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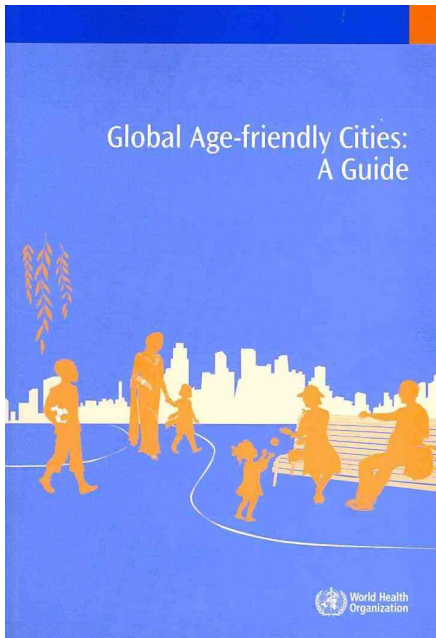
# « Benches as Mediations of Age in Public Space – A critical case study from Age-friendly Wallonia, Belgium »

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Neuve (UCL), LOCI, Faculté d'Architecture, d'Ingénierie architecturale, d'urbanisme,  
Belgium

Manchester, **BSG 2018**, *Ageing in an Unequal World*  
*Shaping Environments for the 21st Century*

# A original intuition



## New York City AFC

“As of the end of May 2013, 536 benches had been installed (173 at bus stops), 68 benches had been installed at the request of senior centers, and more than 50 benches had been placed in locations requested by Aging Improvement Districts, the Age-friendly NYC neighborhood level community organizing initiative.” (AFC NYC, 2013, 59 initiatives, p. 30)

New York City Department of Transportation

## NYC CityBench Request Form

Sidewalks & Pedestrians



The CityBench program is an initiative to increase the amount of public seating on New York's streets. DOT is installing attractive and durable benches around the city, particularly at bus stops, retail corridors, and in areas with high concentrations of senior citizens. These benches make streets more comfortable for transit riders and pedestrians, especially for those who are older or disabled. Anyone can request a bench. If you know of a good location that meets the requirements below, please submit this Request Form by mail to the address located at the end of this form, or apply online at [www.nyc.gov/citybench](http://www.nyc.gov/citybench).

In order to support walking and transit, priority bench locations include:

- Bus stops without shelters
- Sidewalks near transit facilities (e.g., subway stations)
- Senior centers
- Hospitals and community health centers
- Commercial zones and shopping districts
- Municipal facilities (e.g., public libraries)

