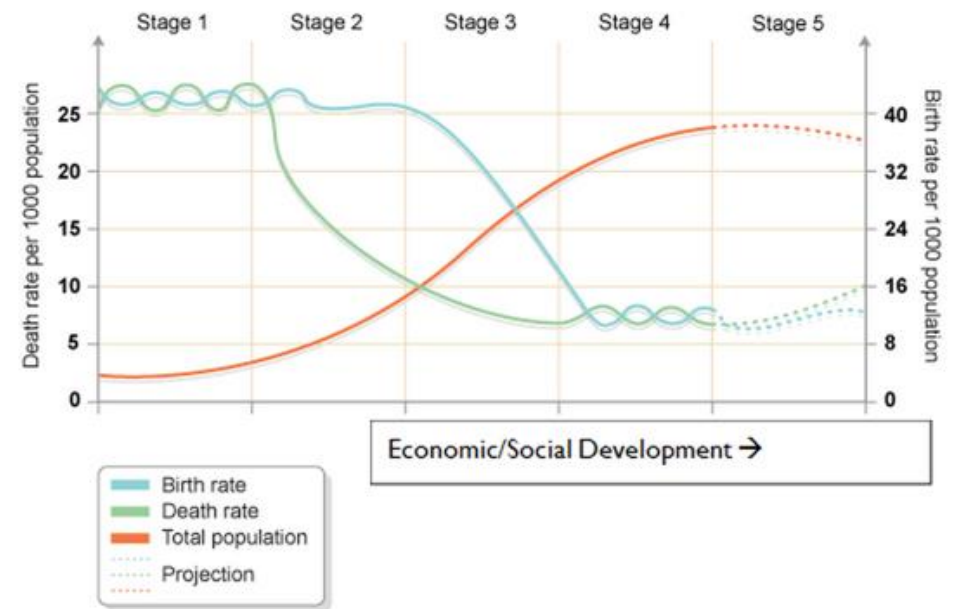
- Declines in child mortality and compression of later life mortality
- Declining fertility
- Prolongation of the life-span





# Structure and pace of demographic change

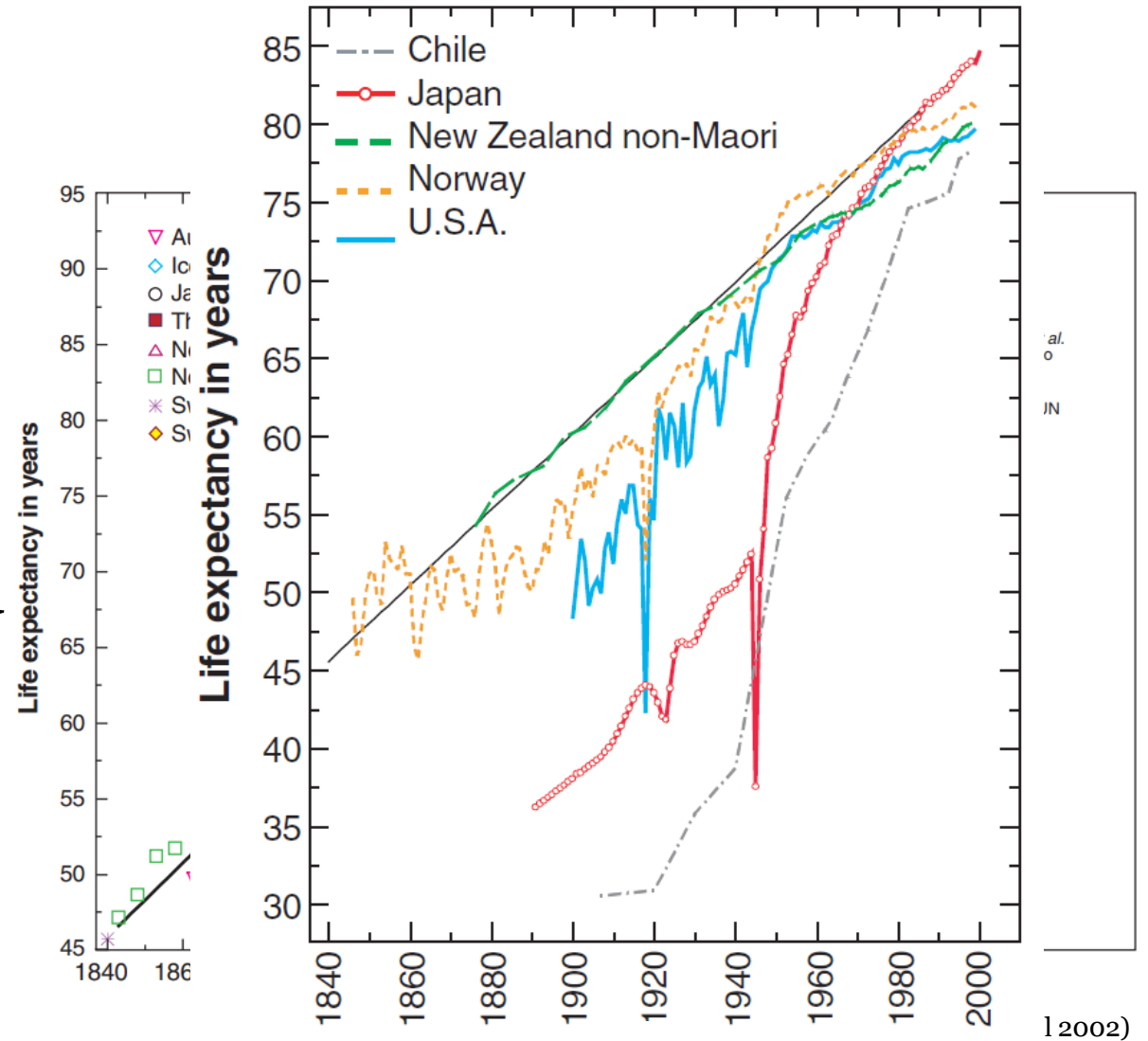
The expansion of the life-span:  
Life-expectancy at birth and at age 65  
has been increasing by as much as  
1 year for every 4 years of birth  
= 15 minutes per hour!



