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Consequences and possibilities of "active aging" among a group of elderly women in The Netherlands

A case study of Granny's Finest

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“She continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself;
and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest
adventures.”

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract

The active ageing ideology encourages an active and socially engaged lifestyle in order to age successfully. In this thesis the lived experiences of ageing women in the context of an organisation that aims to provide them with the possibility to sustain their active participation in society are explored. An in depth case study is performed to increase our understanding of the role such an organisation may play in the lives of the elderly. Through the examination of the way in which ageing is experienced by these women within the context of the organisation this case study provides a number of insights into how the elderly use the organisation to cope with their ageing process and what the social value is of the organisation on them. Moreover, the case provides insight into specific challenges that the elderly face in our contemporary society. The study reveals that through participation the women add value to their lives in the sense that they acquire a larger social network and find meaning as active players in an organisation. However, the case study did shed some light on a number of unintended effects through the analysis of the participants' perspectives on the organisation revealing contradictions about the functions of the organisation and the lived experience of the grannies.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Population ageing is a global trend. As such people, governments, civil society and the private sector must find a way to adapt to changes that are inherent to ageing. Remaining active in the third age is seemingly the way to go forward because remaining actively engaged appears to provide opportunities to age happily. This fits into the modern way of thinking in which productivity is encouraged and idleness is regarded as useless. This chapter explores the background of ageing providing a starting point for the research.

1.1. Population Ageing

Population ageing is occurring in all regions and countries at various levels of development, as such it is one of the key social trends of the century. Inevitably when becoming older people experience several late-life losses as changes occur regarding their mobility, absence from the working field and loss of aged peers which may increase dependency (Settersten and Angel 2011). Such declines in resources and social support make older people particularly vulnerable to loneliness or social isolation.

Social isolation and loneliness are consistently associated with reduced wellbeing, health and quality of life (Cacioppo, Hughes et al. 2006). Moreover, this association of elderly and dependence on the welfare state has contributed to the development of a view on seniors as passive, incapable and helpless recipients, which further feeds their exclusion from various possibilities and spaces in social life (Marhankova 2011) (Tulle-Winton 1999).

Especially in a society that puts a premium on production (Bauman 2004), older people easily become excluded as their productivity decreases and they lose their social worth when they arrive at the end of their working lives. As Bauman (2004) puts it, there is no place for them in a modern society to be productive and thus to be useful. As a result, active ageing is the new credo to live by, introduced by the World Health Organisation in the 1990's, where individuals actively influence the conditions of their ageing through self-responsibility and self care. Marhankova (2011) discusses how positive images of ageing present seniors as independent individuals that achieve feelings of happiness and satisfaction, thanks to their participation in the labour market and their 'productive' activities. Exclusion from mainstream society because of ageing and its associated losses can in this respect be overcome by being active, as activity creates spaces for social inclusion and can therefore become the desirable option (ibid).

Ageing is often measured by its chronological nature. Retirement at the age of 67 is an example that reflects this chronological concept of age. However, age is also a social construct, Laz (1998) p.86) argues that it is constituted in interaction and gains its meaning from this interaction in a social context. It is relational to its social world including other generations that continuously influence each other (Huijsmans, Shanti et al. 2014). Ageing brings along many alterations in the social sphere and requires adaptation when these changes occur. Changes in relation to work and leisure, in relation to family and friends, in relation to the individual physique and well-being, in the view of others and changes in relation to the living environment can all become issues for people when growing older. Accepting these changes might be challenging and may require the need to develop coping mechanisms. Remaining active and involved after the 'productive' life might help this acceptance, or, on the contrary, it may in some cases form resistance to ageing (Lin, Hummert et al. 2004).

1.2. Coping through Social Networks

A wide range of initiatives - both for- and not-for-profit - respond to the needs of the ageing population. Hereby, they aim to provide opportunities for the elderly to cope with the changes in their life. One of such organisations is Granny's Finest, a social enterprise that focuses on the active participation of ageing women. Granny's Finest aims to enhance social connectedness and social functioning among elderly women thereby reducing the risk of loneliness and social isolation. Granny's Finest seeks to enrich social connectedness by letting the grannies actively fulfil (what Granny's Finest views as) their hobby of knitting and other forms of handicraft in a social setting and under supervision of young designers, bridging different generations and industries. The final product is an assortment of knitted fashion accessories and sold under the brand name 'Granny's Finest'.

In this research Granny's Finest functions as a case study to exemplify and reflect upon the local reality of the elderly when it comes to issues concerning social value and the loss and/or re-development of a sense of purpose in society. The case is based on multiple lived experiences that are captured in stories and field notes. The qualitative data adds the necessary depth to the analysis, and thereby contributing to the views and discourses in the existing literature on the active social participation of the elderly.

1.3. Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of ageing women in the context of an organisation that aims to provide them with the possibility to (sustain) their active

participation in society. Thereby, this research aims to increase our understanding of the role such an organisation plays in the lives of the elderly. Examining and understanding how ageing is experienced within the context of such an organisation, and how elderly use the organisation, exposes the social value of such an organisation, and may provide to be useful in the development of programs that address specific challenges that the elderly face in our contemporary society.

1.4. Research Question

Ageing, along with its associated late-life losses and possible consequences of becoming socially excluded or isolated, is a contemporary topic considering the ageing population worldwide. The case study of this research, Granny's Finest, makes an explicit effort to address some of these issues on a micro level. The organisational model is based upon the active participation of elderly women in the organisation. Thereby it allows women to be productive (again) in a literal sense, as the women are producing handmade accessories for a fashion brand, while simultaneously expanding the social network of these women and allowing them to retain a place (sense of purpose) in society.

The research question therefore asks:

How do ageing women use Granny's Finest to adapt to the changing life course they experience in a society that views the aged population as redundant, and what do these uses illustrate about the social value of the organisation?

1.5. Overview

First, this research will explore ageing in the modern society (chapter 2). In the 3rd chapter the case of Granny's Finest is described, based on an ethnography of the women that participate and thereby thus also constitute Granny's Finest. In chapter 4 both the manifest and latent functions of Granny's Finest (Goudsblom 1974), as well as the intended and unintended functions of Granny's Finest for the elderly women, is analysed using the functions as described by Goudsblom (1974). Using the functionalist perspective sheds light on what the organisation means for the participating grannies, but also exposes the intergenerational power relations and uncovering contradictions between the functions of the organisation and experiences of the grannies. The 5th chapter presents a critical discussion of the value of both the case study and the subsequent analysis in this thesis to extend our understanding of the

functions and social value of organisations that aim to aid the elderly in their process of ageing.

1.6. Research Methodology

The research methodology includes phenomenology and the interpretative approach. These approaches help to explore and understand the meaning and function of Granny's Finest to the grannies. The interpretative approach aims to understand the reality from the view of the participants, as it is about the interpretation of the participants by focusing on the meaning they attach to phenomena (Green and Thorogood 2009).

There is a logical explanation for choosing an interpretative approach along with phenomenology, as interpretative approaches stem from philosophical approaches of phenomenology (Ibid). Corresponding to the interpretative approach, phenomenology focuses on meaning, "to understand the essence of phenomena, one ... understands how the 'life-world' was directly experienced" (Green and Thorogood 2009) p.14). It differs strongly from the positivist approach, as phenomenology is not about passively experiencing reality but instead reality is experienced through interaction and behaviour. As Green and Thorogood (2009) argue, phenomenology is about attempting to reveal how the reality is experienced instead of trying to be objective. By using qualitative data, the interpretative approach (with a focus on meaning) in combination with phenomenology (with an emphasis on the lived experience) therefore reveal an insider perspective on a subject matter.

This research relies on an ethnographic study. It thoroughly explores Granny's Finest and their participants as a case study. This allows depth in the exploration, of the grannies life worlds' including all of its components, and therefore generates more understanding compared to the use of numerous more superficial and closed question interviews. A case study involves studying a phenomenon within its context, whereby it aims at including as much context as possible instead of excluding this context, which is often the result of using questionnaires or conducting experiments (Green and Thorogood 2009). With questionnaires the researcher designs the questions on which the respondents have to formulate an answer. As a result, the posed questions, and in some cases the suggested answers, have a great influence on the outcome of the research as they automatically exclude the exploration of areas that lay outside of the questionnaire. On the contrary, ethnographies can bring attitudes, motivations, and experiences of to the surface. Doing ethnographic research helps understanding lived realities and meaning, and prevents over-simplifications.

It is important to note my potentially subjectivism in this research because of my position in the organisation. I have been involved in Granny's Finest for over a year prior to the start of the research. During this time I have grown close relationships with the grannies. On the one hand this provides advantages in acquiring valuable information, since a bond of trust that forms the basis of the data collection had already been established. However, because the grannies might consider me as part of the organisation, they may actually be hampered to be completely open about their feelings towards Granny's Finest. To avoid or minimise this risk it is important to stress my efforts as a researcher to acquire a 'neutral' role in the organisation. To minimize the subjectivity in the analysis, I collected extensive written- and sound-recorded memos, and I kept a reflexive diary to monitor my thought processes. As Green and Thorogood Green and Thorogood (2009) have argued threats to reliability and validity are less relevant for qualitative approaches because it relates to the social reality that the object of research represents or shapes.

