urbanistik

by JCDecaux

HOW CAN CITIES ADAPT THEIR PUBLIC SPACES TO SUPPORT AGING POPULATIONS?

WHO ARE THE "SENIOR CITIZENS"?

Today, who is the "senior citizen"? Several legal and medical definitions primarily based on age are proposed, such as the one from the World Health Organization (WHO), which defines people over 60 years old as seniors.

In France, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee), seniors' citizens are aged between 55 and 64. Finally, the Larousse dictionary describes seniors as people over 50 years old.

According to Cerema, the French public agency for developing public expertise in the fields of urban planning, regional cohesion and ecological and energy transition, there is no "consensual definition of an age threshold at which a person becomes an elderly person. This label is attributed as a result of physical, physiological, and psychological changes associated with aging " (2016).

The way to qualify a senior citizen is constantly evolving, depending on social and societal contexts. Several factors can be taken into consideration, such as age, retirement, general state of health and thresholds, set by health insurance companies, for example.

> Originally, the term "**senior**" was borrowed from English and in Latin, it means "**older, elder**".

This note aims to objectively identify the areas of work and action strategies for supporting aging in urban environments.

The first part will present the needs and expectations of seniors in public spaces, while the second part will illustrate these trends and challenges with solutions and examples of initiatives implemented in public spaces to support aging in cities.

Seniors in key figures

The number of **people aged 65 and over** is expected to double over the next three decades, to **reach 1.6 billion worldwide in 2050,** according to the United Nations.
Source – Statista, 2024

12.6% of the European Union's population will be over 80 years old by 2070.
In fact, this demographic is expected to double between 2018 and 2070.
Source – INSEE, 2020

1 in 4 French citizens will be over 65 years old by 2040.
Source – Insee, 2018

One in seven individuals aged 75 to 85 does not leave their home for an entire week.
Source – Cerema, 2016

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WHO ARE THE "SENIOR CITIZENS"?

THE SENIOR OF TOMORROW…

The proportion of the population in the European Union aged over 80, is expected to more than double between 2021 and 2100, reaching **14.6% of the European population by 2100** (Source – Statista, 2022).

And what about France? By 2040, nearly one in four French people will be over 65 years old (Source – Insee, 2018). Insee projections even anticipate that by 2070, 270,000 elderly people will be... 100 years old or older! France is thus facing an unprecedented demographic transition in terms of its scale and speed, becoming a challenge for social, territorial, and generational cohesion, requiring a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

The trend is therefore towards **a triple increase in aging** (an increase in the proportion of elderly individuals in the total population of an area): a significant growth in "*gerontological growth*", an explosion in the number of dependent elderly people, as well as a massive rise in the number of very old and frail, yet still independent elderly individuals.

SENIORS CITIZENS AND THE "SILVER ECONOMY"

Statistical projections demonstrate that **the world population is aging** ; countries must adapt to these demographic changes. This context has led to the birth of the Silver Economy - a global phenomenon that has expanded to Asia and recently to Europe.

> Defined by the French Directorate General for Enterprises (DGE) as "**all economic and industrial activities that benefit seniors**", this sector represents **a potential revenue** of around a **hundred billion euros** in France today.

It is in this context that many companies and startups are created, offering solutions to help people age well.

Several countries have already recognized the market potential and are witnessing the development of their "silver economy" sector. The UK has primarily focused on activities related to home care and assistance. Japan, facing a rapidly aging population, is developing activities in the fields of healthcare, housing, and telecommunications.

France is developing activities in research, fairs, as well as dedicated products and services (mainly related to housing and home care). The French silver economy sector was officially established through a sector agreement in 2013, becoming a support for economic activity that brings together aging-related stakeholders (such as Korian, Orange, Essilor, etc.).

In 2018, the sector was relaunched after being put aside due to various political changes.