# TOWARD AN AGE-FRIENDLY NEW YORK CITY: A Findings Report



Fall 2008



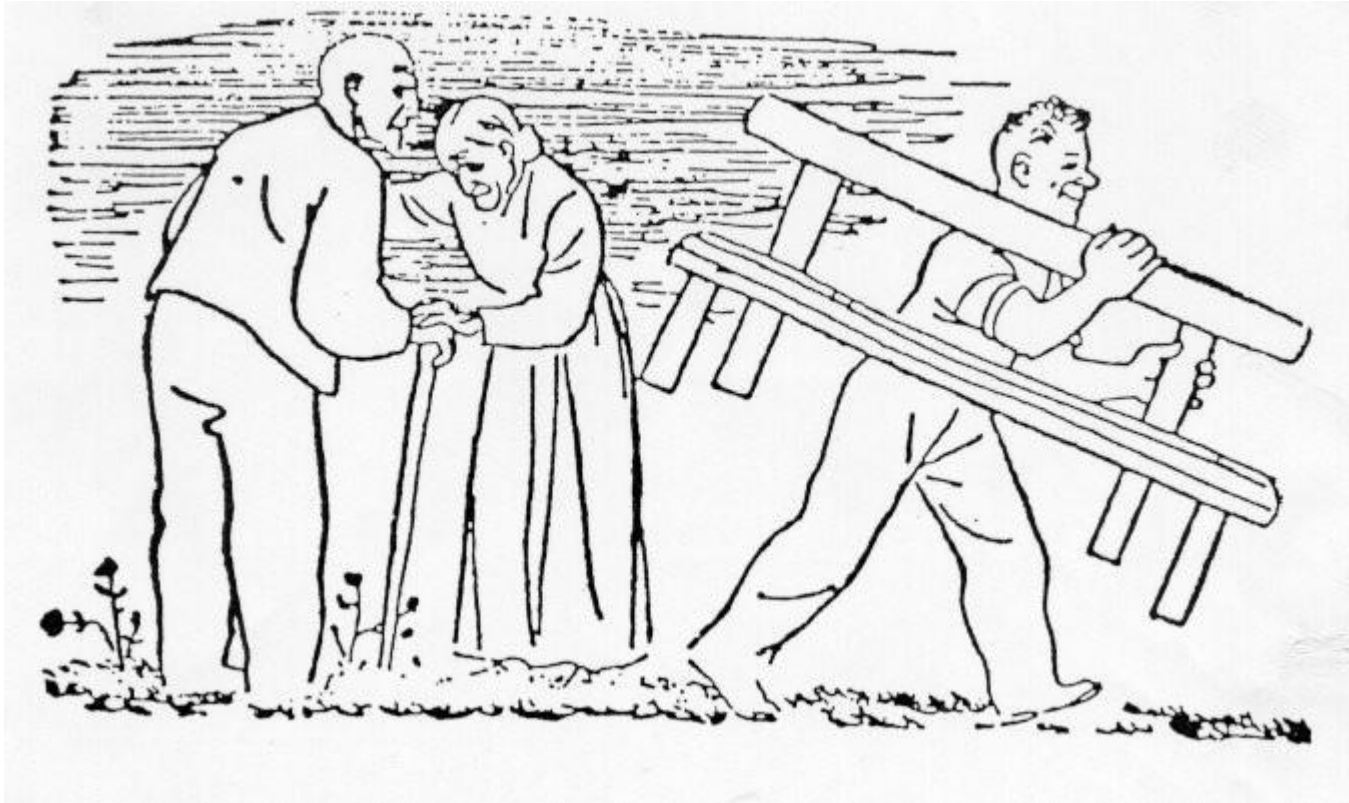
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## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PROJECT ACCORDING TO THE CO-RESEARCHERS

In the section below, co-researchers commented on what they thought were the most striking findings from the interviews they conducted themselves. Topics that were discussed included:

- The existence of strong neighbourhood attachments, and the importance of neighbourly relationships for older residents, especially those with limited mobility
- The strong desire of most older people to 'age in place', or to stay in their own home in their current neighbourhood, for as long as possible
- The importance of family relationships
- The decline or withdrawal of local amenities, facilities and meeting places which increases the risk for social isolation among older residents in the neighbourhood
- The central role of reliable and frequent local transport in being able to get out and about
- The detrimental impact of the loss of local transport connections on the quality of life of older people
- The importance of local meeting spaces for socialising and maintaining local social networks
- The importance of local opportunities for social participation, with an outreach to socially isolated older people
- Fear of crime which limits older people's engagements in and use of the neighbourhood
- The importance of safe outdoor spaces, with public toilets, well-maintained pavements, outdoor seating and effective traffic control measures

# To avoid to sit and (lazy) relax



Le banc retiré... Campain for AVS, Switzerland, 1947

Source : Lalive d'Epinaï, 2003, *La retraite et après? Vieillesse entre science et conscience*, Leçon d'Adieu, Université de Genève, 22 mai.

- The Anti-homeless benches

Source : <https://seenthis.net/tag/anti-sdf>

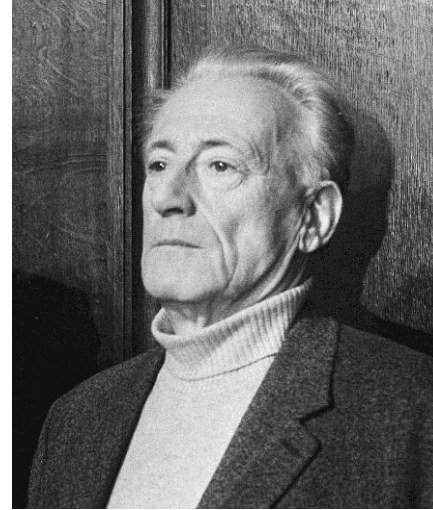


- Promotion of bench in public spaces
  - As an application of ‘active/healthy ageing’
  - As an application to reduce social isolation
- A potential normativity ‘inside’ the bench, Vs potential contradictory practices
  - Research questions : **How age in public space is mediated by benches? How are benches framed within local Age-friendly initiatives?**