To build a strong case study the data collection should involve a variety of techniques (Yin 2009). The core of this research consists of four full months of extensive qualitative research using different methods namely participant observation techniques, semi-structured interviews, informant produced photography, and documentary sources. Implementing the combination of these methods produces a robust base of qualitative data. Each of these methods is elaborated upon below.

1.6.1. Participant observation

Because I was already actively involved with Granny's Finest, I was able to perform participant observation in settings that are natural to the grannies. The participant observation took place in different settings, such as the knit-clubs, the excursions and the 'after knit-club activities'. For participant observation the knitclub in Schiedam provided the best opportunities for acquiring data. The grannies in this club already had been acquainted with me since I have been around for several months at these weekly meetings in my role as a 'supervisor' and the point of contact to Granny's Finest. I performed my regular activities during these knit clubs, which consisted of providing new knit-kits and providing general assistance. This allowed me to simultaneously observe the naturally occurring interaction between the grannies, and to have informal conversations with the grannies on topics that have proven relevant for this research. In total the participant observations consisted of four sessions of one and a half hours.

This knit club in Schiedam introduced the after knit-club 'borrel', which consisted of a weekly cocktail hour with a small group of grannies and the researcher to enjoy a drink and

talk about a variety of topics. These afternoon drinks have stimulated the relationships between the women and the researcher, reducing their fear to speak their minds. Topics that might have been too sensitive to address during the knit-club, could be discussed during these informal meetings.

Granny's Finest also organises excursions for the grannies to acknowledge them for their efforts, and to enhance the social relationships within the groups. These excursions provided additional interesting settings for the researcher to perform participant observations. In particular, the excursion to the Museum of Boijmans van Beuningen was used to perform participant observation. As part of this excursion, the grannies were invited to be part of the exhibition 'Hand Made', where they functioned as the stars of the exposition. By performing participant observation in this setting I was able to see how the grannies respond to the public attention and recognition. This excursion was carried out over the course of a week with all the different groups of grannies. Thereby it allowed me to perform extensive observations in this setting.

1.6.2. Informant Produced Photography

To develop additional qualitative data on the perception of the grannies on their own ageing process two grannies were provided with a disposable camera with the request to capture places, people, objects or situations that they found meaningful, lend them identity and/or express or add to their quality of life in relation to growing older. These images contribute to the research process by giving the participants the opportunity to select and emphasize aspects of their (domestic) environment, and thereby may well represent their understandings of ageing and quality of life (Pink 2007). These photographs were used as the basis for in-depth interviews where the interviewees were asked to use the photographs to elaborate on, and add meaning to, their pictures.

1.6.3. Semi-structured Interviews

To allow for further exploration into the meaning of ageing to the grannies and their adaptation process of becoming older seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with grannies. To select respondents a purposive sampling method was used, which means that respondents were selected on the basis of my conception of their ability to generate appropriate and useful data that would result in information rich cases that would consequently allow for in-depth study. Six of these interviews took place in the homes of the interviewees. This also allowed me to have a closer look at the personal environment of the

interviewed granny, providing insight into the way that aspects of Granny's Finest reflected in their homes. For these interviews a diverse group of grannies, varying in age and background, were selected. Aside from the participating grannies, an ex-participant who provided the researcher with information about why she decided to quit was interviewed, which revealed certain obstacles to participate in Granny's Finest. Aliases are used in this thesis to protect the privacy of the respondents.

Chapter 2. Ageing in a modern society

The ageing population is a vulnerable group in society. At a certain age people inevitably have to deal with late life losses and retirement comes into play. In a modern society the aged population is being made redundant because they are regarded unproductive and therefore useless (Bauman 2004) and prone to risks such as experiencing loneliness and becoming socially isolated (de Jong Gierveld and Hagestad 2006; Windle, Francis et al. 2011). The active ageing ideology supports how remaining actively engaged presents a coping mechanism or how active ageing can counter 'decline' through ageing (Lin, Hummert et al. 2004). However, whether active ageing is the solution to age happily is questionable (Marhankova 2011).

2.1. We're Getting Older

As a result of declining fertility rates and increasing survival of older people ageing is one of the major current global societal trends. Population ageing is occurring in nearly all countries in the world, the number of people aged 60 years or over is expected to more than double from 841 million people in 2012 to more than 2 billion in 2050 (Guzman, Paliczko et al. 2012). Moreover, the majority of this older population is predominantly female. Older women outnumber older men almost everywhere, as women tend to live longer than men (ibid, 2012). This phenomenon is also significantly apparent in the Netherlands where the ageing population brings about new challenges for the health and welfare sectors. In 2012 the Netherlands counted more than 2.7 million people of over 65 years old (16% of the total population) (CBS 2012). This number will continue to increase in the future, by the year 2040 26% of the population is expected to reach the age of 65 and over (CBS 2012). These demographic changes require new approaches. An ageing population in combination with the economic crisis have raised many questions about the sustainability of future pension systems and health care facilities. The challenge is to create societies that are fairer and more sustainable for all generations with active participation and involvement of all age groups in society (Aartsen and Komp 2013).

2.2. Late Life Losses

When growing older, people's integration into society on the basis of their roles changes, especially in marriage, parenthood, and employment (de Jong Gierveld and Hagestad 2006). These late life alterations such as shifts from work to leisure and losing aged peers may lead

to a smaller social network and a decrease in self-reliance, making this group of people more vulnerable to loneliness which potentially has negative consequences for the overall health and well-being (Dykstra, Van Tilburg et al. 2005). Well-being, is broader than health and refers to how an individual assesses his or her life situation as a whole (Cramm, van Dijk et al. 2013).

2.2.1. Post productive life

Retiring from the labour market often has many consequences that stretch further than the monthly paycheck. Ending the productive life involves a decrease in social relations as relationships with (former) colleagues likely perish. Moreover, people may question their usefulness in society that weakens their self-esteem and the feeling of being proud of one's accomplishments. This also has implications for the learning cycle that often ends along with retirement, as participation of adults in education is mostly work-related (Jovic and McMullin 2011). On the other hand, retirement equals time that allows for new activities in daily life providing new opportunities after the working life (Lin, Hummert et al. 2004; Aartsen and Komp 2013).

2.2.2. Social Isolation

Especially elderly people face a risk of becoming socially isolated because of possible late life losses, decline in mobility, and exiting the labor market. "Loneliness is a major health risk for the old and the socially isolated" (Settersten and Angel 2011) p.666). Research shows that one million out of two and a half million people in the Netherlands above the age of 65 experience feelings of loneliness. Four per cent of the over-65s, which comes down to roughly 100.000 people is feeling very to severely lonely (TNS/NIPO 2008). "Loneliness is described as the negative difference between the perceived quality of existing and desired relationships, it is a situation that is characterized by loss and disappointment" (Van Tilburg and De Jong Gierveld 2007); p.7). Van Tilburg and De Jong Gierveld (2007) distinguish social and emotional loneliness, where emotional loneliness entails the absence of deep intimate relations social loneliness refers to a lack of a number of meaningful relations with a broader group of people such as acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours or people with similar interests. Emotional loneliness often relates to people having to deal with losing loved ones, family, friends, or aged peers. Whereas social loneliness can be a result from decreased mobility due to health problems minimizing the opportunity to go to places where people can meet and interact with each other (Toepoel 2013).

2.3. In Need of Care

Socially isolated people lack a network of people who may provide informal care or other forms of support (Machielse 2011). This means that when people become temporarily or permanently in need of help they are dependent on professional care (Hortulanus 2003). A growing ageing population therefore poses challenges and even more so because due to the economic crisis governments are cutting back on their expenditures in care (Phillipson and Powell 2004).

Another reason to challenge loneliness is the low social participation of socially isolated citizens in social networks and activities. As a result, they are hardly involved in society and therefore have fewer opportunities to express solidarity with others (Machielse 2006). Moreover, several studies in which the relationship between loneliness and health is examined show that people who experience loneliness or are socially isolated live a less healthy lifestyle opposed to their socially engaged peers (Yarcheski, Mahon et al. 2004; Greaves and Farbus 2006).

2.4. Is Active Ageing the Solution?

An active and socially engaged lifestyle is seen as an important factor of ageing successfully (Tulle 2004; Adams, Leibbrandt et al. 2011; Marhankova 2011; Martin 2012). Through the concept of active ageing “the prevalent view of ageing as a process of a passive, biological and inevitable decline has been challenged old age is increasingly viewed as a time of possibilities and opportunities” (Martin 2012) p. 52). The term active ageing has become increasingly popular, where activity is becoming the key conceptual framework in the current perception of ageing, promising a better life in the third age (Katz 2000). Moreover, it also entails an ethical aspect, as this view defines activity as the universally desirable condition (Marhankova 2011).

2.4.1. What is Active Ageing all About?

Since the WHO adopted the term “active ageing” in the 1990’s it has been an important vision on how to approach old age in Western societies (Marhankova 2011). The WHO (2013) describes active ageing as follows:

“Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. It applies to both individuals and population groups. Active ageing allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental

well-being throughout the life course and to participate in society, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they need.”

Active ageing is based on the concept of individuals actively and systematically influencing the conditions of their ageing through self-responsibility and self-care. It is fed by the neoliberal concept of reduced involvement of the state.