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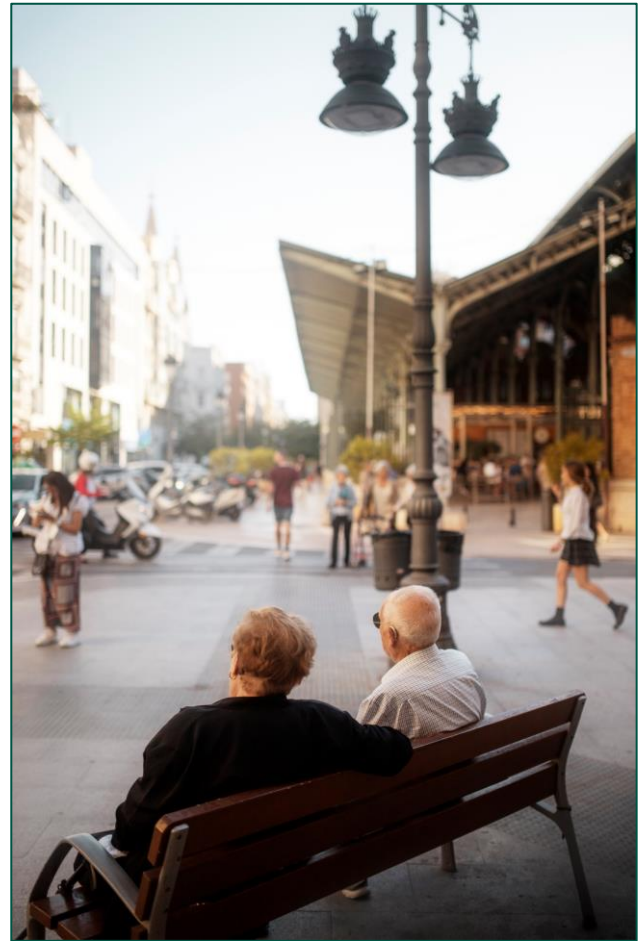
The France Silver Eco association was created in 2009 and is chaired by Luc Broussy, a specialist in aging issues and author of the report "Nous vieillirons ensemble... 80 propositions pour un Pacte entre générations" (2021).

The association was subsequently commissioned by the Ministry of Solidarity and Health to animate the "Silver Economy Sector."

It now serves as a toolbox aimed at supporting the ecosystem's development..

"AGING WELL" FOR FRENCH PEOPLE AGED 50 AND ABOVE

What does "aging well" mean?

A survey conducted by CSA Research in 2019, with 1006 respondents, focuses on the definition given by the French for "aging well".

According to 77% of the respondents, "aging well" is seen as a marketing term that could be defined as "being in good health (50%), having a positive mindset (44%), staying active (31%), and maintaining a fulfilling social life (25%)".

Source – « Les Français, les seniors et le « bien vieillir » », CSA (2019)

According to the Prospective Lab of the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (CGET), seven main challenges can be identified: getting around and maintaining mobility, to reappropriate public spaces, aging in one's own home, knowing and asserting one's rights, staying connected, aging in good health, and maintaining one's "right to the city." This section will mainly focus on the challenges faced by senior citizens in public spaces and the consideration of aging in urban planning.

THE CHALLENGE OF MOBILITY: PROMOTING WALKABILITY

Elderly people are increasingly mobile, but mainly by car and less by public transportation or bicycle (CGET).

While the overall population makes about 22% of their trips on foot, individuals aged 65 to 74 make 30% of their trips on foot, and this percentage increases to nearly 40% among those over 75 years old.

Therefore, **elderly people walk more than the rest of the population.**

People over 75 years old represent **9% of the French population,** but **account for 36% of pedestrian fatalities.**

Furthermore, seniors are more mobile than the rest of the population, but within a more limited range, explained notably by **the shrinking of their living territory.**

Did you know? An elderly person can typically walk only 300 to 500 meters before needing to take a break.