# No limits of longevity?

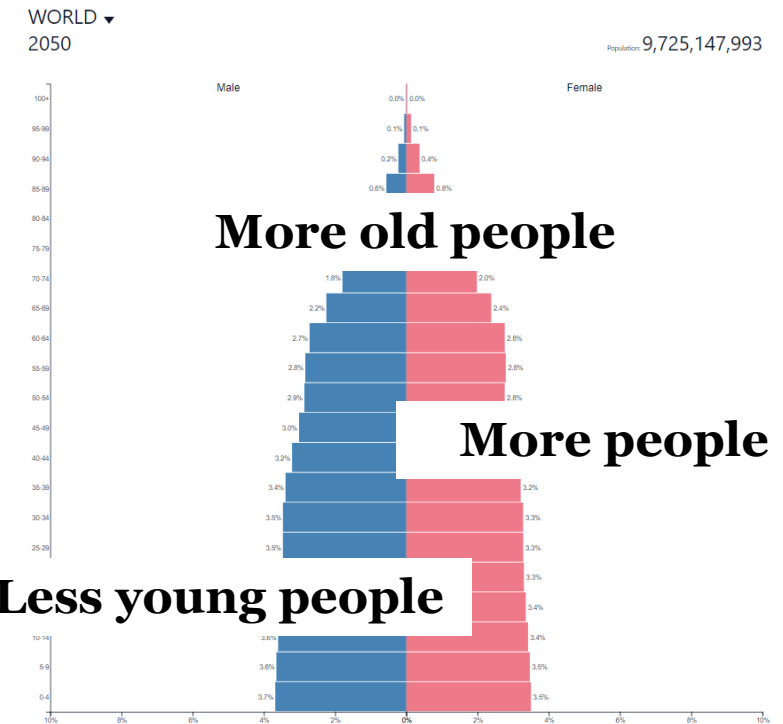
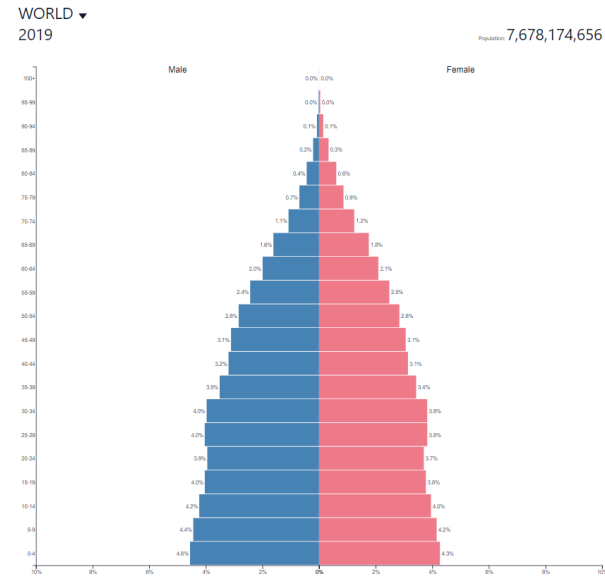
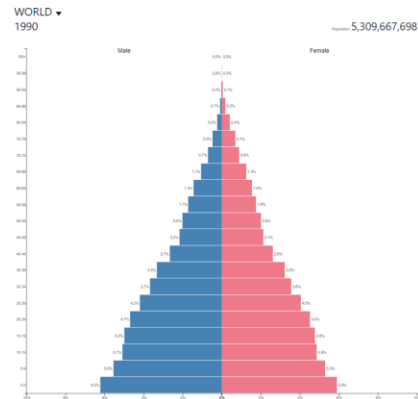
Limits for longevity are the basis of planning in health systems, pensions, markets...