# Theoretical lens

(From Moulaert, Wanka, Drilling, 2018)



## Henri Lefebvre : Production of space (1991, 1974)

- Spatial practice: everyday practices and perceptions of people (attachment)
- Representational space: **signs and symbols** associated to one location
- Representations of space: spatial imaginary by experts (**planners, architects...**) and **policymakers**

# 1. Representation of space

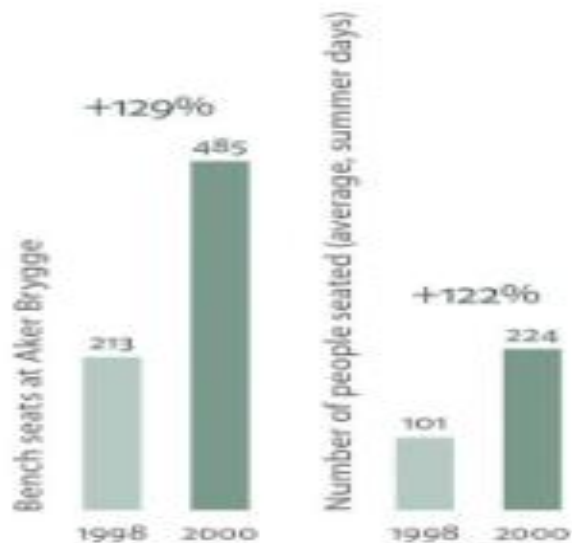
## A) The planner/architect solution

- The French industry of urban equipment (2015)





# Gehl's *Cities for people* (2010)

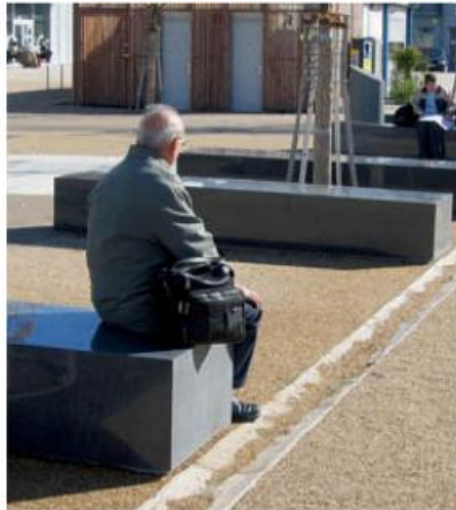


More modest invitations can also have a measurable effect. Doubling the number of places to sit in Aker Brygge in Oslo has doubled the number of people who are seated in the area.<sup>17</sup>



Source : Gehl, J., 2012, *Pour des villes à échelle humaine*, Montréal, Ecosociété.

# Is technic/esthetic the answer?



Source : Gehl, J., 2012, *Pour des villes à échelle humaine*, Montréal, Ecosociété, p.156.

## 4 elements for a quality of sitting (Gehl 1990):

- Nice weather conditions, climate
- Good location (on a border of a urban area, protected from the back)
- An open view
- Good environmental condition (reduced noise, no atmospheric pollution)

## The 10 most beautiful universities in Europe

They say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but you'd be hard pressed not to see the beauty in these 10 European universities

January 22 2018



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# 1. Representation of space