2.4.1.1. Social Participation

Social participation and mobility are strongly related to active ageing and the prevention of loneliness. Social participation is defined as the ability of an individual to fulfil social and societal roles in a meaningful way involving rewarding contacts with other people and it fosters a sense of being part of society (Putnam 2000; Veenhoven 2009; Toepoel 2013). Therefore it is important that both social and individual aspects are approached in tackling loneliness. Social relations are important for a well functioning society ensuring cohesion and stability, they assume a certain degree of social integration and in a sense functions as a 'glue' for social cohesion in society (Hortulanus 2003). These relations confirm a sense of belonging, through the process of social integration people get involved with each other and with other groups in society. Identification with a social group may lead to commitment, confidentiality and friendships leading to positive implications for one's well being (ibid). This certainly appears to apply to social relations in the immediate environment of people and social cohesion in the neighbourhood (Cramm, van Dijk et al. 2013). These social connections produce resources, also referred to as social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Resources include functional and emotional social support, implying that social investments result in social returns (Son, Yarnal et al. 2010)

2.4.1.2. Remaining Productive

Aside from the importance of a meaningful social network other aspects are also important when it comes to tackling loneliness and improving wellbeing. Cramm, van Dijk et al. (2013) argue that well being is also reflected in affection, affirmation, status, comfort and encouragement. This includes for example, whether people feel useful to others, and people are proud of their achievements, or whether people really do what they like. This implies that remaining engaged in productive activities positively influences well-being O'Neill, Morrow-Howell et al. (2011). For elderly, productive activities are often embedded in leisure or volunteering activities when their working career has ended. Benefits of engagement in productive activity may reside in the sense of responsibility, purpose, and usefulness (ibid,

2011). Putnam (2000) makes the distinction between productive and consumptive leisure activities where he emphasizes that productive activities prove to be the most beneficial for creating stronger social ties, this shows how remaining productive is often interconnected with social participation. When engaging in social, physical and cognitive activities seniors can enhance the way they experience life (Oerlemans, Bakker et al. 2011).

2.4.2. Ageing and Modernity

In the modern era, emphasis on productivity prevails (Bauman 2004). Active ageing therefore fits in this modern thinking where remaining active after the productive life has ended is essential. When people reach a certain age they are pushed into retirement. Where the aged (and therefore) unemployed people were previously viewed as useless individuals “those without work are now ‘redundant’, superfluous and without any prospect of a return to work” (Emmison 2006) p.212., the productive aged now have a function in society where employment and usefulness are desired societal goals when they manage to remain actively engaged. “The passage of time is to be recorded on the debit side of human life projects; it brings losses, not gains. The passage of time portends the waste of opportunities that ought to have been grasped and consumed as they came.... Waiting is something to be ashamed of because it may be noted and taken as evidence of indolence or low status, seen as a symptom of rejection and a signal to exclude” (Bauman 2004) p. 109 Working is what makes people productive, it is a social activity and in modern societies people and their lives are evaluated by their careers (Baars, Dohmen et al. 2013). Consequently, this social construct writes people off as ‘old’ and ‘useless’ when they retire from work. (Edmondson 2013) argues that because retirement is enforced and standardised by age it imposes a ‘formal’ kind of equality on different situations, which leads to inequality and moreover generates a loss of meaning in life, isolation of age categories and loss of competence and productivity.

Chapter 3. Case Study: Granny's Finest

Granny's Finest is a social enterprise that responds to the issues of the ageing population by actively engaging elderly women in the production process of a fashion brand. The organisation has a connective function by bringing these women together to participate in creative leisure activity, every week at the same time.

3.1. Granny's Finest: Origins

The fundamental idea of Granny's Finest was born when one of the founders visited his grandfather in his retirement home in 2009, the following narrative illustrates his experience.

"I am visiting my grandfather in his retirement home, we are sitting in the communal area enjoying a cup of coffee. An elderly woman is sitting by the window, she is knitting an enormous amount of yarn into something that looks like a large scarf. Her visible devotion to her craftwork intrigues me and I wonder what it is that she's making, and for whom. I walk over to her to have little chat."

"Good afternoon madam, what a beautiful piece of craftwork you are making here. May I ask what it is you are making?" "Oh yes young man, well frankly I don't know yet maybe a scarf or a little dog-coat." "And who will be the lucky recipient?" "Well I don't know actually all my children and grandchildren already have plenty of my creations so I'll have to see" "Really? So what will you do with it once it is finished?" "Well, take it apart and start over, for me it is just something to keep me busy and I just really enjoy knitting."

"After the visit to my grandfathers' retirement home I could not stop thinking about the woman, and her remarkable skills that would go to waste. The image of her sitting all alone in the corner by the window devoted to a piece of craftwork with no destination somewhat saddened me."

He discussed his experience with a friend, at the time they were both students in business hence they saw opportunities to further develop this into a business plan that aimed to conserve the talents of elderly women and at the same time stimulate their social involvement. With the idea to establish a social fashion brand by fostering cooperation between elderly women who have the expertise in craftsmanship and young designers who are able to

translate the modern view of fashion into handmade garments the Granny's Finest foundation was born and a pilot start-up followed in 2011. Two years later, at the time of research, Granny's Finest established itself as a social enterprise that aims to re-activate elderly women and encourages these women to actively play a role within the organisation.

3.2. Granny's Finest: Social Purpose

Granny's Finest is a social enterprise. Instead of neoclassical firms who merely aim for the greatest possible financial profit, social entrepreneurs aim for both economic and social returns. Their mission is creating social value where its business model incorporates societal issues and transforms them into business opportunities. Granny's Finest opts for a set of social priorities bridging different industries and generations.

While the older generation is coping with the issues associated with ageing and 'ending their productive life' (see chapter two), a younger generation has difficulties in starting a career. In recent years several governmental cutbacks have come into place due to the enduring recession and unstable financial market. Amongst others the Artists Work and Income Scheme Act is abolished, a law which is designed to support professional artists with insufficient financial means with the purpose to help them build a profitable business at the start of their careers. With the abolishment in January 2012 beginning artists are deprived of their favourable position and social security (Rijksoverheid, 2012). This means artists have to be ever more concentrated on commercial activities in order to generate sufficient income. Talking to artists from different disciplines the founders of Granny's Finest discovered knowledge and expertise in this area are lacking or insufficient among artistic professionals, which is ascribed to the limited commercial attention in Academies of Arts. Granny's Finest aims to play a role in the success of the careers of young creative talent by providing the opportunity for designers, photographers and illustrators to accessibly expand their portfolio and providing commercial support and guidance

The organisation aspires to enhance social connectedness and social functioning among elderly women thereby reducing the risk of loneliness and social isolation. Under supervision of young designers, the grannies perform a leisure activity of knitting and other forms of handicraft in weekly fully catered knitclubs. Every week the grannies receive new packages with pattern and wool, referred to as knitkits, so they can continue their 'hobby' in their own time during the week. Granny's Finest fosters cooperation between the elder- and the younger generation. During the creation process of a new collection there is intensive collaboration between the designers and the grannies, through creative interaction they are connected by a

mutual interest and goal. Understanding of current fashion by designers is linked and supported by traditional craft techniques from the grannies, from their own expertise the different generations contribute to a common end result. The grannies are encouraged to actively participate in the production process of the organisation, whilst being endorsed in a social and informal environment.

The final products lead to a collection of handmade accessories, as the slogan illustrates 'Designed by the new, produced by the best, worn by the greatest'. These accessories are sold under the brand name Granny's Finest. All products have a hangtag telling the consumer whose hands made their product through a personal hand-written note from the granny. The consumers are then encouraged by Granny's Finest to send the granny a postcard with a picture to thank her for her effort and craftsmanship, for which the organisation provides a paid service. Taking connectivity a step further, aside from connectivity between the group-members the grannies (producers) are connected to the consumers. It intends to give the grannies a feeling of appreciation from the consumer. The products of Granny's Finest exceed the Dutch borders as the products are frequently sold to tourists resulting in postcards from Germany, Italy, Australia, Canada and the United States.

While Granny's Finest is not purely a social organisation and is therefore able to make a profit, the grannies do not receive a salary. Instead, in return for their effort and commitment, aside from the weekly organised knit clubs the grannies receive fully catered excursions with the intention to further strengthen social connectivity among the entire group.

3.3. The Women that 'Make' Granny's Finest

The women starting from the age of 55 and up form the group of 'grannies' and weekly get together in informal but professional knitting clubs organised by Granny's Finest. There are different motivations among the women for participating in Granny's Finest: some seek a form of leisure, some are drawn to Granny's Finest because of the involvement of young people, and some want to meet other aged peers. At the time of research Granny's Finest counted eight different knit clubs on different locations, six in Rotterdam, one in Schiedam and one in Scheveningen adding up to over a hundred participating grannies and still growing. The grannies have different cultural, economic, educational and professional backgrounds, and also differ in age as this ranges from the age of 55 to 97 years old. However, despite these differences they do find each other in their mutual creative pastime of crafts within the context of Granny's Finest.

3.4 A Day at Granny's Finest

It is Tuesday afternoon, the Granny's Finest knitclub in Schiedam starts at two PM in the communal area of the local elderly care centre. Some grannies already gather half an hour prior to the starting time of the knitclub to catch up and show each other what they have made during the week, the perfect opportunity to proudly show their accomplishments or share difficulties they struggled with. I arrive at 1:45 PM with a suitcase full of new knit-kits, I hardly have time to greet everybody as the grannies come straight at me eager to get their hands on something new. "What did you bring today? Some nice colours hopefully? Something new?" The curiosity is palpable and the grannies seem like little girls in a candy shop.

