Urban ageing via seniors' playgrounds

An exploratory research of its possible contributions on the seesaw between ageist instrumentalism and older adults' quality of life.

Karen Schilders

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“We don’t stop playing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop playing.”
(attributed to G.B. Shaw)

Preface

As a child spending many hours in playgrounds, I never imagined to spend the same amount of time – or so it seemed at least the past few months – on researching them; and especially not on the variation of playgrounds that addresses not my then generation, but the current third – and perhaps even fourth – generation. But you never know which way the future will swing. This thesis, presented in the context of the Advanced Master in European Urban Cultures, focuses after all on seniors' playgrounds and their desirability for and possible contribution to ageing-well in cities.

I would like to thank everyone that made the completion of this thesis as the final climax of a great year possible. First and foremost, I am obliged to all the persons that I could interview and who provided me with their valuable insights on the subject in question. The same applies to all the professors and lecturers of the Polis-programme, thanks to their enthusiastic involvement this academic year became more than just instructive – dank u, dankjewel, thank you, aitäh! A special and sincere thanks goes out to my supervisors without whose assistance and support across borders, this thesis would not have been the same.

I am moreover truly grateful for all the 'strangers' who walked into my life on the 17th September 2012. Although our paths will soon no longer be kept together by the formal structure of Polis, the trajectory we went together, literally and figuratively, in different countries and in good and bad days, connects us forever. An idea that makes me smile when typing it.

Furthermore, one year after honouring them in the acknowledgments of my previous thesis, I want to express once more my utmost gratitude to my parents for their unceasing encouragement of my well-being and development. Without their support – in the broadest sense imaginable – this incredible year would not have been possible. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for this priceless experience. After the proofreading of theses, the time of motivation letters has arrived.

And last, but not at all least, I want to thank my brother for the mental assistance, the provision of mate and his renewed English skills, and my boyfriend – I always wished you were there.

Whatever direction the seesaw of the future will bring me, perhaps I end up as an older person on a playground, musing about the past and the great adventure that Polis was. Or not? Seniors' playgrounds, a topic for discussion!

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment in public spaces possibly contributes to the quality of life in older adults who live in urban neighbourhoods. This study critically assesses the discourses that surround the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment by generating an understanding of what constitutes urban ageing-well. This comprehension builds further on the domains that the World Health Organization (2007) distinguishes as essential for quality of life in older adults – a person's physical health, psychological state, independence level, social relationships, personal beliefs, and relationship to the surrounding environment – and emphasizes the importance of playful behaviour and social capital for human development throughout the life-course. These aspects are looked at in an international case-study that features 'the seniors' sports playground' in Hillesluis, Feijenoord (°2005, NL) and 'the movement park for seniors' in Sint-Truiden (°2008, BE). It appears then that the spatial implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment does not meet its intended effects. This shows that a comprehensive exercise program should accompany the spatial implementation to be able to live up to the presumed benefits on the physical and mental well-being of older adults. This research fills thus a knowledge gap identified in the field of gerontology and gives attention to the fact that in spite of the recent boom of initiatives labelled 'age-friendly', there should be enough focus on the actual functioning of these projects.

1 Introduction

In the last four decades the age structure of the world population has changed considerably due to demographic ageing. The process dubbed 'population ageing' has been established especially in developed countries as a consequence of both the risen and still rising life expectancy and the falling fertility rates. The absolute and relative number of the population of older persons have thus grown and are expected to increase dramatically in the coming decades (European Union 2012). The term population ageing is accompanied by the manifestation of several issues in society and cities. These form the focus of the here presented thesis.

A first point of departure is the concern that the absolute and relative number of the population of older persons have grown, but that the importance that this group is awarded in and by society has not increased accordingly. Even more, old age is often perceived negatively (Iversen, Larsen & Solem 2009). Thane stated however already in 1987 that "Since the ageing of society is unavoidable, we should seek ways to treat the elderly as a resource rather than viewing them as a burden" (p. 373). In accord with this observation, a second issue to be addressed is the fact that "as we live longer, ideas about ageing and what constitutes old age change" (The UK Urban Age Consortium 2013: 20). In order to address the negative perceptions, a multidimensional understanding of ageing is needed. This links in with a third point, namely that the socio-spatial conditions of contemporary ageing mean a break with the past. Whereas nowadays – due to the expanding urbanization and the tendency towards 'ageing in place' (Buffel, Phillipson & Scharf 2012) – mention can be made of 'urban ageing', in the past people used to age in rural areas (United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge International 2012). This shift calls for mental and material change in cities that the development of notions like 'age-friendly cities' (WHO 2007) try to provide for.

In the corresponding policy frameworks attention is given to the importance of being physical and social active in later life to 'live happily ever after' and to live up to the standards and rhythms of the cities' productive sphere. One of the measures endorsed for the stimulation thereof is the implementation of so-called seniors' playgrounds or seniors' outdoor exercise equipment in the public space. The phenomenon of (mostly) outside locations with recreational equipment appropriate for older people is generally believed to have come into being in urban areas in China and to have spread from there to early adopters like Finland and Spain (Dhand, Zhang & Josephson 2010). Since 2000, when the effects and form of population ageing increasingly showed, their example is followed throughout Europe on public squares and playgrounds, in parks and in the vicinity of elderly nursing homes. The establishing of seniors' playgrounds is mostly explained by referring to the benefits for the social and mental well-being of older adults. However, few scientific studies show this, as they are barely existing.[1] The exceptions to the rule are some applied researches (Pahtaja, Hämäläinen & Tero 2006; De Vreede et al. 2007), that mostly took place just after the implementation of the equipment under discussion and focus solely on its direct environment. No long-term scientific explorations and evaluations or (international) comparisons of the contextual desirability could be found.