Life expectancy may approach a ceiling, but so far assumptions have repeatedly been proven wrong



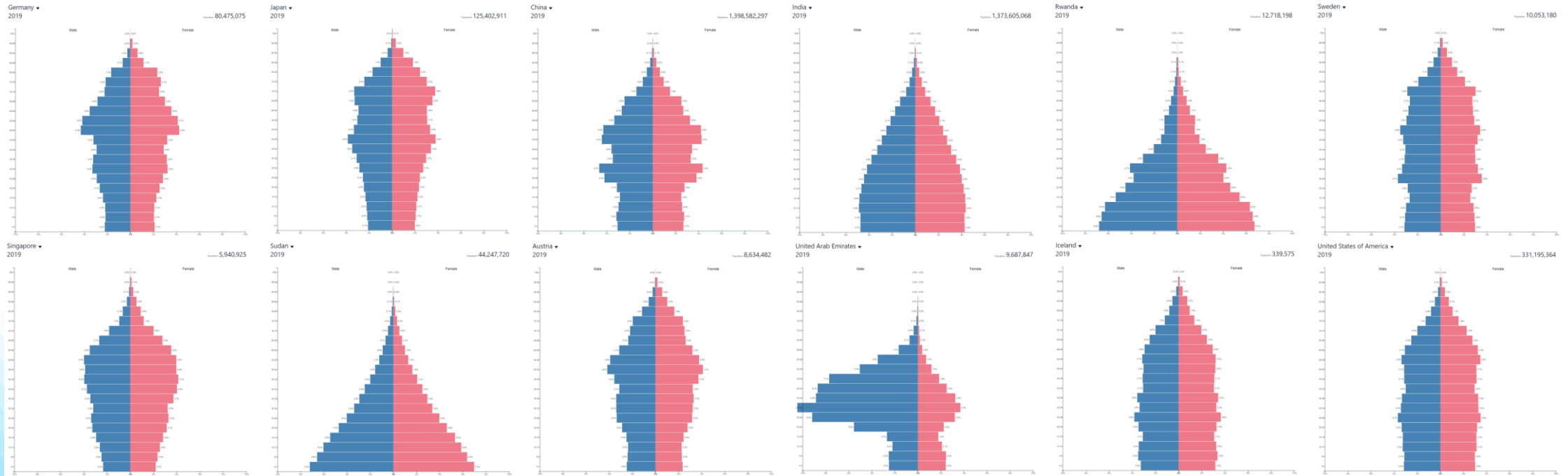
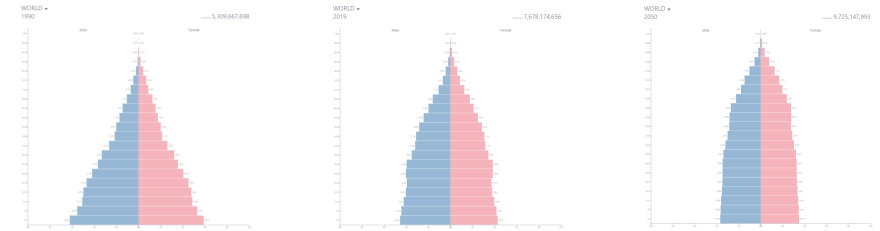
# Ageing is global, but unequal