One of the grannies is responsible for the administration and she manages to bring order to the chaos. "Girls, girls easy there is enough for everybody, now first show me what you have made." She checks the different pieces on quality, hands out the tags and ticks of the administration list. Before a piece is handed back in the granny writes down her name accompanied by a personal message on a hangtag which is then attached to the garment she has made. Sometimes the grannies get very creative leading to small verses such as "when nothing goes right, go left" or "God couldn't knit, so he created grannies". This simple hangtag adds a personal touch and is intended to tell the consumer whose hands made their product and to stimulate them to write a postcard to the granny. Today I have one postcard to hand out, it is a card of a photo of a woman with her handmade scarf saying "Dear Mrs. Jones, I am very happy with the beautiful scarf you made me. It is a unique and crafty piece of work which I will wear with pride." The card goes around the table as each granny wants to take a look at it while cheering to Mrs Jones.

As eager everyone is to get to work, the grannies get back to business and hand in their finished pieces with hangtag as quickly as possible and try to find a new package they want to make and take home. They know that the sooner they are ready the more diversity there is to choose from. Favourites get picked first and as the suitcase slowly empties I hear comments such as, "ah do you only have these boring colours?" and "I don't like these thick needles". The grannies seem to have similar preferences often leaving the less popular packages untouched. In order to foster diversity in the collection I explain how the colours used are the ones in fashion right now which makes them on-trend grannies as well and I try to convince them to at least make an effort to work with the more unusual tools encouraging them to further explore their abilities. I notice this sometimes makes them feel empowered to push their own limits and sometimes puts them off. Some grannies use Granny's Finest to make

time pass more quickly at home and joining a weekly social event, other grannies want to achieve something and push themselves to their maximum ability in order to deliver quality products.

When the exchange of goods is done the atmosphere transforms into a calmer ambiance, one of the volunteers pours everyone coffee or tea accompanied with some biscuits or pastry. The chitchat starts, grannies talk about knitting, family, neighbours, holidays, books, movies and so on. I occasionally join the conversation and move around in order to divide my attention equally.

3.5. Using Granny's Finest to Cope with Ageing

In-depth interviews, observations and casual conversations exposed how the grannies use Granny's Finest. On different levels Granny's Finest seems to have functions that help the grannies give substance to their presumed post-productive life. The case shows that Granny's Finest and the grannies do not consider age to be a determining factor in being productive.

(Bessie, 78) The strong points of Granny's Finest to me are the joy I find in working with my hands, building new relationships with different people and going out to different locations. But the most important reason for joining Granny's Finest is being needed and valued for my accomplishments.

3.5.1. Leisure

Granny's Finest facilitates different spaces when it comes to leisure. There are the weekly knit-clubs in which they also receive knit-kits providing leisure at home.

(Gladys, 84) You have something to do when you're at home, I pick it up and put it away whenever I want. Also, what do you do when you're up and dressed at 9 in the morning. You can read or something, but I don't feel like doing that and rather do something constructively. People sometimes tell you to study something, but honestly the older you get the slower you're able to learn, and what's the use? The thing I like about Granny's Finest is putting my skills to good use and even improve them, designers sometimes surprise me when they can teach me new things in knitting.

The grannies are knitting under the guise of a ‘hobby’, a leisure activity to enjoy. However, seemingly some grannies do not experience it purely as such and feel they have obligations and expectations to live up to. This exposes the ambiguity of the term ‘hobby’ and therefore it is debatable whether this is a desirable term. The activity of knitting should on the one hand be just for enjoyment and on the other hand it has to meet certain standards in order to pass. Moreover, grannies feel pressure in delivering the knits once they have taken home a knitkit.

(Ruth, 76) A few months ago I hesitated whether I should continue with Granny’s Finest or not. I was totally fed up, I thought to myself; well just take a step back here for a moment. Because when I say I quit, I quit and never return. So now I’ve decided to take a long break during the summer. No commitments or obligations for a couple of months. I’ll not even be taking home any knitkits because what’s the use, then people are waiting for me and expect me to deliver. No, I just want to take a short break and might start fresh in September. You know, Rose also doubted to take some time off, and of course Lisa is taking a break now.

Aside from the knit-clubs Granny’s Finest organises events that are meant to thank the grannies for their efforts and investment. These kinds of events include visitations to museums, theatres, fashion events and the like.

(Dixie, 73) I really enjoyed the fashion event in Amsterdam! All those people who came up to us, men and women, all those questions. And we kept on praising the Granny’s Finest store (laugh).

(Emma, 79) The Kunsthal? Amazing! Just as the trip to Eindhoven. Through these trips I know what I am working for, and I like that. You see these trips do not need to be costly or anything, just fun!

Some grannies criticized these trips as they figured most of them included promotional opportunities for Granny’s Finest as a brand. They understand that showcasing the grannies is good exposure and delivers a brand experience for Granny’s Finest. However while the grannies may enjoy going out to such events they also are aware of their function for the organisation on such occasions and seem to desire a trip that is simply organised for their enjoyment.

(Agnes, 61) Don't get me wrong I do enjoy the trips we have made with Granny's Finest, but I am not stupid these trips and events were not just for our pleasure. They were promotion related activities for the organisation, on the one hand I do not mind that. But I would like to have an activity without other strings attached than just pure fun for us. They advertise with how they acknowledge us for our efforts through trips and events, then there should be some without PR activities and having to advertise Granny's Finest to potential buyers.

(Hattie, 81) We get our appreciation through the organised trips, but I must say these are mostly promotional. It would already be great if we would go to the zoo for example. During the promotional events we are used and it is not just for us. I enjoyed it, sure, but it was purely promotional. If we go on those trips they shouldn't be called trips for the grannies.

During these organised events the different knitclubs get connected. However while all being part of Granny's Finest, this does not automatically mean that they experience this connectedness as such.

(Minnie, 68) That time when we all went together to the museum, I didn't like that. It was much too crowded, so many strangers because it is not your own group you know, I found this a bit unsettling. You really want to be with your own group.

3.5.2. Ownership

The participants of Granny's Finest express it is important for them to feel needed and be useful to themselves and to others. There seem to be different levels when the grannies talk about usefulness in the context of Granny's Finest. One important factor in feeling useful concerns intergenerational solidarity. It involves the knowledge that through Granny's Finest, young creative talent is given the opportunity to gain experience and build a portfolio, thereby improving their chances on the market.

(Kitty, 73) Especially in these more difficult times, the economic crisis young people have to deal with, I feel bad for them and through this

project I feel like I can make a difference. Even though it is small scale of course, but we are helping each other.

(Bessie, 78) One of the reasons I enjoy participating in Granny's Finest is helping those two boys with starting their business. I think they are doing a good job and I want them to have a thriving business.

(Gladys, 84) Some people wonder why we are doing all this 'work' without getting paid. Then I usually respond that I want to help start this business and when it becomes a profitable multinational I want to share in their profit (laugh). That is nonsense of course, I really do want to help these boys establishing their business.

Granny's Finest introduces different elements in the lives of the grannies causing changes in how the women experience ageing. Even though the majority of these grannies 'resigned' from their 'active' life, their lives are now being recycled and made productive again by actively participating in a young and dynamic organisation. They are producing goods that are marketed in a dignified manner, contributing to the feelings of pride.

(Hattie, 81) Now I am knitting a scarf, and I think I at least knit twenty of this particular design already. So it is not very exciting, but it keeps me busy. I just want to literally have something in my hands, if I am not doing anything for Granny's Finest I am doing something for the salvation army for example. But what I prefer about Granny's Finest is that the focus is on good design. Some people simply use Granny's Finest to make time pass, others like me want to accomplish something en make a beautiful product. I don't care if I have to redo it six times, I just want to deliver good quality so I can be proud of my work. Like those babyhats, I really like making those. I love making something beautiful, you see for the Salvation Army you made something for Romania threw it in a bin and never heard the end of it. Now I find appreciation.

(Dixie, 73) I felt very proud when I first walked into the store at the Kareldoormanstraat. All the stuff that we made with our own hands was presented so beautifully. Also, the reactions from people who came in were lovely. It made me feel special.

Also, being a valued important factor in the organisation brings pride and satisfaction. However, there seems to be a desire for more involvement and communication on the details of the organisation.

(Gladys, 84) I feel involved in the organisation, and think well we are the ones that make this business. So I am always very interested in new business developments and sales. Sometimes however I wish we would be more informed about the ins and outs of the organisation, because I feel we are an integral part of its success and existence.

The publicity on Granny's Finest has been abundant from the start of the organisation. Injecting a certain type of recognition into the lives of the grannies, reaffirming their identities as individuals and as a group. The publicity also accounts for more involvement of friends and family of the grannies who notice and collect the articles.

(Minnie, 68) The publicity is very positive, this way the boys can build their brand. We are treated as we are part of Granny's Finest and every now and then we are approached for interviews. All my friends and family collect the articles when they come across it in the media. For example the article from the Dutch Design week in Eindhoven, two days later my sister had the paper.

(Bessie, 78) I keep a book of all the publicity of Granny's Finest, I cut out the articles whenever I see something in the newspapers. And that flatters my ego, well only when it is about my own knit-club because I don't have feeling with the other clubs.

