

Ageing in Public Discourse: Linguistic and Visual Representations of Seniors in Warsaw and Berlin

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Abstract:

This paper explores how ageing and older adults are represented in public discourse through linguistic and visual messages displayed in urban public spaces, and is a part of a project funded by the Polish National Science Centre. The study focuses on two European capitals – Warsaw and Berlin – and forms part of a broader project examining the public image of older people in Poland and Germany. The research is based on the assumption that age and the social perception of older adults are socially and culturally constructed and therefore shaped by national contexts. The aim of the study was to compare representations of seniors in communicative materials available in public spaces, such as advertisements, leaflets, and informational posters. The analysis considers demographic and economic differences between the two countries, including the larger senior population and higher average income among people aged 65 and over in Germany. The dataset comprises more than 600 messages collected in both cities. Comparative analysis revealed differences in the representation of, among others, gender and race, lifestyle patterns, leisure activities, or approach to religion. The findings indicate that public discourse simultaneously reproduces stereotypical social roles while also presenting a more modern image of older adults as active individuals who keep pace with social change and resist being defined solely by chronological age. The results contribute to a better understanding of how ageing is constructed in contemporary public discourse and may inform policies and initiatives promoting age equality.

keywords:

Ageing, older adults, public discourse, linguistic and visual representation, public space, comparative analysis, Poland and Germany.