Several solutions are being implemented in different regions:

| Car-sharing | Solidarity transport | Carpooling

New modes of transportation are emerging that should reverse these current trends:
- 3 or 4-wheeled walkers
- Tricycles

One of the main issues faced by seniors in public spaces is related to urban developments

Seniors wish for greater attention to be given to the "walkability" of spaces, often described as unsuitable for smooth pedestrian flow and safety (narrow sidewalks, steep slopes, slippery or uneven surfaces, etc.).

Regarding pedestrian travel, the issues most raised by seniors are related to sidewalks (narrowness, conflicts of use, illegal parking, surface condition, cleanliness, lack of handrails), intersections (duration of traffic lights, lack of supportive infrastructure), inadequate urban furniture (seating, toilets), insufficient green spaces and gardens, as well as the complexity of urban space (difficulty in interpreting information through signage and wayfinding in urban areas).

THE CHALLENGE OF ORGANIZING ACCESS TO SERVICES: "AGE-FRIENDLY ZONES"

According to a study conducted by Cerema, nearly **one in seven individuals aged 75 to 85 does not leave their home for an entire week.**

It is therefore even more important to facilitate seniors' access to services (public transportation, personal assistance, local shops).
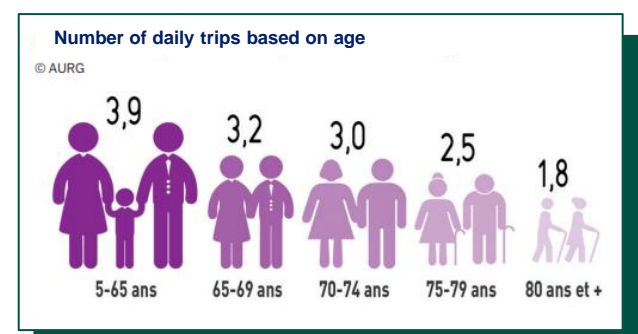
Studies report that grocery shopping is the primary reason for elderly people to go out. Comes first, the bakery (19%), the market (14%), the pharmacy (11%).

It is within this framework that the concept of "**age-friendly zones**" has emerged.

The Centre for Strategic Analysis (CAS) describe these zones as "**areas that intersect within a radius of 200 meters, comprising local shops and services, public transportation, public facilities (hospitals, clinics, and establishments for the elderly in particular), and green spaces.**"

This approach aligns with the discussions held in the context of the "Rue Commune" (Shared Street) concept, but more importantly with those of the "15-minute city" or even the "one minute city."

The pedestrian accessibility to shops and services thus proves to be a powerful factor in social integration and combating isolation.

Number of daily trips based on age
© AURG

3,9 — 5-65 ans
3,2 — 65-69 ans
3,0 — 70-74 ans
2,5 — 75-79 ans
1,8 — 80 ans et +

Source – AURG, Enquête mobilité, 2021

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THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL CONNECTION: MEETING THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF SENIORS BY INCORPORATING THEIR SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS MORE EFFECTIVELY

Promoting mobility for seniors and providing them with easy access to shops not only **reduces the loss of autonomy** but also **helps alleviate feelings of isolation**.

Seniors indeed experience a significant decline in social connections.

Seniors face a significative lake of social interaction.

530,000 French people aged 60 and over never or very rarely meet other people.

Source – Petits frères des pauvres, 2021

The planning and design of open spaces most often focuses on the physical and safety needs of older people, without addressing social needs.

Social connection is identified as one of the most important needs for seniors.

The need for social interaction in public spaces is expressed through the desire for places that foster sociability, the demand for an **inclusive offering** rather than dedicated spaces that perpetuate segregation, and the wish for intergenerational considerations.

According to the CGET study, to meet the need for social interaction and support social connections, **public spaces should promote conviviality through appropriate forms and necessary amenities** (e.g., seating, shelters, tables, restrooms, shaded areas).

Social connection, mobility, and access to local shops are key factors in considering aging in public spaces.

They contribute to promoting **a welcoming environment that facilitates daily life** and aligns with the objectives of a compassionate and inclusive city.

Other issues related to seniors in public spaces include safety, lighting, and access to public transportation.