3.5.3. Bonding

In terms of new friendships Granny's Finest seems to be a successful mediator, there are different examples on how the grannies take on activities together outside the knit-clubs and even beyond the context of Granny's Finest. Even between the different knit-clubs social contacts are blooming, signifying the intensification of the social network of participants is not limited to their own knit-club and neighbourhood in which they live. Joint participation in Granny's Finest allows for multiple connections on different levels of intensity.

(Hattie, 81) I used to knit for the Salvation Army, when I found out about Granny's Finest in my neighbourhood I went to have a look. One granny came up to me and asked me if I could knit, sure I can! Everybody was knitting that particular cable scarf, so I said well let me try that one too. While I was knitting someone told me I was doing something wrong with the side stitch, I said no I'm not doing it wrong I just do it my own way. That was my first clash (laugh), and as a result two other grannies came up to me telling me how much they liked the particular stitch. I liked Granny's Finest from the start, not because they just listened to me but for having conversations and creating something together. Now, everyone uses that stitch!

That is how I got involved and it clicked right away. The interaction is nice, some people suit me better than others but isn't that always the case? Judy for example, she is always grouching and then I tell her to shut her face because she's driving me crazy. And then, Rose is laughing. And Judy tells me I am crazy, to which I respond well let's shake hands than we both are! I just go there for fun, really watch what is happening in the group. The one person does this the other does that, and I love it, it's such a great group altogether. I love and enjoy being at Granny's Finest, let's be honest it is just really cosy!

The social function of Granny's Finest is not limited to the spaces provided by Granny's Finest. Grannies interact over the phone, through Internet and face to face, sometimes within the context of Granny's Finest regarding their knits and sometimes just for spending time together and undertaking activities.

(Hattie, 81) We email each other about patterns when we get stuck, take a picture of what we are doing. I really like that. We visit each other, drink coffee and puzzle on how to make it right.

(Agnes, 61) I love IKEA, and during the knitclub I found out Minnie is a fan as well. So whenever we plan on going we check whether the other one likes to go too.

(Ruth, 76) There have been several occasions that we went with a group of grannies to musea, the Keukenhof or a citytrip. We are all different in age and lived different lives, nevertheless we enjoy spending time together and

*feel connected because of our passion and involvement in Granny's Finest.
But we talk about everything though, not just stitches and patterns!*

3.5.4. Security and Steadiness

Because of the constant factor Granny's Finest becomes in the lives of the grannies, the organisation functions as a social security network. Absence and poor conditions can easily get noticed in a group of people that spends time with each other on a regular basis and relies on each other for delivering the collection of produced goods,

(Gladys, 84) There is no use to wait for people to come over and see how you are doing, you have to get out yourself. Especially with the current situation in elderly care where maintaining self-reliant as long as possible is being urged, I feel the burden is placed on children and neighbors. With Granny's Finest I make sure I maintain surrounded by different people, now I use public transport to go there but when a time comes when I will not be physically able to do so I will just take a taxi.

Other than the social contact with other grannies and the younger team of Granny's Finest, the regularity of the knit-clubs also accounts for another form of security that is the assurance of occupancy at the knitclub and during the week. For example, when the knitclub in Ommoord was cancelled because of Ascension day the grannies expressed how they missed their weekly afternoon outing and on top of that some of them had to go through one entire week without 'work'. This reveals how the afternoon knit club has become an anticipated structural moment in the lives of the grannies.

3.5.5. Artistic Expression and Progress

The women attracted to Granny's Finest are initially drawn by creativity and need to have creative skills in order to participate. Therefore creative ambition and mutual interest in handcraft is present among the grannies. Hence working with new designs and certain types of materials brings enthusiasm and has a stimulating effect.

(Agnes, 61) The bracelets of Granny's Finest, those make me happy and open my heart. I think it is fun, original and a pleasure to make them.

(Bessie, 78) The yarn that we use at Granny's Finest is very special, it is very different from the yarn I usually buy at Wibra or Zeeman for one Euro. It is nice to work with these materials and it complements the designs. The only downside is that the people can't wash the products because it's hundred per cent wool.

The case of Granny's Finest reveals that learning is not bound by age. Even at an older age improving skills and progressing appears to be satisfying and rewarding.

(Minnie, 68) When I just started at Granny's Finest I didn't want to use the thick needles at all, they scared me so I requested the normal thinner ones. Now, I love the thicker needles! I found out I can knit much more easily with the thick ones. Before I started at Granny's Finest I had average knitting skills, but now I have learned much more such as a variety of needles and cables.

3.5.6 Sharing Knowledge

The exchange of knowledge is an integral part of the Granny's Finest organisation. The grannies share their knowledge about handcraft skills with each other and with the designers, in return the designers share their knowledge on fashion, design and innovations within design. Being able to share knowledge seems fulfilling as this creates the awareness that despite their age they are still of good 'use' and thus valuable actors in society through participation in Granny's Finest.

(Gladys,84) I first found out about Granny's Finest when it was mentioned at the client advisory board of Laurens. I was interested and went to have a look together with my daughter, we both thought it suited me perfectly. Especially because when I was young I studied craftsmanship, my main course was designing fabrics. A lot has changed since then, now everything is designed with computers and that is something I do not know much about. But I do think that our generation knows much more about working with materials because when working with your hands you continuously feel the fabrics and material going through your hands. That is why I really like being part of the design process as well, so I can use my experience and expertise.

I enjoy working with different generations. Such as right now, I am glad I can help you too! And I like the fact that the young are interested in what we think. It makes me feel needed and appreciated. And on top of that, interacting with younger people keeps your spirit younger as well.

(Agnes, 61) Granny's Finest brought me social relationships, enthusiasm, artistic expression and interaction with young people. The energy of the younger people very much appeals to me, they are excited, bubbly and don't talk about illnesses or conditions and they don't nag.

Through its own handmade designs Granny's Finest promotes and propagates the value of craftsmanship, contributing to the shared awareness about products and their origin.

(Gladys, 84) I am excited about the regained attention for craftsmanship. Kids nowadays don't learn these things in their normal curriculum. But I am starting to see that it is being stimulated more and more, for example recently I taught crafts on my grandson's school.

3.6. Secondary Effects

Aside from how the grannies use Granny's Finest for their own good as is intended by the organisation, the case study exposed some secondary effects. These effects were unexpected and shed a critical light on some functions of Granny's Finest.

3.6.1 Stress

In Granny's Finest competitiveness among the grannies to work the fastest and deliver the best quality transpires naturally. Having positive outcomes for the production, but putting a downside to the overall experience of some grannies that are sensitive for competitive behaviour.

(Dixie, 73) You know, so many women work so fast. I feel like I can't keep up with them, and I want to deliver as well so I make sure I take home a number of knitkits every week. Like this week, I have three ties, one turtleneck scarf, and two headbands I still need to finish.

(Ruth, 76) I have been working very closely with designers and I am bothered with some of their attitudes. I understand that they might have other obligations next to the ones they have for Granny's Finest. But that doesn't mean they can leave me hanging. I mean, when I work so hard to finish the samples to a point where I feel pressure and stress to make it in time and to a certain standard, I expect to at least get a response on my work.

3.6.2 Exclusion

However moderate, in order to participate in Granny's Finest basic skills of knitting are required. But these basic skills possibly do not meet the requirements in the eyes of a granny with average skills, she may feel like the bar is too high and is not eligible enough to participate.

(Eula, 60) I joined Granny's Finest out of curiosity and the desire to learn how to knit. However, I soon found out I couldn't keep up with the other grannies. They were so fast and so precise, then I decided it wasn't for me, it wasn't my place.

Identifying with being a 'granny' of Granny's Finest may be a turn off for elderly women who do not want to be perceived as such (yet). Especially the younger grannies expressed having troubles with identification with being a 'granny'. These grannies have troubles in finding connections with the group, not necessarily because of the participating women but because of the image they represent.

(Eula, 60) I knew almost everybody in the group, and I wasn't aware of that beforehand. Of course that was a nice coincidence and the atmosphere was good. But you know, I am not the target group of Granny's Finest. When I pretend I am a granny of the target group I think, well yes that is nice for these women that they have their weekly knitclub and get to go to places. But for me, it doesn't appeal to me to sit and knit somewhere with an imaginary signboard saying 'look at me I'm a granny! I don't see myself like that, well maybe in twenty years if I'm still here.

3.6.3 In need of appreciation

While appreciation is often being experienced by many grannies as mentioned in previous paragraphs, it becomes problematic when this aspect is missing and not experienced. Especially because the grannies are not being paid with money in return for their investment, appreciation for their efforts is a minimum prerequisite in order to feel valued.

(Bessie, 78) You know what, lately we don't get any response on the products we hand back in. They just end up in a big box at the end of the knitclub and that's it. I would like to have a small reaction, I don't need to be 'worshipped' or anything. But now I miss the small recognition.

(Ruth, 76) I enjoy the idea of being part of the design grannies who get to work closely with the designers on the new samples. But in reality I just work very hard and try my absolute best to make the sample and write down all the steps I'm taking so it is easy for them to make a pattern. And now, there have been a few occasions where I got no response on my work whatsoever. Let alone, appreciation of the effort I put in there. That really puts me off, you see I don't need money or anything. I just want to be valued for what I am doing, and I don't even care if I have to redo it over and over. I understand that the designers are busy and Granny's Finest isn't their priority, but just a simple response on my work would suffice.

