

A Food Blog Created By and For Elders: A Political Gesture Informed by the Normative Injunctions to Eat and Age Well

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Abstract. This article analyzes a food blog developed by and for elders. The organization under study developed this project to integrate itself in a mediatized food culture. Rather than to perpetuate the individualising processes that come with the pressure to eat, be, and age in a healthy way, the group members used food as a means to collectively work towards their ideals of social justice. They have done so by developing digital skills and by adding their voice to the mediatized food culture. Therefore, they gained visibility and created socialization spaces. Through this project, they challenge ageist conceptions of older people's (non) uses of technologies as means to improve their health or to keep in touch with their children and grandchildren. The research is based on the researchers' participation in the project and is rooted in a cultural studies perspective, drawing from the literature emerging from the fields of critical food and ageing studies.

Keywords. Food culture; Successful ageing; Digital autonomy; Mediatization; Cultural studies; Critical ageing studies

1 Introduction

This special issue invites us to reflect positively on the relationship between old age and technologies. We analyze and present a food blog project's unfolding, which was created by Ressources Ethnoculturelles Contre l'Abus envers les Aîné-e-s (RECAA), a community-group based in Montreal (Canada). RECAA is mostly composed of seniors coming from various ethno-cultural communities. The community-group aims to raise public awareness on elders' mistreatment and works towards a culture based on respect for elders, free of physical or mental abuse¹. For over twelve years, the members have met

¹ Although RECAA is mainly composed of women from various ethnic communities, the group's ethnic and gender dimensions are not at the heart of this analysis. These dimensions occupy a central place in its regular activities, but the project we observed and analyzed does not focus on these dimensions.

on a regular basis to discuss issues related to elders' mistreatment. These meetings are where they prepare the diverse artistic performances they use to communicate and express these issues and to raise awareness². The meetings are also an opportunity for them to share a potluck-style lunch. Throughout the years, they have noticed how their discussions around shared meals have strengthened the links between them and have encouraged them to exchange ideas, experiences as well as culinary tips or recipes. Over time, RECAA has developed partnerships with various organizations such as the research network Ageing + Communication + Technologies (ACT). Since then, the group's activist activities have been transformed, as its members constantly integrate more technologies into their practices, following the pressure they feel to mediatize [1]. RECAA's food blog, *Food Talks, À table with RECAA and friends*, follows this mediatized trend and the group sees it as a new form of artistic expression that complements its activities and its weekly potluck meetings.

RECAA's wish to create a food blog also arose from its members' awareness of what they call a "food culture", namely how informational sources and contents related to food in the public scene have multiplied. They noticed that this "food culture" was largely dominated by younger people and, therefore, excluded elders' voices. They partly explain this exclusion due to technologies' significant role in this food culture. Their exclusion from this culture can be seen as contributing to maintain ageist conceptions of elders and their alleged inability to learn and use technologies. Our case study shows how RECAA's use of technologies, which they use to reach political/activist purposes, reconfigures the social injunction to « age well » (in its articulation through food and health).

Elders are generally perceived as passive users and consumers of technology, and less skilled than other age groups [2]. Lazar, Diaz, Brewer, Kim and Piper [3] have studied initiatives of older people challenging their presumed relationship to technology and becoming creators of online content. These authors ask how elders engage in social movements in online spaces. As they say, blogs are used for the development and visibility of social movements, as well as spaces where new narratives can be articulated. According to the researchers, older adults adopt blogging practices to share life experiences, to network, to express their opinions, to create a sense of community and get support. Research focusing on their participation into these spaces could « help reveal the role of technology in negotiating social issues more broadly while deepening our understanding of their unique views on pressing social issues ». More specifically pertaining to our research, we note that informational content about food proliferates on websites, social media, blogs, etc., but no studies seem to focus on elders as producers of online informational content about food and eating.

This article will help readers understand what computers, digital photography, and video production mean for a group of elders. It will explain the ways old age appears inviting and worth living through ICTs for RECAA members and partners. By allowing

² The group performs at different events and for various audiences: they do flash mobs, choreographies or theatre pieces ("forum theatre") to raise awareness towards elders' mistreatment.

technologies to permeate their activities and influence their political cause, RECAA was able to improve its members' agency and autonomy and increase the group's visibility in the public sphere, counteracting the ageist conception that elders "need to be taken care of".