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TOWARDS AN AGE-FRIENDLY CITY: PUBLIC POLICIES AND LOCAL INITIATIVES, EXPERIMENTATION, AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

In response to demographic changes in their territories, cities are gradually realizing the genuine need to design cities that are more suitable for older adults and to consider aging in their local policies.

Here is an overview of some initiatives launched by cities in favor of seniors, aiming to enable them to (re)claim public spaces.

PUBLIC POLICIES AND LOCAL INITIATIVES

In Denmark, one way to contribute to improving aging, beyond all the specific measures dedicated to seniors at the national level, is to give them a voice and actively involve them in local life, thereby promoting "active aging."

The involvement of seniors in decision-making dates to 1997 when **Senior Citizens' Councils** (SCC) were established in all municipalities across the country. Seniors who serve on these councils are directly elected by universal suffrage for a term of four years and must be over 60 years old.

These SCC hold considerable power in Denmark, as they have a real impact on local policy decisions and can even influence the municipal budget. Therefore, municipal councils must consult with the SCC before making a final decision on issues concerning the elderly, such as healthcare, cultural policies, and public services.

This approach is beginning to develop in France as well, aiming to promote the participation and engagement of seniors in public life.

Urban walks organized by the city of Dijon, member of RFVAA.
© Villes Amies des Aînés

The city of **Dijon**, on the other hand, has chosen to embark on a **participatory approach**. The city has installed various **urban furniture** and then collected feedback from residents to better understand and meet the expectations and needs of seniors.

Japan is a country with a high proportion of seniors, to the extent that the Japanese population is now the oldest in the world. Japan is renowned for its policies in favor of aging populations and invests in promoting **places where it is** "**good to age.**" Akita is one of the first cities in Japan to join the World Health Organization's global network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. The city of Akita is characterized by a declining birth rate and rapid aging of the population. People aged 65 and over currently represent nearly one-third of the city's residents and are expected to reach 44% by 2040. The city has implemented several programs with the aim of involving seniors and fostering genuine collaboration to make them active participants in their city.

Among the initiatives implemented is a mobility project that promotes easy and accessible **access to public transportation**. One key to the program's success is collaboration with private stakeholders, which has led to the installation of **defibrillators** in establishments and public spaces in the city, as well as the installation of **public benches** to create more resting areas.

Another example is the city of **Ottawa** in Canada, which, through its Seniors' Plan (2015-2017), has notably improved the accessibility of outdoor spaces and municipal buildings. This includes the installation of 39 accessible **benches** and the redesign of 2,637 **sidewalk curbs** to ensure maximum safety and to prevent falls.

THE GLOBAL NETWORK FOR AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) created the Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC).

This network brings together more than 1'600 cities and communities committed to becoming more "age-friendly". The aim of this initiative is to encourage territories to "*take into account the experiences of older residents to improve their quality of life on a daily basis*" and to promote healthy and active aging.

The Francophone Network of Age-Friendly Cities (RFVAA) was established in 2012 and focuses on developing the "Age-Friendly Cities" approach in France, Belgium, Switzerland, and other countries.

In France, this program is also accompanied by the *LABEL "AMI DES AÎNÉS"®* (Friend of Seniors label), which highlights the initiatives of local authorities. It is a network of cities that wish to contribute to the well-being of seniors in their territories, and the labeling process promotes better consideration of aging.

The *LABEL "AMI DES AÎNÉS"®* consists in several commitments and sub-commitments, including involving older adults (participatory diagnosis, implementation of actions), organizing the governance of the approach (establishing a steering committee, identifying stakeholders), conducting a territorial assessment, developing an action plan, and presenting the progress of the approach.

Over 300 French cities are currently part of the network, such as Grenoble, Nantes, and Metz.

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EXPERIMENTS AND THE ROLE OF STREET FURNITURE

Here is an overview of various initiatives or experiments implemented in public spaces through the installation of specific and/or adapted urban furniture for seniors, encouraging their mobility, providing them with greater comfort, and fostering social connections.
It should be noted that we will not present experiments related to living spaces exclusively dedicated to the elderly (cities, villages, neighborhoods).