3.6.4 Defence and justification

Granny's Finest is a stranger in the midst of other fashion brands who pay their producers for making the product. Therefore grannies often experience the need to defend themselves to others who are not acquainted with the untraditional approach of Granny's Finest. Having to convince others that there is no exploitation involved is a frequently occurring reality.

(Agnes, 61) People in my environment sometimes laugh at me when I tell them I knit for Granny's Finest. They don't understand I am knitting especially when they know my background. That might be a bit off, but I don't care and let them laugh. I just do what I like.

(Agnes, 61) A recurring theme is that Granny's Finest doesn't pay us for our efforts. It doesn't bother me at all, but I find it annoying when people

are opinionated about this which makes me act defensive. And sure, Granny's Finest is the livelihood of these boys, it is just business and not a charity. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that, people who don't want to just shouldn't bother participating.

(Minnie, 68) You are part of the organisation but you don't get paid. Some people say they use us, but hey if we all know what is happening and what we are doing then it is all fine don't you think?

Chapter .4 Functions and social value of Granny's Finest

The case study in the previous chapter describes how the grannies use Granny's Finest in their daily lives. This chapter questions what this implies about the social value of Granny's Finest. The social value can be found on different levels; for the grannies individually, the grannies as a group and the society as a whole. In order to assess the implied social value of Granny's Finest two perspectives are studied. First the functions of the organisation perspective are analysed to explore how Granny's Finest intends to impact the lives of grannies. Second, the narratives of the case study are used to explore the various functions of the organisation as it is experienced by the grannies. Providing insider perspectives through lived realities helps to gain a deeper understanding of how the organisation is achieving their social goals and exposes the secondary effects. The theory of Goudsblom (1974) is used to analyse the different functions of the organisation.

4.1. A range of functions

Within the sociological literature the word 'function' carries a range of different meanings. In this analysis of the case study of Granny's Finest as an organisation and the way it is used by the elderly women that participate in it, as well as the impact it has on their ageing process, clarity of analysis can be provided by using two interpretations of the concept of functions as it has been used in the field of sociology. The first are the manifest and latent functions as described by Merton (1957). The second is the concept of functions as used by Goudsblom (1974) in his description of the functions of the solutions to the social problems that we experience, where he makes a distinction between a.) the 'I' function, b.) the 'We' function and c. they 'You/They' function (free translations from Goudsblom (1974).

Analytical clarity can be increased by analysing the case study through the use of the manifest and latent functions from the perspective of the organisation of Granny's Finest, whilst distinguishing between the 'I', 'We' and 'You/They' functions of Goudsblom. Moreover, the same distinction of manifest (intended) and latent (unintended) functions of Granny's Finest can be identified from the perspective of the participants of Granny's Finest (the effect the organisation has on them), the elderly women, where again distancing between the 'I', 'We' and 'You/They' functions of Goudsblom provide additional clarity on the variety of experienced impact.

4.2. Manifest and latent functions

According to Merton it is useful to distinguish between two types of functions: those functions that are intended and recognized, and those that are unrecognized and unintended (Merton 1957). The first type is referred to as manifest functions, such as a supermarket providing consumers with the necessary products or the bank providing its customers with financial services. The second type are unforeseen consequences, such as the effect that supermarkets have on the ability of the local specialty stores such as bakeries and butchers to stay in business.

These latent functions could be (inter)related to the manifest functions. In the example of the local specialty stores the manifest function of the supermarket (providing people with the products they need/want) has a negative relation to its latent function (or might even undermine it), which decreases the range of products that consumers have access to through the inability of the specialty stores to survive (and people thus having decreased access to the products they need/want). However, the latent functions could also be completely unrelated to the manifest functions.

4.3. Goudsbloms' functions: 'I', 'We' and 'You/They'

Goudsblom (1974) describes how social structures always have a range of functions at different levels. When formulating solutions to social problems, such as the institution of a school to educate our children, the functions that these solutions fulfil occur at three interrelated (and interdependent) levels. The first level is the 'I' function, to a parent or a child, the school fulfils the function of acquiring education. The second level is the 'we' function, as to (groups of) parents or (classes of) children, the school fulfils the function of a place where social capital can be nourished and/or grown. The third level is the 'you/they' function, as the schools are also a result of the total figuration within which a range of activities occur.

The distinction that Goudsblom (1974) makes between these functions is useful in providing clarity to sociological analyses. Whereas a sociological analysis requires departing from the 'we' function when analysing institutions, including elements such as truly understanding the 'language' that is used within the institution, to allow for an analysis of the institution as a result of the total figuration the researcher will need to be able to take the necessary distance from the subject of its analysis. As (Goudsblom) argues (1974) p.128), these two perspectives (the 'we' function and the 'you/they' function) are not in tension with one another. On the contrary, he suggests that in the ideal cases they fulfil a complimentary role.

4.4. Organisational perspective: intended functions

As a social enterprise Granny's Finest has a set of social objectives that can be translated into functions for the grannies as individuals 'I', for the collective Granny's Finest 'We', and 'You/They' refers to how the organisation is a function of the total context it finds itself in. The functions that are drawn from the social objectives can be viewed as Merton's (1957) manifest functions. Later the discovered unintended latent functions are analysed.

4.4.1. Manifest functions

The manifest functions, thus referring to the recognized and intended functions, of Granny's Finest are derived from the case study in chapter 3. In this analysis below these functions will be grouped according to Goudsbloms' 'I', 'We' and 'You/They' functions. It is important to note that there is an inherent overlap between the functions at these different levels.

4.4.1.1. 'I' functions

Granny's Finest provides spaces and tools where grannies can experience meaningful things. This abstract concept of meaningful things may vary and cover social and personal characteristics all intended to positively affect the wellbeing of the grannies. Looking at the gains for the individual grannies it appears that when people occupy themselves with activities they enjoy wellbeing is improved as logic may suggest (Cramm, van Dijk et al. 2013). Moreover, including social aspects in these activities appear to affect the state of being even more. Encouraging meaningful social roles and active engagement shows positive impact on older people's quality of life and health (Anderson 1985) (Tennstedt, Howland et al. 1998; McAuley, Blissmer et al. 2000).

By actively engaging the grannies in their organisation Granny's Finest aims to make the grannies feel useful and valued as they are the important producers of the product. Granny's Finest positions the brand and its products in a lavish and fashionable manner hoping to instigate pride among the grannies aside from targeting a certain group of consumers. When the grannies feel part of the organisation and actively take ownership of the products and the brand their pride and self-confidence may boost. Recognition for accomplishments and the feeling of being useful to others prove to be significant indicators for the wellbeing of elderly people (Cramm, van Dijk et al. 2013). Moreover, as O'Neill, Morrow-Howell et al. (2011) argue older adults risk experience decreased purpose in life when they are not civically and socially engaged.

Granny's Finest aims to strengthen social networks of the grannies and focuses on individual qualities and capacities of all participants causing them to be stimulated in their abilities and appreciated for their creative incentives. Greaves and Farbus (2006) argue how interventions that promote active social contact and encourage creative activity positively affects health and well-being. "Having many ties to other people gives people alternative routes to valuable resources such as information, social support, financial connectedness, or cultural connectedness through connections to experts. Such resources are essential for well-being and can serve to improve quality of life" (Toepoel 2013)p. 357) The grannies expand their social network through Granny's Finest with people who vary in ages, profession and gender.

Creative leisure in the form of handcraft, specifically knitting is the central activity that connects the grannies. According to Putnam (2000) the type of leisure activity plays a vital role in engendering social connectedness, he differentiates between productive activities (doing things together) and consumptive activities (watching things together). Participating in Granny's Finest means active involvement including productive activity and creativeness that is directed towards a common goal. These productive activities involve cooperation helping to create stronger ties and strengthen social connectedness (Toepoel 2013). The creative activity does not end when the knitclubs do, grannies take home whatever they are working on so they can continue whenever they feel like doing so. Here, Granny's Finest provides leisure activity that stretches further into the personal spaces of the grannies.

Granny's Finest opts to play a role in preventing social loneliness by broadening the number of meaningful relations with a diverse group of people such as fellow grannies, young designers and other people that are connected with the organisation. When people are able to maintain contact with others on a regular basis loneliness decreases, consistent activities provide steadiness and a sense of security opposed to ad-hoc once organised activities that are aimed to tackle loneliness (de Jong Gierveld and Hagestad 2006).

Given the changing situation regarding elderly care with less involvement of the government people are more designated to depend on family and friends when their self-reliance decreases. Social relationships that are established through Granny's Finest may provide a social security net in the vicinity of their homes and become ever more important in the face of possible future need of care.

4.4.1.2. 'We' functions

Granny's Finest allows its participants to gain social connections on different levels likely resulting in more social capital. "Social capital refers to resources that may be produced through one's social connections, such as functional and emotional social support either as an individual or as a group" (Son, Yarnal et al. 2010)p. 68. Here, Putnam's (2000) distinctions of bonding and bridging between the different types of social capital are useful to understand these functions. More recent literature also acknowledges linking as a third type of social capital further exploring the concept of social capital (Szreter and Woolcock 2004).