Our research on the food blog project and its related activities allowed us to reflect on its deployment and, more widely, on the ways food, ageing, and technologies intersect. Rooted in a cultural studies perspective, this research draws from the literature emerging in the fields of critical food and ageing studies, following researchers' work that critically address the normative understanding of "successful ageing" [4]. "Successful ageing" comes from the field of gerontology and is quite pervasive in our societies. It informs many policies' development, including those of the World Health Organization, and encourages the more local funding for projects consisting in teaching elders how to use technologies [1]. Initially, it was developed by [5] and addresses interrelated spheres of so-called success in ageing, such as: maintaining a good physical and mental health (for example, by avoiding disease and maintaining high cognitive function) and staying engaged with life (like being involved in productive activities). Therefore, to achieve successful ageing, it is seen necessary to adopt healthy living practices that include food and meaningful personal relationships. Adopting these practices would avoid elders' exclusion from society. Many researchers had issues with this discourse on successful ageing, drawing attention to the fact that it promotes an idealized ageing subject, one that would be individually responsible for his or her health [4, 6-8]. This individualization fails to take into account the structural dimensions of exclusion that inform ageing processes. For example, researchers have criticized the fact that this injunction stigmatizes disabled people or that it is addressed to a white male, middle class population, marginalizing the women, the poor, and the people of color's perspectives [9].

We see *Food Talks* as a response to the injunction to "age well" because throughout the project, RECAA's members have developed technical skills that allowed them to participate and stay included in a mediatized food culture. However, rather than actively participating in the individualizing injunction to reach a successful ageing by producing more knowledge about how one should eat (and hence participating in the reproduction of this individualizing conception of food in its relation to ageing and health), RECAA has used food as a way to collectively and consistently engage with its activist mandate. We will demonstrate how the food blog became a way for the group to infiltrate into the "mediatized food culture" and to collectively engage with their ideals of social justice and equity. The blog is a rich example that shows that the role of ICTs in older people's lives needs to go beyond improving their individual health or communicating with their relatives. Indeed, studies have shown that seeing ageing as a « problem » (deterioration of cognitive and physical abilities, health-related problems, shrinking of social opportunities) can be detrimental to elders' appropriation of technology and may limit their uses [10]. In our case study, for RECAA, the food blog became a pretext to create socialization spaces both within the group and with community partners, while contributing to raise awareness towards concerns related to their mandate. Then, food became a medium to discuss social issues or injustices, as well as a way for the group and the individuals to feel included

within the mediatized culture, where ageism and exclusion processes permeate the relationship between ageing and technologies.

The following section addresses the methodological strategy we used for this research. It is followed by the presentation of RECAA's blogging practices and its related activities on-the-ground. The concluding section will address how the food blog reconfigures the individualizing injunction to age well into a collective engagement.

2 Research-action and contextualization: A methodological strategy

This article is the product of a research that was conducted between May 2016 and May 2017, the period corresponding to the project's deployment, and it was inspired by research-action principles. According to Hearn, Tacchi, Foth and Lennie [11] the term "research-action" designates studies that aim to understand a problem and provoke a change. This kind of research would improve and help community initiatives as well as the individuals or groups that are in charge to reach their goals and fulfill their needs. In this case, our research contributed to the blog's development for a community organization with the political mandate to raise awareness about elders' issues. Our approach is slightly different from research-action as defined by Hearn & al in the sense that RECAA members did not co-conduct this research. As members of the food blog project, the two researchers participated in it and observed RECAA's blogging and community practices. Inspired by research-action, Soulé names this method « participation observante » (which we can translate as observant participation). It differentiates itself from participant observation by a deeper involvement of the researchers in the field, where participation would take priority over observation.

In our case study, the project's main researcher was recruited by ACT, RECAA's partner, to provide human and material resources and to coordinate the food blog's development. She attended and actively participated in the project with her presence and her interventions during the meetings and workshops. The second researcher was mainly involved in the project's research component and focused on observation and note taking during the various activities. The fact that two researchers were involved in the research project allowed a better recollection of the events and a more exhaustive note taking process. It also allowed sharing thoughts, comparing observations, and confronting points of view that enriched the analysis. It is also important to note that valuing the project's individuals and groups' points of view is central to both cultural studies and research-action, as it acknowledges the participants' capacity to co-construct knowledge. Therefore, RECAA members were involved in the research as participants whose reflections and feedback were taken into consideration³.

³ For example, the research project's first draft of the analysis was presented to RECAA in May 2017, during a meeting where the members were invited to exchange and explain the project's most significant aspects for them.