Encourage physical activity

The city of **Eindhoven** in the Netherlands implemented a **playful health trail** specifically designed for seniors in 2015, utilizing existing urban furniture.

In partnership with the French company *Denovo*, the city redesigned public spaces to encourage seniors to engage in physical exercise. The exercises to be performed are indicated on the ground or on the sidewalk curbs.
In addition to utilizing existing infrastructure, which allows for cost-effective development, this initiative also greatly contributes to maintaining social connections.

Playful health trail "KWIEK", Denovo Design, Eindhoven (Netherlands) © Denovo Design

Street furniture to facilitate rest

The city of **Belfort** in France is also acting in favor of seniors in public spaces by installing **32 seating areas adapted to the reduced mobility** of seniors between 2015 and 2018. After consulting with several associations, the city installed three types of benches. These benches are **elevated** to facilitate movement (sitting down and standing up), equipped with **footrests** and **armrests** for added comfort, and some of them have a **designated space for wheelchairs**.

Other "standing-sitting" benches offer the possibility to rest without having to fully sit down.

Street furniture from « Bien vieillir à Belfort », City of Belfort (France) © Ville de Belfort

Discussion benches "Gadulawka", Cracow (Poland) © Allison Owen Jones

Conversation benches to address social isolation

The **"discussion benches"** are dedicated to individuals who are alone and interested in starting a conversation. Named **"Gadulawka"**, which can be translated as "ready to chat," these benches encourage exchange to combat loneliness and isolation.

The concept originated in **Poland**, inspired by the "Happy to Chat bench" idea in Wales, has now spread to Australia and New Zealand.

Adjust to the needs of individuals with mobility restrictions

The last example consists in **"Responsive Street Furniture",** an experimental system developed by *Marshalls*. It is a range of **connected urban furniture** that adapts to the needs of individuals with reduced mobility.

It includes features such as increased **lighting intensity, audio information**, **additional seating options**, and **longer crossing times** at pedestrian crossings. This last element aligns with the concept of the **Crosswalk application** developed by Dynniq (now Swarco) in Tilburg, Netherlands. The application provides pedestrians with reduced mobility the ability to have extra crossing time at pedestrian crossings. The application detects, through **sensors** integrated into the traffic lights that scan the sidewalks, if a user of the application is standing near the pedestrian crossing. As a result, the users have four options for crossing time, based on their needs.

Responsive Street Furniture © Marshalls

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RECONSIDERING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY FOR THE ELDERLY:
A REVIEW OF A RESEARCH PROJECT

Focus on **"Mind the Gap - Developing age-inclusive public space in Frihamnen",** a research project based on the thesis of two Swedish architecture students.

Their initial observation is the **lack of scientific research and resources in architecture that consider age in public space.**

Their work highlights **the necessity of rethinking the right to the city for older adults, envisioning it as a tool to deconstruct segregations in the city.**

Their research also addresses the inequalities in access to - and use of - public space and explores how to design those spaces to combat ageism.

The methodology adopted is called "Recoding", based on a **participatory approach** that involves six main steps: identification, information gathering, development, co-design, co-construction, and transfer.