Bonding refers to links among a homogenous group of peers, in this case the grannies. It "reflects the close ties that may develop between people who share similar demographics, background or memberships" (Son, Yarnal et al. 2010) p.68). The second type of social capital applies to interconnections across different groups, highlighting the possibility to improve access to resources in different groups (ibid, 2010). In the case of Granny's Finest this relates to intergenerational connections, for example between grannies and designers and ties crossing different industries such as elderly care and fashion. Linking is the third type of social capital and refers to the ability to engage in vertical connections with external groups (Szreter and Woolcock 2004). Granny's Finest aims to link the producers (grannies) and the consumers (wide variety of people) through the exchange of notes and postcards. The consumer knows whose hands made his purchased product. Conversely when the consumer decides to write the granny a postcard as the organisation encourages, the granny is linked back to the consumer through which she may acquire further closeness to society. A card is received with great enthusiasm by the grannies, the cards that are handed out during the knitclubs lead to appraisal and admiration by other grannies. The confirmation that her work is being appreciated and valued by others fosters pride.

The individual gains for the grannies of the productive activity that Granny's Finest evolves around are described in the previous paragraph. However there is another function for the group of this productive activity Granny's Finest facilitates, it is a productive space that links the grannies and designers. The existence of this space is dependent on the presence of the combination of group members.

Aside from the productive leisure activities, Granny's Finest organises other types of activities of a more consumptive nature such as visitations to a museum, theatre or a high tea in order to reward the grannies for their efforts. These activities are intended to further enrich the strength of the group of grannies.

4.4.1.3. 'You/They' functions

Due to the decrease in government budgets that many countries face elderly people become increasingly dependent on other resources such as their families and civil society organisations to provide them with their products and services they need (Phillipson and Powell 2004) (Wisensale 2005). Granny's Finest is such an organisation that stimulates social connectedness that ultimately has the potential to function as a social security network for elderly women that participate in their organisation. The positive benefits of an organisation like Granny's Finest on women and the subsequent increase in their wellbeing also has a number of other indirect effects. The study of Greaves and Farbus (2006) on the effects on health and well-being of socially isolated elderly people engaging in creative and social activity reported a variety of such effects including an increased physical activity, a healthier diet and less health visits and reduced medical use. This suggests that participating in an organisation such as Granny's Finest might affect the decrease of the demands of these women on the products and services of the government.

Granny's Finest can be seen as a child of its time in the sense that it is a fitting example of an organisation that can exist in a society that requires and promotes more civic participation. By actively involving the grannies and making use of their abilities instead of 'putting them away', Granny's Finest helps the grannies to remain participating actors in society further promoting the benefits of civic engagement.

4.4.2. Latent functions

Next to the manifest functions of Granny's Finest, the organisation also fulfils a range of latent functions for the group of elderly women (We) and society as a whole (You/They).

4.4.2.1. 'We' functions

In order to participate in Granny's Finest there are certain requirements such as fitting into a specific age category and possessing skills in knitting. Even though these requirements are very minimal and allow accessibility to a large group of elderly women, the other group of women who cannot meet the requirements are excluded, shaping exclusion through inclusion. This illustrates how only certain people or groups may gain access to societal institutions through their membership, and underlines the negative side of social capital meaning it does not automatically benefit everyone (Son, Yarnal et al. 2010). On top of that it may also become extra clear to the excluded ones that they are not productive while their peers are

‘actively ageing’, this might influence their well-being as self-confidence and pride may be reduced (Marhankova 2011).

4.4.2.3. ‘You/They’ functions

Granny’s Finest helps to reinforce the concept of appreciating the quality and value of handmade products opposed to industrially made products. Throughout their whole external communication, the fact that its products are design and handmade predominate. Consumers are even able to see the face of the producer (granny) of the product, making this an obvious counterpart of the industrial revolution and feeds to the general increase in awareness of consumers on products and their origin (Shen, Richards et al. 2013) (Cherry and Caldwell 2013).

The case of Granny’s Finest strengthens the deeper institutionalisation of the active ageing ideology (Marhankova 2011) (Tulle 2004). This case positively confirms that it is possible to remain active and productive, and might raise expectations of other elderly women regarding ageing and life quality.

4.5. Participants’ perspectives: Experienced functions

By solely analysing the functions, both manifest and latent, of Granny’s Finest from the perspective of the organisation, one mostly gets insight into the aimed purposes as they are formulated and experienced by the organisation. However, as the case study illustrated, by departing from the viewpoint of the elderly women that are participating in the organisation, these functions from the organisational perspective can be enriched and compared with the perceptions of the participants. Here again it is useful to distinguish between Merton’s manifest and latent functions, as well as Goudbloms’ ‘I’, ‘We’ and ‘You/They’ functions.

4.5.1. Manifest functions

The manifest functions of Granny’s Finest experienced by the grannies that are derived from the case study involve many functions for the grannies.

4.5.1.1. ‘I’ functions

By participating in Granny’s Finest the grannies gain experiences, engendering meaning that adds richness to their post-productive lives. This richness is embedded in various indicators containing both social and individual attributes.

Research shows that artists and artistic activities have a positive effect on competences of vulnerable groups in society (Oud and Oostdam 2007). In Granny's Finest creativity is the factor that binds all together, the grannies and the designers. The case study showed how discussion of the creative efforts of the grannies provided a basis for continuing social interaction and mutual support. Discussing patterns and sharing ideas on different types of stitches seemed to function as a universal language between different grannies (bonding) and designers (bridging) helping in developing stronger relations. Social relations among grannies may stretch further than the context of Granny's Finest, where interaction between grannies can take place outside the organisation. Engaging socially inside and outside of the context of Granny's Finest further feeds the social relationships among grannies, stronger and deeper social ties have greater implications for preventing loneliness (Carr and Moorman 2011). The grannies seem aware of their vulnerability of becoming socially isolated as they grow older and purposely pursue a stronger social network. For some grannies engaging socially with aged peers was the primal motivation for participating in Granny's Finest.

Others found it more important to find a constructive activity in order to keep busy during the week when home alone. Continuing the creative activity during the week, and knowing that somebody is counting on you seemed to function as a pre-empting coping mechanism for loneliness.

Further value of the creative activity may originate in the sense of achievement and self-esteem instilled in the successful completion of the products (Greaves and Farbus 2006). The feeling to be needed (again) seems fulfilling and instead of being needed by family, providing they still have one, they are needed for their skills by an active organisation appealing to different generations. Feeling useful and appreciated for ones' accomplishment positively influences self-worth and are important factors in the appraisal of well-being of people (Cramm, van Dijk et al. 2013).

This case suggests that being active in old age may relate positively to happiness because it may regulate people's mood and may satisfy various personal needs. As Oerlemans, Bakker et al. (2011) point out social activities often allow people to feel connected, recognized, and valued which satisfies the common need for relatedness. While physical activities relate to a sense of mastery or personal achievement, which translates into positive feelings about oneself (Oerlemans, Bakker et al. 2011). A boost for self-confidence and self worth is pride, which is experienced in different ways. On the "I" function there is the pride one feels over her accomplishments and the satisfaction in delivering quality products. Looking further into

the aspect of abilities, some grannies experience growth and learning. Pushing one's limits to further develop especially at an older age is found to be rewarding. Not surprisingly engaging in on going learning is advised to people of all ages in order to remain socially and economically active (Jovic and McMullin 2011).

4.5.1.2. 'We' functions

When participating as a granny in Granny's Finest she feels like she is part of something bigger. It creates a collective and a sense of belonging or identity for the grannies even during the presumed post-productive stage in their lives. Resigning from the productive life may be associated with loss of identity (Baars, Dohmen et al. 2013; Edmondson 2013). But when becoming part of a collective such as Granny's Finest, identity can perhaps be reclaimed because of this inclusion.

Ever since Granny's Finest started it has gained lots of attention in the media. On many occasions grannies have been actively involved, making them the stars of the organisation. The media publications about Granny's Finest contribute to self-worth of the grannies, as it supports in making them feel important. It helps them find recognition outside the organisation, for example from family and friends.

4.5.2. Latent functions

Next to the manifest functions the lived experiences of the grannies revealed some unintended functions of Granny's Finest.

4.5.2.1. 'I' functions

The association with stereotype grannies may be off-putting, especially for the younger participants. Moreover the weekly knitclubs in the elderly care centres is found to be too confronting with undesirable prospects of possible dementia. A younger granny such as Eula (60) excludes herself because she does not identify herself with that stage in life. Moreover, emphasizing the granny identity through its brand exposure further pushes her away from the desire to be included. Therefore the freshness of Granny's Finest and its youthful approach are attractive. Toepoel (2013) p.370) argues that while older people might be averse to seeking the company of their aged peers, the programs that facilitate intergenerational contact seem more effective in alleviating loneliness.

An often stated argument for participating in Granny's Finest refers to the ability to 'help' the younger generation. This intergenerational solidarity is reflected in the desire to push the younger generation forward especially in these more difficult economic times.

Being valued and appreciated for their work by the designers and other young workers of Granny's Finest belong to the most important rewards grannies experience from the organisation. However, when this appreciation by designers and other young workers is being missed or when it is experienced as insufficient the grannies feel less worthy. Putting this in a generational perspective reveals how the grannies seem to need the younger generation in order to feel recognised and 'active'. This way the grannies themselves reproduce the categorisation that being old equals being less.

While the creative activity of knitting is presented as a leisure activity and a hobby, the ethnography reveals that this is not necessarily experienced as such. Ruth (76) has expressed the need to take a break from Granny's Finest as she could not handle the pressure anymore especially with a lack of response from her supervising designers moderating her satisfaction and feelings of appreciation. The contradiction here is that while initially participating because of the desire to stay 'active', experiencing the pressure that is inherent to the neoliberal work ethos makes the grannies want to resign from this newly acquired productivity.