Our corpus is mainly composed of our fieldwork observations, conducted every week for one session of approximately three hours, from August 2016 until April 2017. We also attended events co-organized by RECAA and its community partners to complement our observations: a lunch with various partners in November 2016, an event in February 2017 with the Union United Church for the Black History Month, and one in March 2017 where RECAA served brunch in a local café. Our observations were completed by a contextualization process, which is central to cultural studies [12]. Combining these two methods allowed us to reflect on how both, at the same time, the context informed the project's development and how RECAA contributed to reconfigure the way food and ageing currently intersect within the public sphere. Therefore, to our observations, we added a collection of heterogeneous documents related to the project, such as newspaper articles (discussed in RECAA's meetings), promotional documents, RECAA's grant application, etc. Our contextualization draws from media documents published by Quebec major media institutions⁴ during the blog project's conception and development periods. The media documents collected for the analysis address both food and ageing and relate their concerns and issues. The analytical gaze used on the material was inspired by Hall [13] who was influenced by Foucault [14]. He observed which objects of knowledge were crossing a corpus and which made sense [13] for the current socio-cultural context. We used these media documents to explore the discourses that articulate food and ageing, following the discourse that defines and delimitates the knowledge that can circulate within the social field [14] and that the media institutions are discursive spaces particularly significant [15] (Clermont, 2009) to produce and circulate dominant significations.

The following sections are filled with two material types that were gathered for the analysis. We have presented the results with excerpts from our field notes and from media documents used for the contextualization process. Throughout the text, we offer direct quotations retrieved from our field notes and some event "reconstitutions" that happened during the project. These reconstitutions illustrate our analyses and are based on our notes, our memories of the various activities, and the discussions we had.

3 Food and ageing – contextual elements

Food is currently a hype that makes it predominantly visible on the public scene. The effervescence surrounding food is observable through a range of discussions, reforms, and programs that are being set up by political authorities, on both federal (Canada) and

⁴ The media documents analysed were published by Radio-Canada, Le Journal de Montréal, Le Devoir, Montreal Gazette, La Presse, 24 Heures Montréal, Journal Métro, CBC, Toronto Star, CTV News and The Globe and Mail. These documents were submitted to a discursive analysis inspired by [13] the documents were used in a discursive analysis that aimed to retrieve the knowledge that was repeated across the corpus.

provincial (Quebec) levels. For example, the new Canadian food guide is expected for 2019 [16] and in Quebec, a new public health policy is being elaborated, which will focus on health prevention and will promote, among other things, the adoption of healthy habits, including eating ones [17]. In November 2017, in Quebec, the main actors related to the food system have discussed a new food bio-policy (www.sommetalimqc.gouv.qc.ca/). However, the knowledge production that defines how one should eat is not strictly limited to governmental stances or institutions. This food knowledge and its constitutive elements are produced by a wide and heterogeneous range of sources; from “experts”, such as nutritionists or scientists, to “celebrities” like public personalities, cooking chefs, bloggers, journalists, etc. All these sites produce and circulate knowledge about food and participate to define (culturally and temporarily) what is currently known as “healthy nutrition” and how it should be approached.

This massive knowledge production addressing what one should eat also occurs in the context of an ageing society. Elderly people are subjected to a multiplicity of strategies and techniques that push them to age “successfully” [4]. Described by critical researchers like Stephen Katz [4] as an injunction that holds elders responsible for themselves, this successful ageing normativity urges older people to take care of their health and body by adopting so-called “healthy life habits”, including eating ones. Through this imperative’s discourse, ageing and the bodies’ deteriorating functions and components are depicted as something to avoid. Ageing bodies are linked to food in a very particular way, with the underlying idea that adopting healthy eating habits would maintain good health throughout the ageing process [18]. Through various modes and registers such as recommendations, testimonies and debates, “healthy nutrition” is continuously produced either as a means to prevent the bodies from ageing or as a tool to have a better life despite the bodies’ inevitable decline, necessarily connoted as something unpleasant.

These types of enunciations were found throughout the media documents we used to explore the ways food and ageing intersect within the media scene. For example, in “Eat these 6 foods to add years to your life” [19], particular food that would allegedly add years to life are revealed. Elsewhere, readers are informed that seafood would prevent elders’ cognitive decline [20, 21]. In « Pour vivre longtemps et en bonne santé », the consumption of whole grains is encouraged to prevent early death [28] and in “Fitness: Menopause and the middle-age spread” [22], the focus is on ageing and weight gain, which should be controlled by an appropriate diet. Through all these utterances, “healthy nutrition” is not only (re) produced as a tool or even as a weapon against ageing processes, but also as way to improve their quality of life. These enunciations are produced within a bio-politics rationality of governance where ageing well is encouraged to avoid exceeding costs for the state when an elder must be “taken-in-charge” because they aged ‘wrongly’. Hence, it is assumed that a “bad” ageing process would increase health care costs or the individual’s take over by society. For instance, this assumption underlies enunciations such as those linking economical and social costs for care services for individuals suffering from Alzheimer, in which they advise to “healthy life habits” to prevent the body’s decline:

Canadian scientists have established a link between junk food and the progression of the disease. [...] Over 350 elders have been followed during three years. Those who ate a lot of meat, fat, sugar and processed foods were at a higher risk of presenting symptoms of Alzheimer compared to those who followed a diet of fruits and vegetables, dairy products and legumes (Nadeau, 2016, our translation).