## A) At the origin of US Gerontology

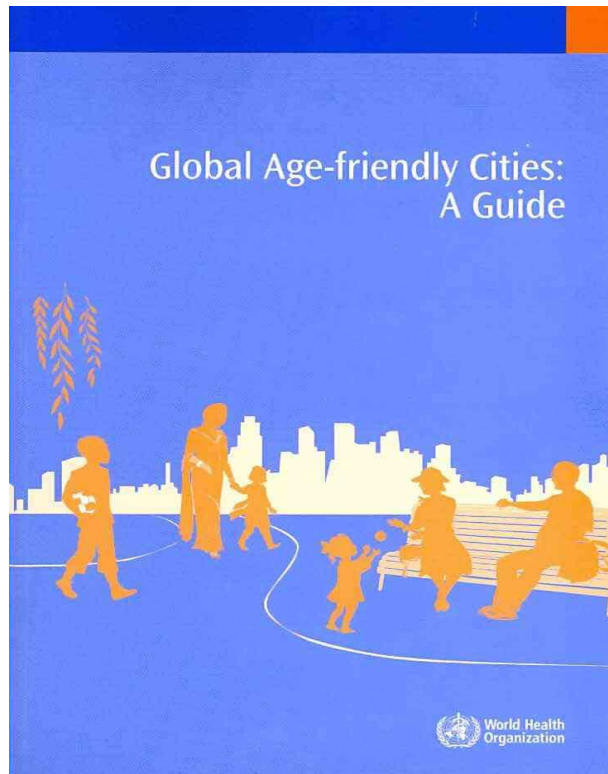
- [« Role flexibility »] Consider the changes in role which may be made by a man just before and after age 65 when he was automatically retired from his work. (...) He may **spend more time with friends at his club**; indeed, he may join a club for this very purpose. He may use a park for the same ends, **sitting on a park bench with others in pleasant weather, or lounging in a park building** when it is wet or cold ».

Havighurst, R. J. (1954). Flexibility and the Social Roles of the Retired. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 59(4), 310.



# 1. Representation of space

## B) WHO: influencing policymakers





## Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities

This checklist of essential age-friendly city features is based on the results of the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities project consultation in 33 cities in 22 countries. The checklist is a tool for a city's self-assessment and a map for charting progress. More detailed checklists of age-friendly city features are to be found in the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide.

This checklist is intended to be used by individuals and groups interested in making their city more age-friendly. For the checklist to be effective, older people must be involved as full partners. In assessing a city's strengths and deficiencies, older people will describe how the checklist of features matches their own experience of the city's positive characteristics and barriers. They should play a role in suggesting changes and in implementing and monitoring improvements.

### Outdoor spaces and buildings

- ☐ Public areas are clean and pleasant.
- ☐ Green spaces and outdoor seating are sufficient in number, well-maintained and safe.
- ☐ Pavements are well-maintained, free of obstructions and reserved for pedestrians.
- ☐ Pavements are non-slip, are wide enough for wheelchairs and have dropped curbs to road level.
- ☐ Pedestrian crossings are sufficient in number and safe for people with different levels and types of disability, with non-slip markings, visual and audio cues and adequate crossing times.
- ☐ Drivers give way to pedestrians at intersections and pedestrian crossings.
- ☐ Cycle paths are separate from pavements and other pedestrian walkways.
- ☐ Outdoor safety is promoted by good street lighting, police patrols and community education.

- ☐ Services are situated together and are accessible.
- ☐ Special customer service arrangements are provided, such as separate queues or service counters for older people.
- ☐ Buildings are well-signed outside and inside, with sufficient seating and toilets, accessible elevators, ramps, railings and stairs, and non-slip floors.
- ☐ Public toilets outdoors and indoors are sufficient in number, clean, well-maintained and accessible.

### Transportation

- ☐ Public transportation costs are consistent, clearly displayed and affordable.
- ☐ Public transportation is reliable and frequent, including at night and on weekends and holidays.
- ☐ All city areas and services are accessible by public transport, with good connections and well-marked routes and vehicles.

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## Stratégie et plan d'action pour vieillir en bonne santé en Europe, 2012-2020