Through a case study conducted in Gothenburg, Sweden, the process began with extensive research and identification of societal needs and challenges related to aging. This was followed by the organization of three workshops with older adults, leading to the conceptualization and design of a prototype.
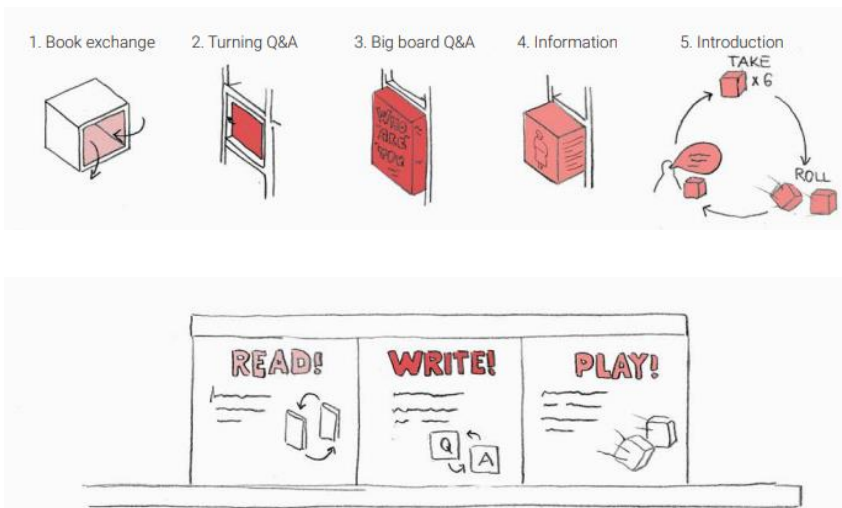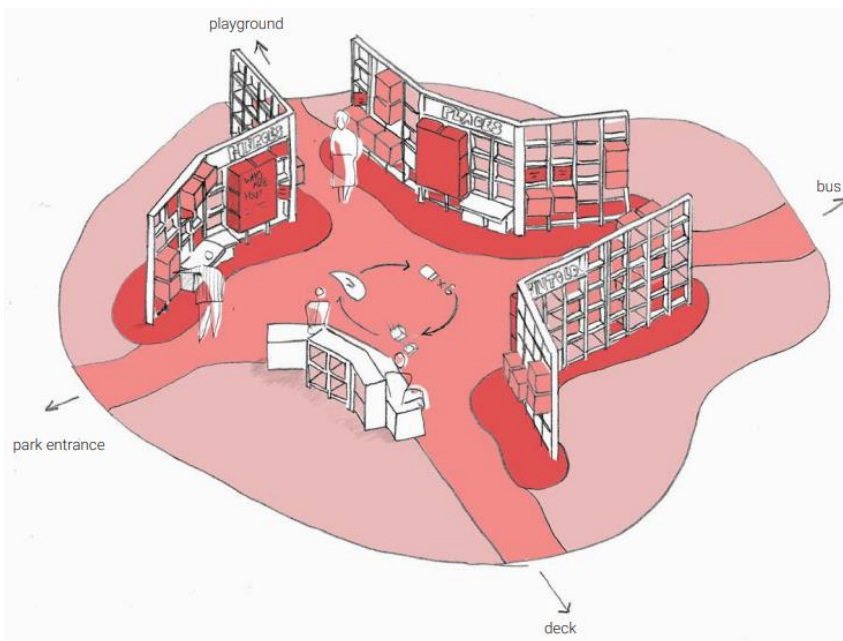
MIND THE GAP

DEVELOPING AGE-INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACE IN FRIHAMNEN

Márton Rátkai & Linda Wirth
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
Examiner Emilio De Cruz Brandao
Supervisor Shea Hagy
Co-supervisor Liane Thuvander

What are the benefits of these workshops?

The workshops allowed for the exploration of ways to design with and for older adults.

One of the highly favored ideas, that of "open libraries," was further developed by the two students.

They created a design following the workshops and developed three concepts around those libraries: "The Wall of Stories," "Story Street," and "Does it Matter?".

The objective of these designs is to **"bring together" people in public space by offering book exchanges, spaces for socializing and sharing** (as shown in the illustrations).

Among other ideas mentioned during the workshops were seating areas, game boards, greening initiatives, shelters, and "open" exercise spaces.

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ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE OF SENIORS IN PUBLIC SPACE (1/2)

Most startups in the Silver Economy offer innovative solutions for enabling elderly individuals to maintain their autonomy at home or provide other housing-related solutions. The **benchmark conducted for this trend report reveals that there are few or no innovative solutions specifically targeted at - or exclusively - for the elderly, by startups.**

The startups' selection presented below therefore offers solutions intended for the overall reduced mobility public and can also contribute to enhancing the experience of seniors.