This discourse presents elders as “vulnerable” subjects who are at risk, and for whom it is important to provide knowledge, tools and means to foster “better” ageing processes [18]. This is also consistent with critical gerontology, a field where researchers have pointed out how society’s medicalization and the knowledge it has produced have created the “problem” of ageing, fostering the development of techniques and knowledge that aim to prevent it [6]. Therefore, this “successful ageing” injunction permeates food and elders are invited to adopt healthy eating habits to “embrace the potential of longevity through the daily acts of eating” [7] and to avoid the “inevitable of aging” [18] cited in Powell, [7]. These discourses produce ageing bodies as possibly “worked” or “moulded” by and through food, and create the impression that the individual may have a control over his or her body, a control that would allow him or her to modulate or maximize its potential by and through food. This form of knowledge draws a tangible relationship between food and the bodies, pressuring elders to take charge of their health and physical well-being by, among other things, adopting healthy eating habits [18].

4 A food blog by and for elders, thought and launched within a mediatized food culture

Within that context, RECAA had the idea to create a food blog. As stated in the introduction, food was already central to RECAA members’ practices as they organize potlucks on a weekly-basis while they gather to discuss the issues they are addressing consistently with their activist mandate. The project was deployed online and on-the-ground and it evolved around four main types of activities: 1) Collective cooking sessions that entailed cooking recipes and sharing meals, hence creating cheerful spaces to share recipes, stories and to practice the technical skills useful for posting online (such as photo and video taking and interview recording); 2) Intergenerational workshops offered by their partner, ACT, that allowed them to develop and practice digital skills; 3) The production of the blog itself, including online publication and promotional material (such as printed postcards and flyers) distributed during their various public activities; 4) Community events dedicated to discuss and raise awareness among the general public or community partners on issues related to ageing, consistent with their mandate. All these related activities were thought for and included technologies to ensure an online visibility while acquiring technical skills.

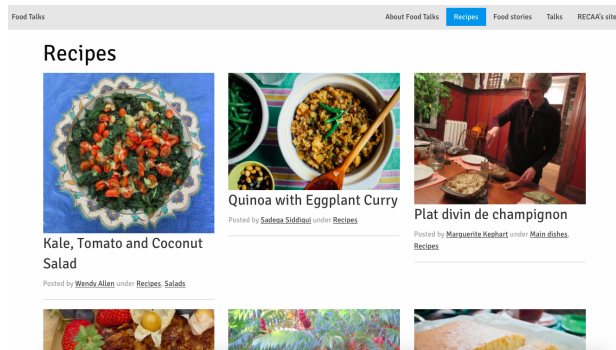


Fig. 1: « Recipes » section

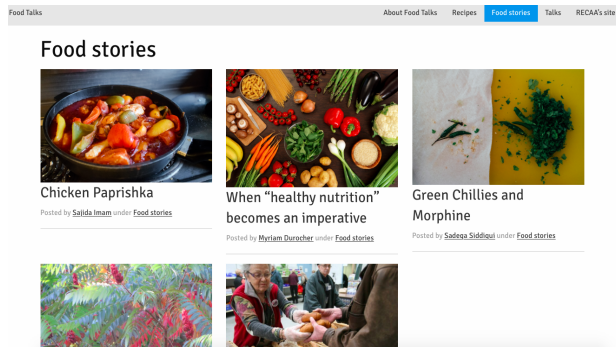


Fig. 2: « Stories » section

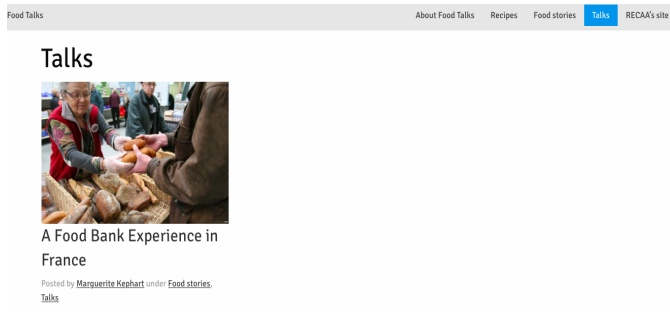


Fig. 3: « Talks » section

Food Talks allows web users to retrieve recipes, which are accompanied either by pictures or videos that depict the cooked meal or the cooking process. The members decided to divide the blog in three sections that are shown above (figures 1 to 3).