# Global demographic change



# National populations

## Global diversity in population patterns



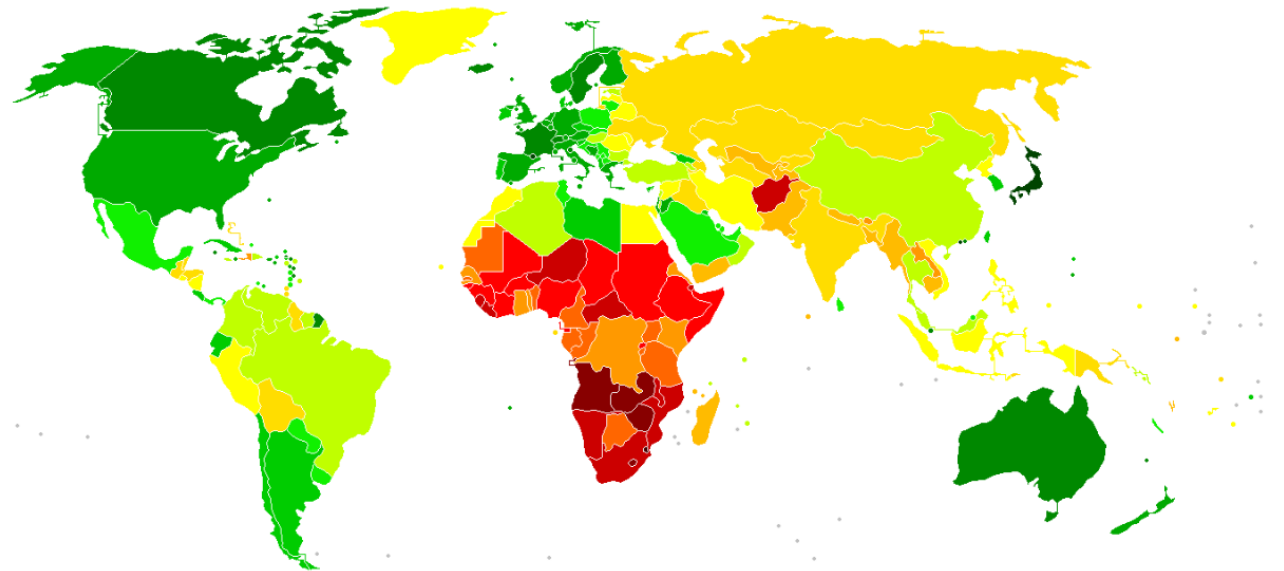
# Life-expectancy varies between countries

Global differences by living standards

Longevity is influenced by the inequality of living conditions

Timing, shape and pace of shifts vary between countries

Nevertheless, there is a common global trend: substantial increases with shrinking variance