© APCI

Assist seniors mobility

Other solutions
such as *Diabolo'Lib* or *Indigo weel* offer self-service wheelchair systems
to promote mobility,
especially for seniors,
in public spaces.

These devices are part
of a growing range of options
that also includes electric
scooters or cars.

Accessibility routes for people with reduced mobility

I Wheel Share was created in 2015 to provide accessible data
and accessibility routes for people with reduced mobility.

The startup launched its collaborative application, also *named I Wheel Share*, which allows users to visualize on an interactive map the wheelchair-accessible locations and transportation, for example.

The application also lists public toilets accessible to people with reduced mobility.

© I wheel share

© Streetco

Identify obstacles in public spaces

StreetCo was founded in 2016 and is billed as the first collaborative GPS.
The application allows users to identify obstacles in public spaces and to obtain routes tailored to people with reduced mobility.

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© designboom.com

## Rest points in public space

IDEO has designed "Pit Stop Posts" in Singapore, a range of urban furniture specifically designed for elderly people or individuals with mobility difficulties in public spaces.

These furniture pieces are intended as resting points and are strategically placed in urban areas (particularly near pedestrian crossings) to provide users with a place to lean on, rest, or simply hang their shopping bags.

Feeling safe in public space

Lpliz is a mutual aid application that allows individuals with disabilities or vulnerabilities that are not immediately apparent to signal themselves and request help when facing difficult situations in public spaces.

Through its collaborative model, the application includes both able-bodied and disabled users, enabling those in need of assistance to feel safer in public spaces.

© Lpliz
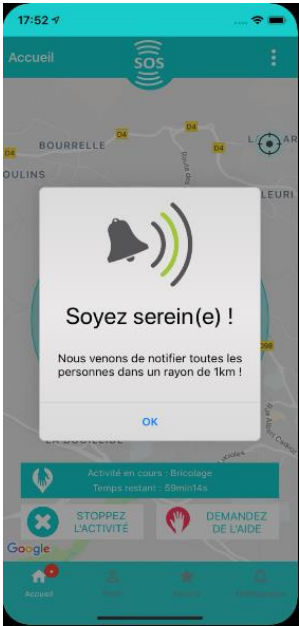
© Oorion

Improve accessibility in public spaces

Oorion has developed an app for visually impaired individuals but also addresses the needs of seniors with low vision.

The application enables users to locate nearby objects through vibration-based guidance, to recognize text through instant text-to-speech capabilities, and to analyze their surroundings by describing objects in proximity.

The application can be used for assistance at home as well as for accessing information in public spaces.

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Meeting with **Pierre-Olivier Lefebvre**, General Delegate of the Francophone Network of Age-Friendly Cities (RFVAA), specialized in social gerontology for nearly 30 years

Could you briefly explain the "Age-Friendly Cities" network?

The Age-Friendly Cities approach is led by the World Health Organization (WHO). It emerged during a geriatric congress, in the context of changes in our ways of living within communities, influenced by population growth and increased life expectancy. The goal of this approach is to establish a genuine network of cities committed to better addressing the well-being of older people in their respective territories. Currently, over 1'600 cities are part of the global network.

The approach involves three key stakeholders: residents, elected officials and professionals, aiming to prioritize active aging in discussions and to encourage participation from all, including older residents.

Another distinctive aspect of the approach is its reliance on the experiences of older individuals and the sharing of tested solutions with cities.

Additionally, within the Francophone network, there is a *LABEL "AMI DES AÎNÉS"®*, that assesses a territory's level of engagement and progress.

What challenges have you identified for cities in welcoming older people? How do cities adapt their territories to accommodate seniors?

We frequently hear about the concept of "successful aging". There is an imperative regarding the notion of successful aging and an underlying debate surrounding questions of "healthy aging," "healthy eating," and "active living," where ultimately the individuals are held responsible for the success of their retirement life. However, the health conditions, as defined by the WHO, are linked to the following questions: how do I feel psychologically and physically in relation to my environment and my sense of security when moving around?