As mentioned in the introduction, RECAA has a political activist mandate that aims to raise awareness about elders' abuse and to work towards the development of a culture of respect for older people. Since the struggle for visibility is central to the social recognition process [24], RECAA wants to render these issues visible and see cultural and/or political change in the public scene. For RECAA members, the food blog is a new mode of expression, allowing a certain visibility for both the organization and the issues they are addressing. From the very beginning, RECAA saw an opportunity to increase its visibility and engage with what the group has called, in its grant submission, a "mediatized food culture". Therefore, blogging became a new form of activism for the group, a new way to "do politics". It became another opportunity for the group to include its voice in a mediatized culture that tends to exclude older people. The food blog's creation might also be seen as part of RECAA's efforts to mediatize, as they have also been integrating more media to their practices over the years to increase their agency and visibility in a mediatized culture that pressures organizations such as RECAA to do so [1]).

It is in the context presented in the previous section, where ideals of « successful ageing » are depicted as reachable by adopting a "healthy diet", that RECAA thought of and planned the food blog. Coveney [18] states that, to age "healthily" is a goal to reach that is recognized by institutional and political authorities as well as ageing subjects. Therefore, food allows individuals to aspire to age well and takes a political character. In that regard, RECAA saw a social injustice in the fact that the needed conditions to age "healthily" seemed to be unequally accessible. The group acknowledged that people coming from various backgrounds, countries or social classes did not necessarily have the same understanding of what should constitute a healthy diet. RECAA also considered that for many, what constitutes healthy food might not be physically or economically accessible. Therefore, at the very beginning of the project, the group shared their knowledge about how one should eat or how to find healthy alternatives to inaccessible healthy food. In that respect, the group intended to improve their accessibility to the resources necessary for elders to age "well", defined here as being in good physical health in older age:

They underline the importance of healthy eating habits and sharing information to improve food intake with people who do not have access to this knowledge (...) Discussion about the changes in how we cook, how we become increasingly aware of food proprieties (...) Against sugar + salt: how can we adapt recipes to make them « healthier »? (Notes Author 1, May 5, 2016)

By doing so, they would have fully responded to and integrated their voice in that "food culture" in the same register that what has been presented earlier, which makes of food another space where the individual is asked to take responsibility for his or her health. Therefore, they would have been (re) articulating discourses that promote

individual responsibility for one's health to their considerations for social justice. That could be understood in the light of Coveney's work [18], for whom the resource attribution and the knowledge production about how one should eat to age healthily is the duty of a fair society, allowing every individual the opportunity to keep a good physical and mental health as they age:

Recognition that the increasing population of older people will inevitably require some degree of support of maintenance has given rise to a number of initiatives concerning food and health. (...) The priority is to design and develop food products to arrest the normal but now considered to be the patho-problematic processes of aging. In this context wellness is regarded not as the absence of disease or the opposite of sickness, but as the accumulation of the plethora of resources, physical and mental, that are required for living ([18], p. 70).

Coveney considers that there is a necessity to provide the resources that are needed to age healthily, which echoes critics formulated by Grenier and Valois-Nadeau [25] over the successful ageing normativity and its tendency to individualize ageing processes. The researchers criticize this normative understanding on how to age well because it is rooted in the current neoliberal context in which ageing is presented as individuals' succession of reasoned choices during their life. Therefore, a "successful ageing" would be the result of "good choices" accumulated over time. Many other critical gerontologists had issues with this normative conception of successful ageing as it promotes an idealized ageing subject individually responsible for his or her health. Grenier and Valois-Nadeau argue that this individualizing injunction fails to take into account that the possibility to make "appropriate choices" depends on the access to particular resources, like knowledge about what is understood as "healthy nutrition".