4.5.2.2. 'We' functions

The knitclubs are fragmented in different groups of grannies. In the knitclubs there are close connections between the grannies. However, the collective identity among the grannies does not automatically account for connectivity between all participating grannies. As Minnie (68) explains she finds it overwhelming to be joined with the entire group on events, and even refers to other grannies as 'strangers'. Bessie (78) collects all media publications about Granny's Finest, but can only find pride in articles that concern her own group excluding herself from the collective at large.

A consequence of Granny's Finest not paying the grannies in money for their efforts is that the grannies feel like they have to justify themselves towards others for participating. Other people who do not know the ins and outs of the organisation accuse the grannies of being exploited. This negative connotation people may have with Granny's Finest makes the grannies feel the need to defend themselves to the neoclassical assumption that compensation should involve money.

4.6. Selective adoption

The case of Granny's Finest shows how the grannies selectively adopt the functions of the organisation to make it work for them individually, thereby uncovering its unintended consequences. De Sardan (2005) described how sidetracking is inherent to development programs: they have intended uses but the participants use them in different ways. To explain this he names a clear example referring to bed nets in Africa. Development organisations hand these out in order to prevent further spread of malaria, however when people discovered these nets were also very useful for fishing leading to bigger catches to provide for their livelihood they started to use the nets for a different function than intended by the development organisation. As a result the programs are often described as 'failures'. However, De Sardan (2005) argues that this is a rather narrow view on the programs as all programs are likely to display sidetracking to a certain extent. Instead of trying to find the causes from this failure, he proposes that it is more useful for in depth qualitative studies that increase the understanding of the sidetracking that occurs by answering questions such as the origins of the sidetracking, its nature and depth. In that way, the way can be paved for the program to respond to this sidetracking if and when needed.

In the case of Granny's Finest the sidetracking seems to be rather limited. The findings from the case that the women use the network they acquainted via Granny's Finest also outside of the organisation could be understood as sidetracking, but here it only contributes to the goal of social engagement of the organisation.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this thesis the lived experiences of ageing women in the context of an organisation that aims to provide them with the possibility to (sustain) their active participation in society have been explored. In order to increase our understanding of the role such an organisation may play in the lives of the elderly, an in depth case study has been performed focussing both on the manifest and latent functions of the organisation as well as the ways that the women use, and the intended and unintended impact on, the organisation (the elderly women). Through the examination of the way in which ageing is experienced by these women within the context of the organisation this case study provides a number of insights into the way in which the elderly use the organisation to cope with their ageing process and what the impact is of the organisation on them. Moreover, the case provides insight into the specific challenges that the elderly face in our contemporary society.

5.1. Most important findings

The case study and subsequent analysis reveal that there appears to be quite some alignment between the functions from the organisation perspective and the perspective of the participants. Where the sidetracking of grannies can be called limited, but this also has to do with the goals of Granny's Finest that to a large extent allow the women to use specific parts of the organisation for their individual benefits. The case study reveals the social value of such an organisation through the perspective of the grannies. Through participation grannies add value to their lives in the sense that they acquire a larger social network and find meaning as active players in an organisation. However, the case study did shed some light on a number of unintended effects through the analysis of the participants' perspectives on the organisation revealing contradictions about the intended functions of the organisation and the lived experience of the grannies.

Granny's Finest provides a case that finds a strong basis in the ideology of active ageing. By remaining actively engaged with the organisation and its members the grannies seem to find a way to deal with ageing. The social engagement provides some sort of social security net through a combination of its social network and the regularity of get-togethers. However, maybe unexpectedly some aspects of the organisation present a burden on the participating women. Examples from the case show how some grannies experience to have to perform

beyond their personal abilities, which could possibly be identified as the cause of the unintended functions.

5.2. Active ageing: too much of a good thing?

The alignment of how grannies use the organisation as Granny's Finest intended it to be used holds less for the latent functions and the unintended effects on the grannies. With an emphasis on activity some grannies revealed to experience stress from feeling the need to compete with other grannies. Possibly placing a burden on what initially was intended as an accessible leisure activity where the grannies could work according to their own pace and without the expectation of a minimum production. Even leading to 'overworked' grannies who explain to need 'time off', this is in great contrast to how Granny's Finest refers to the activity as performing their 'hobby'.

Another contradiction is that the initial reason for participation often lies in the desire to remain or become active again in the post-productive stage, wanting to be a part of something in order to feel useful and productive. But, when this productivity pushes its limits and even leads to stress it seems like the grannies want to be included, yet only to a certain extent.

On top of this some grannies feel like they have to defend themselves to people in their environment, who do not understand the concept of Granny's Finest, for participating in an organisation that expects output in production but does not reward compensation in the form of a salary. The notions of having to compete and receiving salary for produced goods finds its roots in modernist theories and neoclassical assumptions that put a premium on production. Consequently, when not living up to these notions exclusion from society may be around the corner (Bauman 2004).

While remaining active in later life proves to have many benefits, feeling the need to live up to certain standards and expectations when ageing is a serious side effect of the push on active ageing and how successful ageing is viewed in general. Allowing little space for other approaches towards ageing successfully than remaining active and involved. Moreover, the ideology of active ageing and the goal of Granny's Finest to include women who are otherwise excluded tries on the one hand to minimize the intergenerational gap of being employed and unemployed between the younger and elderly generation. Conversely this case reveals that both groups are rather reproducing the intergenerational power relations. This is for example expressed in the context where the grannies need confirmation of the younger generation in order to feel active and valued.

Furthermore, the aim of Granny's Finest to include elderly women in their organisation who have become depreciated and excluded in their post-productive life to become active (again) and more socially involved is not inclusive for all aged women. Here, exclusion takes place on the basis of age and/or insufficient skills.

However, there is a wide variation in the extent to which the participating women experience these negative effects. An underlying cause of this difference might lie in the difference in the cultural, economic, educational and professional backgrounds, and also differ in age, at the time of research this ranged from the age of 55 to 97 years old. Therefore the way they experience post-productive life differs among them as well, some are also actively involved in other voluntary work and leisure activities while other grannies only participate in Granny's Finest either by choice or due to physical boundaries.

5.3. A global challenge

Population ageing is a global issue, it is happening in all regions and countries at various levels of development making it one of the most significant global trends of the 21st century. One in nine persons in the world is aged 60 or over, this is projected to increase to one in five by the year 2050 (Guzman, Paliczko et al. 2012). Population ageing presents challenges for societies worldwide and should be planned for in order to make the transformation to age friendly communities (Aartsen and Komp 2013). Hence the inevitability of the growing numbers of older persons should be recognized to prepare governments, civil society, the private sector and communities. Consequently it is key to ensure inclusion of ageing and the needs of older persons in development policies and programs worldwide (Guzman, Paliczko et al. 2012). Therefore understanding the effectiveness of solutions to this challenge is paramount to this development.

This particular case looked at one organisation in the context of a developed country, the Netherlands, to see how elderly women use such an organisation to cope with their ageing process. The case seems to suggest that the active ageing ideology overall aligns with positive experiences for the ageing women. However some unintended consequences have been experienced as well. Yet one could argue that these negative effects are less likely to occur in a context where the ideology of active ageing is less prominent. Women would potentially experience less stress and competitiveness in more rural areas of the world as the notion of active ageing and modernity are less embedded in those societies.

5.4. Limitations and future research

In terms of the methodology and the findings from this thesis there are a number of important limitations. This case study focuses on the case of elderly women and the way they use the social enterprise Granny's Finest in their process of ageing. First and foremost it is important to note that the case and the analysis could have been cut many other ways – one could have taken the viewpoint of the organisation, the field of social enterprises in this sector, a comparison of two or more organisations in the field and so on. Each of these approaches would have its own purposes, and be accompanied by a set of methodological opportunities and limitations.

This case study is an attempt to present results from an in depth case study that focuses on the viewpoint of the participants. Consequently, no claims can be made about the generalizability of the findings. In face of the scope and complexity of the problems that surround ageing, the theory and empirical evidence at this level of study seems to be relatively rare. As a result, the intent was to explore the case in depth and capture its essence in the phenomenological sense of lived experience. In time, other research might add similar types of cases and in that way the cases can provide a foundation for the development of 'grounded theory' of these type of programs.

The methodology of this study might suffer from further limitations due to the biases that might stem from my own involvement with the organisation prior to the research. As discussed more extensively in chapter 1, if the grannies considered me as an integral part of the organisation they may have been hampered to share all their honest feelings towards Granny's Finest. Which subsequently may lead to a more narrow view regarding the impact of the organisation. Nevertheless, the research has exposed some interesting secondary effects suggesting that grannies openly shared their experiences whether they were positive or negative.

Despite the limitations that accompany this single case the approach that was used offers the reader the possibility of gaining insight into the complex interrelations between the manifest and latent functions of an organisation at different levels of analysis, and the manifest and latent functions of the organisation as used by the participants at different levels of analysis. The use of the distinction between manifest and latent functions (Merton 1957) and the different levels at which this functions occur (Goudsblom 1974) provided the ability to analyse the social value of the organisation in light of the way that the participants of the organisation use its functions to cope with the challenges that they face while ageing. The

clarity of analysis that is brought by using the combination of Merton and Goudsblom's differentiation of functions, in association with the case method, suggests to be a useful approach to be used in future research.

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