> " **In this reflection related to aging, the key to success is not to confuse the target audiences.** "

The question that arises regarding the challenges of longevity is how **individuals can live longer and feel integrated into society**.

This is how people will remain independent for a longer period, as the city will make their lives easier.

The current challenge lies in how we adapt society to the challenges of longevity **without stigmatizing aging individuals or making them feel that things have been specifically designed for them**.

The complexity lies in the fact that they do not want to be different because they consider "old age" to be about "others."

With the Age-Friendly Cities network, our objective is to make cities understand that things need to be adapted for all generations, including older people, without explicitly pointing it out to them**. Our collective duty is to be creative in this regard.

Indeed, it is essential to differentiate between the public with disabilities and the public experiencing longevity. For instance, a person in a wheelchair who has built upper body strength due to a road accident will have different wheelchair usage than a slowly declining 90-year-old person. Too often, due to a lack of understanding of the challenges of aging, older individuals are wrongly associated with a loss of abilities.

> **There are three generations of older people: those aged 50-64, those aged 65-75, and those over 75 years old.**

In spatial planning, the physical and safety needs of older people are often highlighted, while the needs related to social connections and intergenerational mixing are frequently overlooked. What is your perspective on this issue?

We often hold the perception that "old" refers to the "very old," those who are dependent and costly, and we tend to overlook those older individuals who are doing well, actively volunteering, and engaged in associations, sports, or politics.

> " **The question is how the city enables a continuum, that is, ensuring the change of social status when transitioning from being employed to being retired, and how to reinstate a relationship.** "

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The city needs to be organized in a way that analyzes time differently. It's crucial to understand the usage of territories and how people move around, considering that older residents don't walk in the same way as other generations.

For example, older people often hear the phrase "it's not far." If the path turns out to be unsuitable or hostile, the message conveyed is "stay at home." Ultimately, **the mobility of older individuals in space is a tool for social connection** because they may no longer have the desire or feel capable of moving around.

Due to their fear of not being able to manage, due to their abilities, they restrict themselves and self-censor.

Thinking about the city of tomorrow means addressing these issues. Urban infrastructure also plays a crucial role. For instance, an Age-Friendly City is one that provides public toilets throughout its territory and promotes their availability.

What constitutes an "ideal" city for older people? Does such a city exist?

An age-friendly city is one that understands that populations are living longer. Our challenge is also to teach cities not to equate aging with a loss of abilities.

This is how cities can adapt. As we age, our mobility perimeter narrows, and it must be well thought out.

It's important to note that 80% of older people's trips are made on foot.

> **An ideal city is a city that constantly seeks to adapt, that is constantly concerned and attentive to co-create the city with its inhabitants.**

For example, the city of Dijon has developed adapted furniture with seating at different heights (30cm, 40cm, 80cm). This way, each person can use it according to their needs.

Cities can also consult their older residents by organizing workshops, proposing different devices, and determining which one is most suitable.

By adopting this methodology, cities have "ambassadors" who become active participants in the city.

This was implemented in Dijon, specifically in the market hall, as older people reported a lack of seating.

The city services stated that there were certain width regulations for aisles, making it impossible to add seating.

Workshops were organized, and it was collectively decided to add folding seats at various heights.

Today, older people can sit while doing their shopping.

Today, can we say that it is good to grow old in our French cities? How does France compare to other countries?

France is part of the WHO global network on aging programs.

We are well positioned and committed to the improvement dynamics.

There is still work to understand sociologically what "aging" is and, once again, move away from the discourse of "the elderly are the others."

It is also necessary to stop determining the age at which populations are deemed "incapable," by integrating questions of time, rhythms, and geographic mobility.

There is a long list of cities that have been awarded the "Villes Amies des Aînés" label, meaning they have been recognized for their commitment. Among these cities are Metz, Grenoble, and Sceaux, where we find both political and operational willingness to co-create with the residents because, ultimately, that is what matters.

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