However, RECAA's initial intention to share knowledge about how one should eat never got formalized through the blog, even if it remained in their informal discussions. Nevertheless, the fact that the project was initially thought this way and that they saw it as a new opportunity to work towards their ideals of social justice is significant: it demonstrates how "healthy nutrition" is invested with a symbolic meaning, making the ideal of "successful ageing"⁵ reachable. Rather than producing more knowledge about how one should eat, and thus reproducing this individualizing understanding of health and its relation to food and ageing, RECAA approached food from a collective and activist

⁵ Another reflection avenue could be inspired by mediatization studies. The mediatization theories are concerned about how mediatization occurs in co-relation with other forces that are crossing the social field's development. Among these forces is the individualisation process, described by Driessens [26] as putting the disembedded individual, over the collective, at the center of social transformations. This individualization that informs the mediatization process could generate the personalisation of media practices that are more focused around the individual and its experience, and that would be reflected in blog entries that are more tied to personal experiences than to general and globalized issues and concerns.

perspective, consistent with their mandate. Throughout the project's development, RECAA's political stance was found in the group's integration of that mediatized food culture, creating a breach where it ought to "be political" in three distinct, but related, manners: 1) by elders' inclusion in a mediatized society through the acquisition of digital skills; 2) by the visibility, both online and on-the-ground, granted to the group and its mandate through the project's unfolding and, finally; 3) by the collective engagement it contributed to foster. Through these political dimensions that span the food blog project's development and that go beyond the initial intent formulated by the group, RECAA wielded a form of agency within the current neoliberal and mediatized context, nourishing its activist mandate. The food blog becomes one site among others where the political can be played, deployed, and rendered effective.

5 Reconfiguring the injunction to age well: Using ICTs for political and collective purposes

The food blog project, conceived as a way to infiltrate that "mediatized food culture", has become a way for its members to engage with their ideals of social justice and equality. The blog became a pretext for RECAA members to meet, among themselves or with their partners and other community members, and discuss the social injustices they are tackling. Previous research has addressed how elders can become producers of digital content (see, for example, Brewer and Piper [27] who have studied blog content creation and sharing among older adults). Our approach is different; instead of focusing on how blogging meets psychological and social needs, reproducing these problematic ideas of ageing needing to be 'fixed' and which presupposes a vision of technology as remedy to some limitations or deficiencies, we focus on a group of elders' activist goals through content creation. The food blog project produced socialization spaces, therefore contributing to raise awareness towards concerns related to their mandate. Then, food became a medium to discuss elders' issues and a way for the group and its members to find their voice/place within a mediatized culture. It also allowed them to gain technical skills, individually and collectively, in order to stay connected in a digital world that largely excludes elders.

5.1 Acquiring technical skills: RECAA's inclusion in a digital society

Sawchuk [1] argues that the necessity to acquire technical skills for the group has to be understood in a context where political organizations, such as RECAA, feel the pressure to mediatize. For the activist group, acquiring technical skills allows to consolidate and expand its relations with other community organizations, one of its basic communication practices to assert its interests and fight for elders' concerns. It is also a way for its members to increase their agency within the Canadian context, where citizen services are gradually taking the « digital turn ». Acquiring these skills helped RECAA members on

an individual level as much as on a collective one, encompassing the only purpose to produce a food blog, which resulted in changes to their individual communication practices.

Most participant members have learned basic photography, video (including editing), online publishing, and online social networks. These skills allowed them to document their memories, to improve their possibilities and means of communication, and to create intergenerational ties. For example, during a discussion about organizing and archiving the project's digital documents, a few members shared with the group how some of their children and grandchildren helped them upload their recipes' photos or publish these recipes on the blog (when ACT members were not present to do so) (Reconstitution from the notes of Author 1, October 13, 2016). This example illustrates how the project encouraged intergenerational exchanges and gave elders the opportunity to increase their digital literacy.

In the first meeting, when the group discussed the form the project would take, they agreed on a blog form that could be easily manipulated, necessitating only some basic skills to be able to publish online. The accessibility considerations informed all RECAA's decisions and reflections throughout the project. For example, during a workshop on how to interview people, the members decided that the interviews had to be carefully planned and practiced in advance, and that they should not exceed three to four minutes. By agreeing on these procedures, they ensure themselves easiness and accessible online publications, without the necessity to edit, which would have required more advanced skills: « We are beginning the editing phase. Sol suggests that we think about the time we have and about who (within the group) will do the editing (...) Next time they will try to plan telling them what to film/capture. Include the audience more » (Notes Author 2, January 26, 2017). Author 1 also noticed the importance to have some sort of *storyboard* to guide them, again to avoid the need to edit the videos as much as possible (Reconstitution of notes, Dec. 1, 2016).