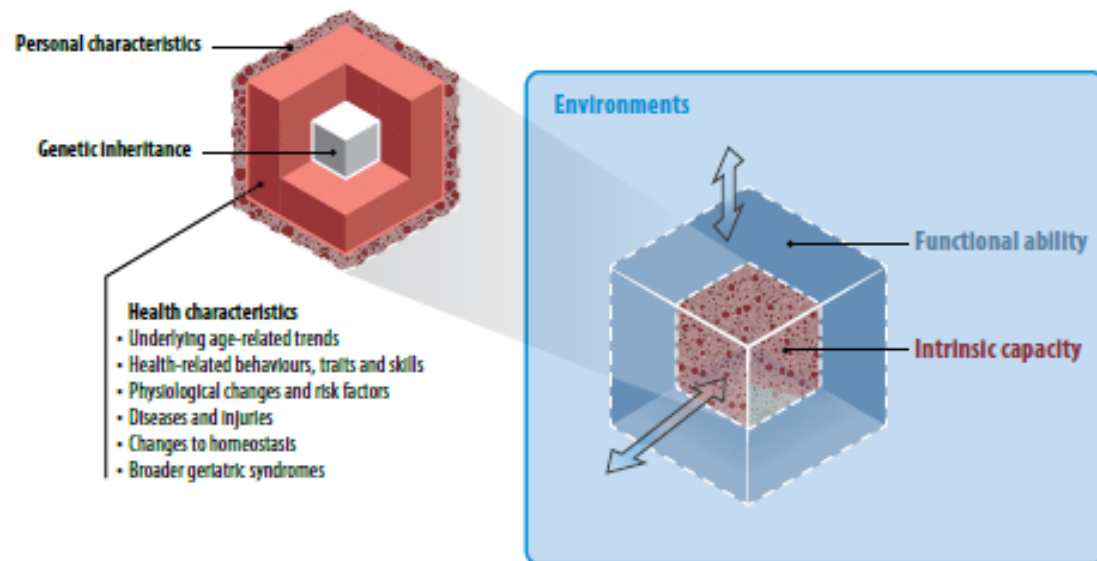


- Old (lonely) men reading alone, discussing with other older people  
Old women laughing together  
= intragenerational socialisation

# Environment as a « new » ageing domain for action

« Environments comprise all the factors in the extrinsic world that form the context of an individual's life. » (WHO, 2015, 28, from The international classification of functioning. Disability and health, WHO, 2001).

Fig. 2.1. *Healthy Aging*



- Support the « functional ability » defined as « the health-related attributes that enable people **to be and to do** what they have reason to value (...) » (WHO, 2015, 227).

➔ In public places, ***what do older people want to be and to do ?***

## 2. Towards 'representational space'

### Benches as 'symbols and signs': A Walloon exploration

- The 'functional benches' (to do somth)



Credit of this picture : Myriam Leleu





Credit of pictures : Robert Grabczan

- The 'official benches'





- ‘The welcoming benches’