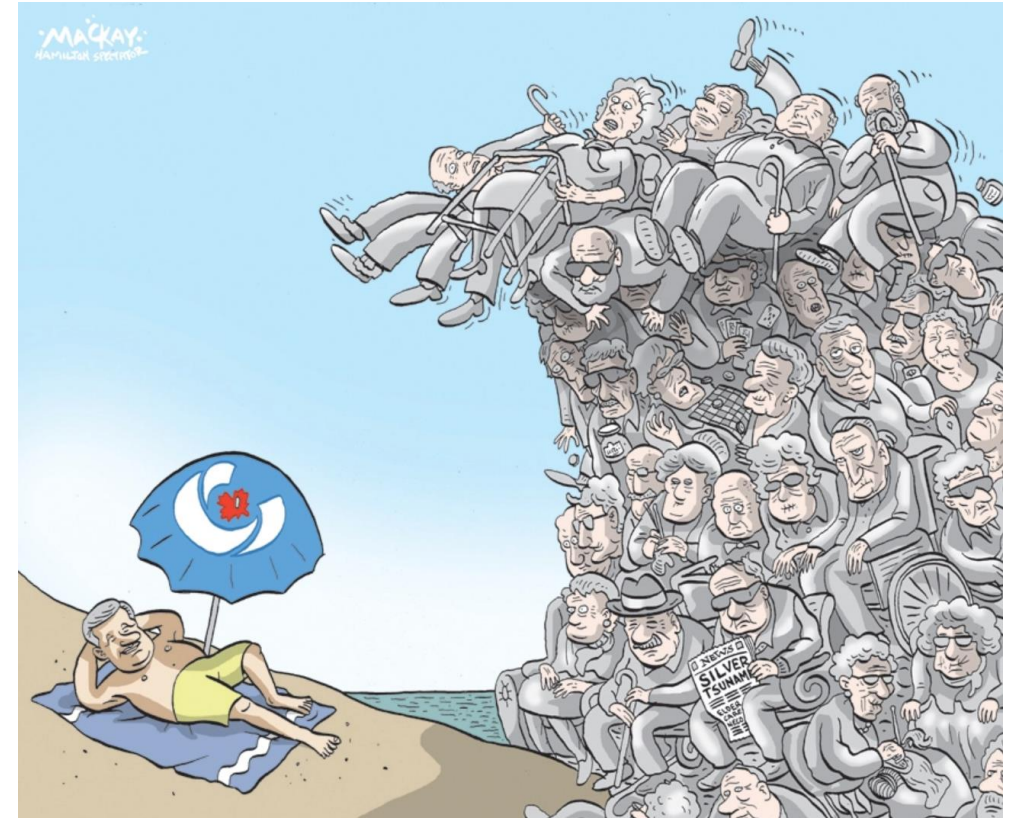


Life expectancy at birth by year in selected countries

# Demographic Change

Debates since the 1990s in countries like Japan and Germany stressed costs and economic burdens

- Public expenses
- Productivity and innovation
- Labour supply
- Work organisation
- Care systems