The technological activities surrounding the blog's deployment were planned in such a way that the group and its members could reproduce them once the partnership with ACT would be over. Sawchuk [1] qualifies this kind of learning as « tactical » interventions. The project encouraged learning simple manipulations that do not need or need very little editing work. This way, RECAA members hoped to increase their digital autonomy beyond the project's timeframe. Here, autonomy designates the group and its members' technological independence and therefore, their potential inclusion in a mediatized culture, which can take the shape of collective as much as individual autonomy.

From RECAA's perspective, ageism tends to exclude elders from the mediatized culture as much as from the food culture that is dominated by youth (RECAA, Grant application, 2015, p. 5). For them, the idea of increasing their autonomy by developing technical abilities resonates with their general mandate to fight ageism. In this context, « ageism » refers to biases and contempt directed at elders and reflects an attitude that perpetuates the rejection or the fear of ageing. In the contemporary mediatized culture, a set of assumptions is (re) produced on the relation between elders and technologies. For example, elders are represented as a homogeneous group with a low potential for learning

about technologies. These ideas also reinforce inequalities in the learning about and using technologies [2].

From the individual members' point of view, achieving social inclusion by learning digital skills is consistent with the idea of « successful ageing »; they can therefore participate in this mediatized culture that is strongly associated with youth. From the organization's point of view, acquiring digital skills is part of RECAA's strategy to reach out to various publics through different communicational means, to reinforce its agency in a mediatized context, and therefore to encourage its members' social inclusion. In this project, RECAA acquired « political agency » by learning digital skills, by maintaining their website, and by enriching their future communicative events. Moreover, the food blog became a new form of media visibility that contributes to fight the ageism related to preconceived ideas about elders and their relationship with technology.

5.2 The food blog as a means to increase one's visibility

Because its mandate is to fight for elders' rights by making them more visible and by putting forth their concerns, RECAA thought it would be relevant to make a « tactical » intervention [1] by taking advantage of what is already highly visible in popular culture: food. The members saw their compliance with this mediatized food culture as a necessity. It is indeed reflected in the goals they formulated in the grant application that preceded the beginning of the project:

[...] (2) Skills building workshops and recipe exchanges will mean elders can participate in workshops that build toward generating content for an intergenerational and intercultural audience, via the universal language of food. As mentioned, those without skills or resources to share their recipes online are excluded from conversations. (3) The blog will include elders' voices online and generate social participation. (4) Through elders' participation in a global, primarily youth dominated, food based event (Restaurant Day), we will promote person-to-person social inclusion (RECAA, Grant application, 2015, p. 5).

According to Sawchuk [1] RECAA's efforts to mediatize can be seen as « tactical mediatization », referring to its will to improve its agency within a culture moulded by this mediatization process. For the researcher, “tactical digital learning can be understood as a set of maneuvers or timely interventions made by a precarious and vulnerable group of elders into an existing system of media and representations of the elderly”. From the beginning of the project, RECAA made explicitly obvious that the blog would serve its political mandate by making the organization visible and its concerns, both online and on-the-ground:

“Thus, the goal of this project is to include elders' voices in contemporary food culture (online and on the ground)” (RECAA, Grant application, 2015, p. 5). The mediatization process, which informed the project's development, is observable in their

activities that go beyond publishing content online, as the blog became a space of socialization for RECAA members with the community.

5.3 A collective engagement fostering socialization and activism

RECAA actualizes its political stance by unfolding this food blog project and its related activities. The project became a pretext to gather together to cook, to follow workshops about digital skills or to plan subsequent activities. Every time they met, the members took the opportunity to discuss relevant matters in regards to their mandate and the issues the group is tackling. The blog also became a pretext to discuss these issues with the larger community. For example, the events RECAA organized with their community partners became an opportunity to raise the general public's awareness on elders' mistreatment and to create spaces to share and explore new causes and concerns that should be endorsed by the organization⁶.

For example, during an event organized in collaboration with a community organization working with the Black community, RECAA cooked various recipes retrievable on the blog as a way to promote it. During the event, the attendees were invited to discuss thematic questions related to racism in Montreal. These questions were prepared in advance by RECAA. Their goals through this event were to: 1) build solidarity within the community by sharing personal experiences; 2) raise awareness about elders' mistreatment in regards to these personal histories; 3) think and plan this event to produce at least one blog post to summarize the day. RECAA tried to foresee what technical material would be necessary (e.g. to not forget to bring the microphones, the cameras, the audio recorders, etc.). They planned in advance the camera angles that would be interesting and easy to upload online (e.g. short videos, no editing). On the ground, RECAA members took photos of the attendees and took notes on the issues that were raised in the discussions in order to write about them in their blog.