Credit of this picture : Myriam Leleu

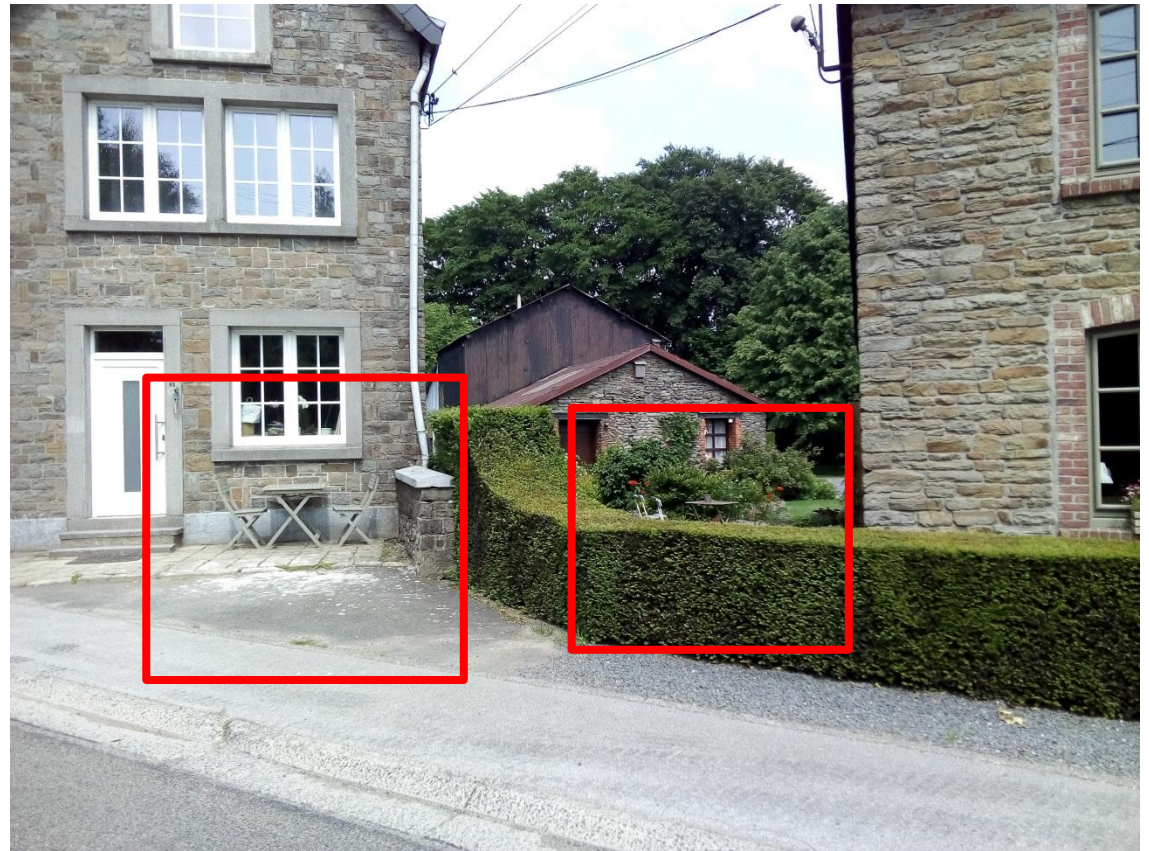




- The 'unexpected benches'



- In rural area, the ‘linking benches’ (public/private)