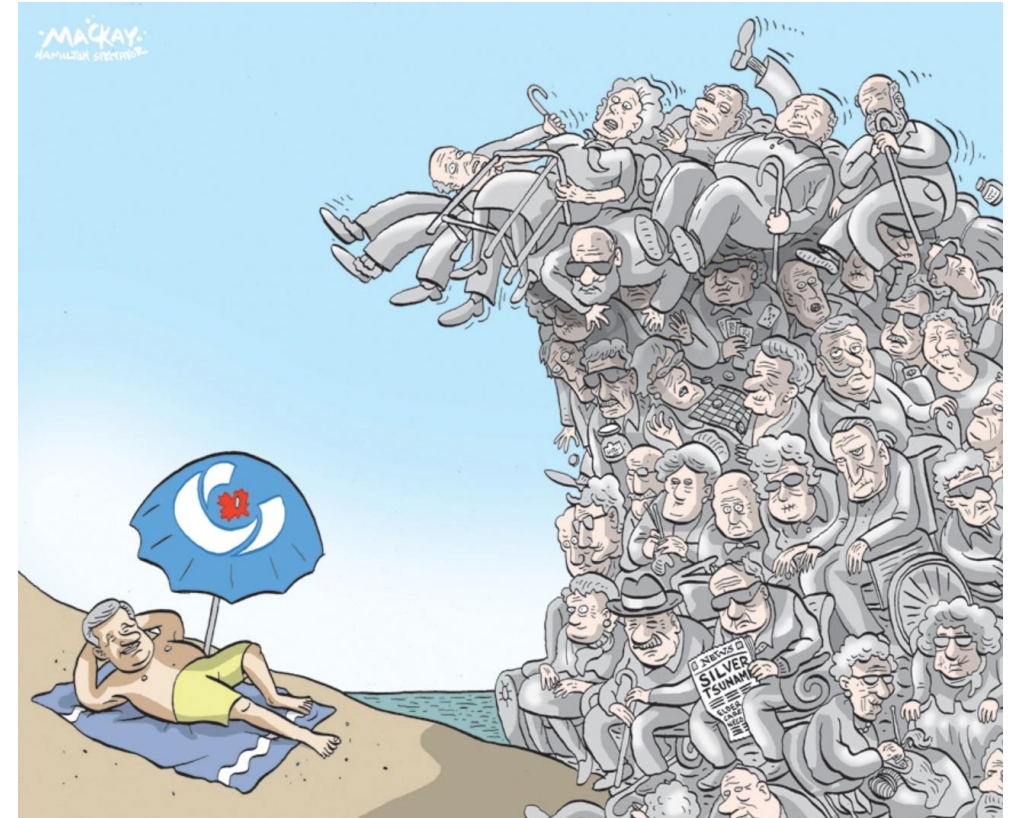


# Demographic Change

The older population appears to be a 'silver tsunami' of inactive, moody 'zombies' with disabilities

Older people appear as a social problem

This view has changed over time to a more ambivalent concept





# Ageing and the dispersal of chronological age

# Ageing and the 'New Old'

Demographic change happens in an exchange of cohorts that are at a certain age at a certain time – later cohorts live longer, they do things differently

New cohorts are challenging our ideas of what constitutes being 'old' and of 'the old' as a homogeneous social minority group

# Ageing and the 'New Old'

Normal ageing fades away with increases in wealth and opportunities, but also with shifts in work, economic shocks and de-regulation of welfare systems

People aim at maintaining mid-life lifestyles, but some have to

# Ageing and the 'New Old' - Lifestyles

New lifestyles and consumerism (Coleman et al. 2018)

Mobility, experience and personal fulfilment as goals – limited scientific studies on tourism, no information on thrill-seeking in later life stages

Healthy life: Anti-ageing lifestyles, health and beauty markets

# Ageing and the 'New Old' - Lifestyles

Cognitive ageing: The healthier and wealthier see themselves as 'younger' – 'non-old' individuals feel that they will not age the same as 'the others'

Capabilities at later life stages decrease and healthcare requires adaptations, precarious ageing leads to differences in preferences and consumption styles

# Ageing and the 'New Old'

More older people

Increased heterogeneity

Shifts in norms, demands and resources

- Demographic change is not context-free, uniform and self-evident
- Looking in the rear-view mirror is no longer a future strategy
- Age is not a good proxy for various customer groups
- Ageism and stereotyping are a source for widespread failure

# Ageing and tourism

# Ageing as a challenge for service industries

The tourism sector may become one of the most successful beneficiaries, but there are risks that it misses this chance

- Protagonists (media, states, regions, companies...) are facing difficulties
  - to understand the nature of this change
  - to pinpointing these increasingly complex consumer groups and their behaviour, resources, expectations, values, beliefs, desires...
- What was known from older people in the past loses relevance – what are there potentials for thrill-seeking and adventure travelling tourism?



# Adventure travellers

Adventure tourism is a dynamic, and fast-changing branch – mostly in North America, South America and Europe

There are substantial dynamics in international departures, in numbers of travellers and in spending behaviour

Increases are linked to income trends and infrastructures

Adventure tourism is often defined anti-mass tourism

# Adventure travellers

Adventure travellers are often in their mid-30s and this group is dominated by single men who spend relatively high amounts per trip

Senior adventure travelling seems to be a small niche: either adventure OR older tourists in studies and reports

Adventure tourism is mostly quite ambitious: physically, financially, time-related

# Ageing and opportunities for the tourism industry

Scientific studies on senior tourism often have a micro-economic focus: Consumer behaviour of ‘the old’

- Alén et al (2016) criticize a ‘lack of consistency in the few existing studies’
- Patterson and Balderas (2018) argue that ‘senior tourism will become an evolving and changing market’ in the growth of the 50+ population

Most available studies and planning approaches share the notion

- that chronological age is the dominant marker for demand
- that the quantitative shift between age-classes is key