In sum, the food blog's political dimension actualized itself in various ways and spaces throughout the project's development. Its stated goal was to serve RECAA's activist interests by making the organization visible in the mediatized food culture and by increasing its digital autonomy. Another goal was to fight against the inequalities related to accessible knowledge about food, making it possible for elders to age more « successfully ». Finally, the project turned this individualizing injunction that correlates "ageing well" with "ageing healthily" by adopting an appropriate diet into a collective action: food became a way to share personal experiences and inequalities, and to gain visibility in accordance with RECAA's activist mandate.

According to Vines, Pritchard, Wright, Olivier and Brittain [10], when researchers start thinking about ageing and technology in a way that does not frame the latter as a

⁶ During the course of the project, a few events were organized in collaboration with community partners: a potluck in November 2016, an event for the Black History Month in February 2017, and the cooking of a brunch for the general public in a community cafe in March 2017.

remedy to the « problem » of ageing, they can redefine what « success » means, from participants' points of view. In their examples, success is contextual and comes out in many contextualised forms. Hence, “success” does not only take form through the idea of an individual ageing healthily, but needs to be understood as being defined and driven by elders themselves. Vines, Pritchard, Wright, Olivier and Brittain provide a few examples of how “success” could hence be defined and measured, such as feelings of societal worth, a sense of giving back to a community, a sense of learning new ideas in retirement, or the perceived success of one's friends or family, among other things. Taking that into account, the food blog's success is not necessarily measured by the number of visitors on its webpage or shares of its posts, but by how RECAA members felt satisfied and proud of their work. These satisfaction testimonies were largely heard by the researchers throughout the development of the project and have become even more salient during the last official and wrap-up meeting of this project, held in May 2016, as RECAA members were sharing how proud they were by the outcome of the project and how it contributed to change the ways by which they think and dispose of food: « Nothing has changed in the way I cook or in the food I prepare. What has changed is our relationship with it and this is what gets exciting. We need to see food differently, render it appetizing. » (Notes Author 1, May 5, 2017). Hence, the “success” of this project does not rely on statistics, but on lived and shared experiences of satisfaction resulting from the online results as much as from the community connections that were built throughout its development. “Success” can also be measured by the feeling of pride they experienced seeing themselves being able to produce and publish content online, and by the fact that even those less skilled with technology were able to participate in the project.

6 Conclusion

We would like to point out how the food blog, developed in a context of multiplying discourses that define what are contemporary “healthy eating habits”, reconfigures “health” in the normative understanding of “successful ageing”. It is indeed possible to find a heterogeneity of informational content about healthy eating as a way to “prevent” ageing or as a tool to improve people's ageing experience despite the bodily functions' inevitable decline, which is connoted as necessarily unpleasant. These discursive elements are produced within a neoliberal context in which individuals are held responsible for their health, are prompted to “improve” themselves, and are pressured to adopt appropriate behaviours to age “well”.

RECAA thought and launched the food blog within that context. Rather than actively participating to this food culture by adding more food knowledge and perpetuating the individualising processes that come with the pressure to eat, be and age healthy, the group members used food as a means to work collectively towards their ideals of social justice. Indeed, they explicitly saw the blog project as a way to increase their autonomy in a mediatized culture by developing skills on how to post online. They also took advantage

of food's large visibility in the public sphere to add their voice and gain visibility for their organization and its mandate. Following the mediatization processes that inform their practices, the blog was deployed online and on-the-ground and became the pretext for the group to create socialization spaces between its members and with the larger community. Throughout the project's development, RECAA members used digital technologies in accordance with their political mandate and activist practices to fight ageist conceptions of older people's (non) uses of technologies as means to improve their health or to keep in touch with their children and grandchildren.

This project also raised other questions we have not yet addressed. We think that the reflection could be pursued further to interrogate feminist issues that might be at play throughout the project. Researchers from the critical gerontology field have raised concerns about the fact that only the white male perspective was taken into consideration when it came to normative discourses around successful ageing ideals, neglecting women or other ethnicities. Similarly, in the critical food studies field, researchers criticize the discrimination and exclusion processes that are being produced by and through food in its relation to the bodies. For example, the stigmatization of fat or unhealthy people does not take into account structural and historical oppression systems that permeate bodies and the ways they are ageing. Many studies in the critical food field have shown that gender issues are raised through food. For instance, issues related to caring, domestic labour, and bodily concerns have been raised regarding food and bodies: how are they reconfigured throughout a project like this? How can gender issues be addressed when food, through its mediatization, serves a political stance, especially when it involves ageing women too often excluded from normative injunctions such as the "successful ageing" one?

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