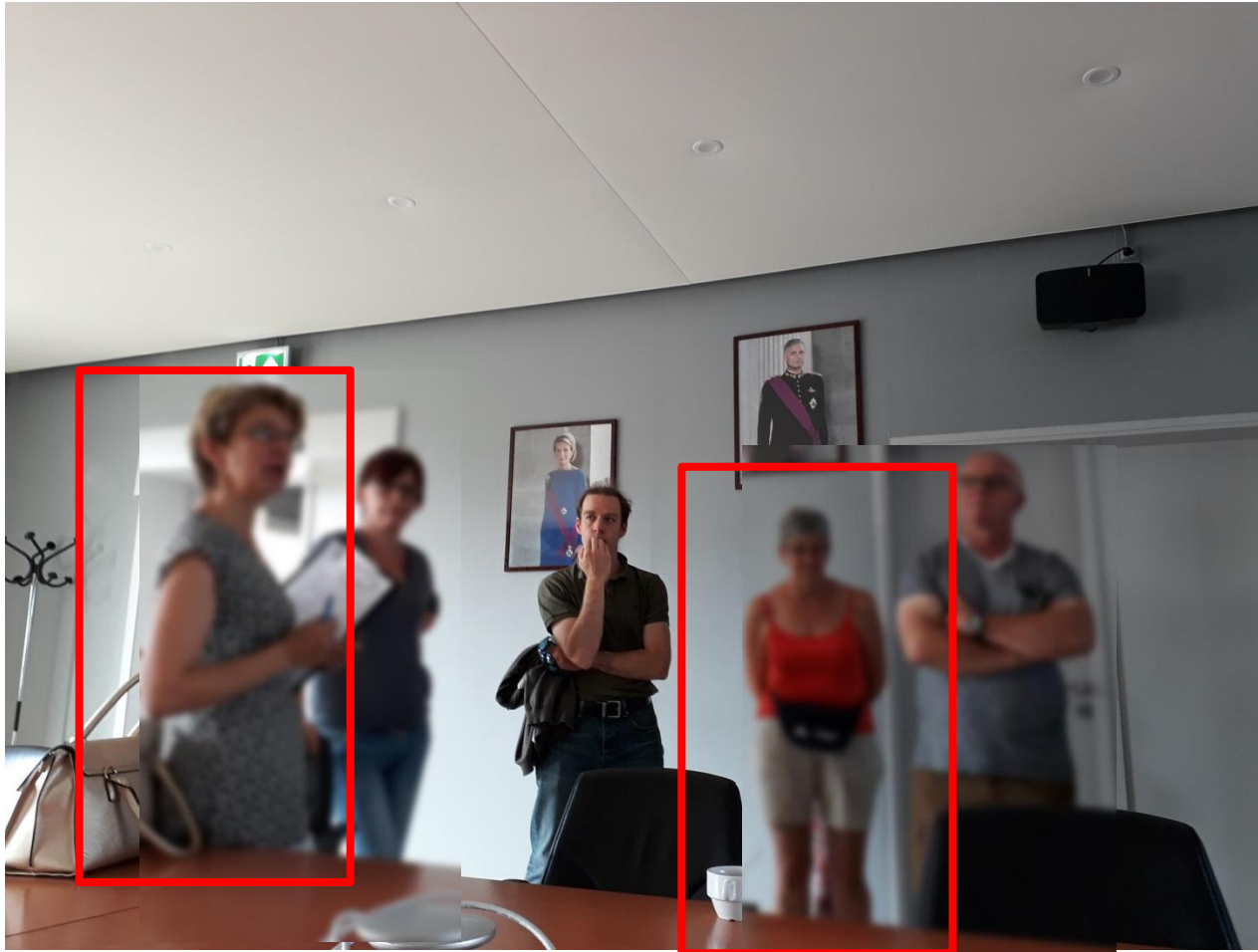


Credit of this picture : Robert Grabczan

# Three key commitments



- 1) 'to listen to the needs of their ageing population'
- 2) to 'assess and monitor age-friendliness'
- 3) to 'work collaboratively with older people and across sectors to create age-friendly physical and social environments'.

1) 'to listen to the needs of their ageing population' ➔ *Who is at the table?*





**2) to 'assess and monitor age-friendliness' :**  
*need for research + need for local  
appropriation*


Observateur 1 : .....

Observateur 2 : .....


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## Marche dans le cadre du Projet « Wallonie-Amie des Aînés »


Cette marche fait partie du projet Wallonie Amie Des Aînés (WADA). Cette marche exploratoire vise à encourager les aînés à faire une évaluation critique de l'environnement urbain/rural dans lequel ils évoluent au quotidien, de la commune des Sprimont.

L'Observation Marche WADA est menée par Mme LELEU, sociologue, et Mr GRABCAN, ingénieur architecte, assistants de recherche à la Faculté d'architecture, d'ingénierie architecturale et d'urbanisme de l'UCL.


**Sprimont centre**



**Louveigné**



**Adzeu**



**Observations**

**SPRIMONT**

I. Qu'observez-vous au niveau des transports ?

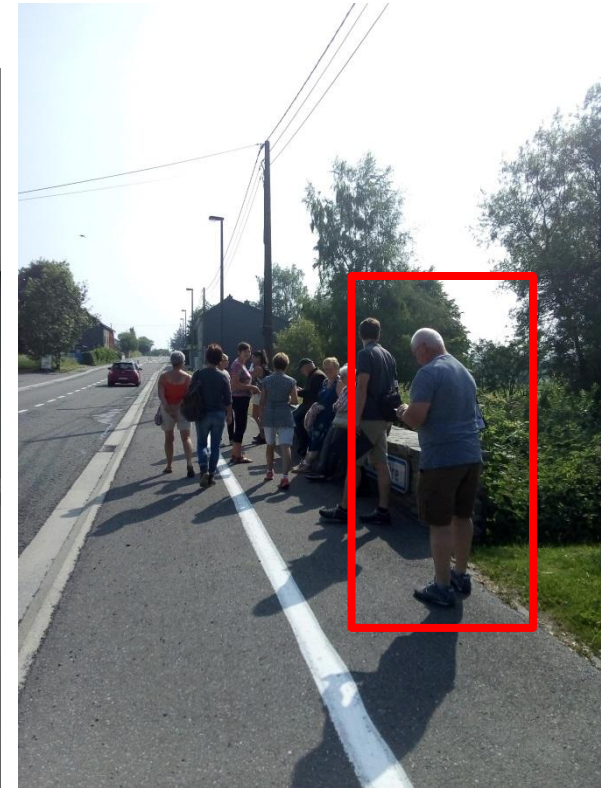
II. Qu'observez-vous en terme de communication et d'information destinées aux aînés ?

III. Que constatez-vous au niveau de l'habitat, des accessibilités et des aménagements pour les aînés ?

IV. Observations particulières

Commentaires :

### 3) to 'work collaboratively with older people and across sectors to create age-friendly physical and social environments'



# Conclusion

- Benches offer a materialisation of various visions of '(ageing in) public space'
- Unexplored and potentially contradictory experiences of benches by older people: « *arts de faire* »/ « Practices of everyday life » or « tactics » of (older) people (de Certeau, 1984)



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