# Ageing tourists so far

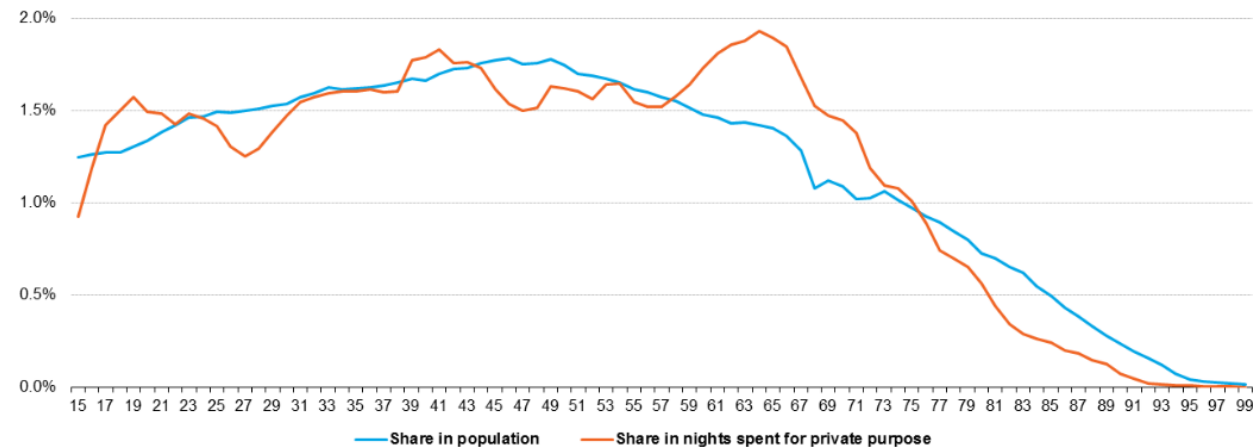
More than half of European residents aged 65+ (52 %) did not participate in tourism in 2014, compared with 37 % of people aged 15-64 (Eurostat 2014)

Senior tourists (65+) make longer trips, preferably in their country of residence and staying at non-rented accommodation

# Ageing tourists so far

Tourists 65+ extend the peak tourism season

Retirement boosts travel – for a short period



But is this peak just age affects? And what about the future?

Ageism hinders tourism industries to take advantage of ageing and social change

# Ageism?

Ageism is the stereotypical construction of old age and older people

Butler (1969): Ageism is the systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender

Iversen et al. (2009): Ageism is ‘negative or positive stereotypes, prejudice and/or discrimination against (or to the advantage of) elderly people on the basis of their chronological age or on the basis of a perception of them as being ‘old’ or ‘elderly’”

# Ageing, the 'New Old' and the triple ageism

Chronological age as a marker for customer groups blurs the vision for dynamics and heterogeneity in demands, experiences and resources

- The assumption of 'age classes': Focussing on chronological age neglects ongoing shifts in people's life-styles
- The 50+ thing: Homogeneous and extrapositive later life images disregard changing potentials and properties over the life course
- The issue of 'othering': Old are just the others



# Overcoming ageism

There is no specific upper or lower age that defines a senior or senior consumers/tourist

The importance of a market segment is not in a consumer group delimited by chronological age

The older tourist as an ageing tourist in a specific phase of his or her life embedded in particular conditions of economic and social resources, experiences, opportunities and constraints, that accumulate over the life course

# Some conclusions from an ageing perspective

# What challenges and opportunities does the ageing population have in store?

Demographic change affects population structures, resources, norms, lifestyles, population heterogeneity and – as a social process – the relevance of chronological age

Cohort differences and life course trajectories matter:  
People carry new life-styles and diverse resources

# What challenges and opportunities does the ageing population have in store?

Gains in latest life are not a target for tourism industries – inclusive and accessible tourism?

Ageism blurs the vision for dynamics and age-independent life-styles

- adventure travelling in later life in a thrill-seeking society
- adequate travelling as part of active and healthy ageing

# ‘New Old’ – ‘New Tourism’?

With the ‘New Old’ and their lifestyle shifts, ‘adventure-seekers’ are ageing into later life,

But is still not clear how they will transform mid-life experiences to later travelling or other activities

Travel as part of active and healthy ageing in general plays a major role from a gerontological perspective





# ‘New Old’ – ‘New Tourism’?

Ageing can offer more opportunities for sustainable, holistic tourism approaches – and vice versa

There are those, who cannot pay for expensive travels or have other aims

So far, cohort-sequential life course data is scarce: we cant understand what we can't measure