This thesis wants to fill the identified gap of scientific knowledge, by looking into the desirability of, and the effects and affects connected to the establishment of seniors' playgrounds. On the basis of an international comparative case-study, it brings the seniors' playgrounds in relation to the enlisted points that accompany population ageing. The research aims thus to gain insight in what constitutes 'urban ageing' on the one hand, and in what seniors' playgrounds possibly contribute to this phenomenon on the other.

The terms 'seniors' playground' is throughout the paper alternated with the term 'seniors' outdoor (exercise) equipment', in spite of the fact that the first term via the general conception of playgrounds as 'for children' associations generates with a play context, while the other term rather reminds of a

[1] I came to this conclusion after a thorough review of the literature. There is however always a chance that I overlooked texts and text material that indicate otherwise.

sport context. That the terms are often brought in relation to respectively ‘childish’ and ‘mature’ or ‘adult’ activities is here thus put to use.

The thesis starts with a theoretical chapter that explores in first instance the socio-culturally constituted notion ‘older person’. This consideration is enriched with the life-course perspective that looks into the notions that constitute ageing according to individuals. From here on, ageing-well is conceptualized as an open-ended narrative and several plot elements that cross the various life chapters – cliff-hangers – are singled out as ‘vital’ to its understanding. An overarching concept for the right mix of factors that contribute to ageing-well across the life course is then offered in the form of ‘quality of life’ (QOL). As ageing is literally and figuratively taking ‘place’, environmental gerontology is then presented as the underlying rationale of the thesis. Subsequently, various environmental aspects are considered in relation to the QOL of older adults. ‘Urban ageing’ is thereby acknowledged as beneficial. Seniors’ playgrounds or seniors’ outdoor exercise equipment are then contextualized with the theoretic socio-spatial medians for eyes and more specific research questions are formulated.

A second chapter is dedicated to the methodology of this thesis. Attention is paid to the unfolding of the research process, the motivation for the selection of the cases and the data collection process. The third chapter presents then first the main results from Hillesluis (NL), after which the main results from Sint-Truiden (BE) follow. This leads to a concluding chapter with a comparative discussion of the two cases, a recapitulation of the results in relation to the research questions and recommendations regarding further research. The bibliography and appendices – e.g. the interview item list, pictures of both cases – can be found hereafter.

2 Theory

2.1 Introduction

In the context of this paper, ageing is defined – following the United Nations (UN) – as "a process of physiological deterioration that gradually impairs the capacities of people to function socially" (Leithäuser 2008). Although the UN associates old age in their publications with the age of 60 or over, 65 years or over is here taken as a directive. This chronological age is namely in most European countries the official retirement age and determines the old age dependency ratio.[2] As such, the ageing population is often perceived as a burden on the welfare society. It makes older age a categorization besides race and gender to which a combination of negative and positive stereotypes, prejudice and/or discrimination implicitly or explicitly adhere. This phenomenon of cognitive, affective and behavioural components is dubbed ageism and can manifest itself on a micro-, meso- and macro-level (Iversen, Larsen & Solem 2009). As "a coherent set of shared ideas and beliefs that constitute a particular justification of the interest of dominant groups" (Bytheway 1995:130), the ageist ideology justifies and sustains the inequalities between age groups and the belief that these age groups exist and differ. However, 'older person' is – as mentioned before – itself a socially constructed identity category. Informed by ageism, it denies the great diversity that exists within the elderly and has a chance of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy; "affecting … how older people make sense of themselves" (Gibson & Singleton 2012). In order to value the heterogeneity that is present in the older population and endorse the self-ascribed identities of older people, the directive chronological age is in the following section enlightened by the life course perspective.

2.2 A life course perspective

The life course perspective is an approach for analysing how individuals actively negotiate their lives in the confrontation with key life events (e.g. retirement) and times of transitions (e.g. retiring) (Hutchinson 2005), amid decreasing levels of resources. A life course can therefore be defined as "a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" (Giele & Elder 1998:22). It reflects from birth to death the intersection of social and historical factors with personal biography and development (Elder 1985). Early events and roles in a person's life are argued to influence future decisions and events, which calls attention to the manner in which individual and age-differentiated experiences are established as part of a trajectory (Hutchinson 2005; WHO 2010). Ageing is within the life course perspective an integral part of the life course that offers new opportunities and choices by making sense of and redefining previous roles (Chapman 2005). The life course perspective suggests moreover that since a personal biography or a person's life time intersects with a certain social and historical context, the timing of life is shared with others being born at the same historical moment. The group of persons that enjoy a parallel timing of life within a given culture and that experience particular social changes in the same sequence and at the same age is dubbed a birth cohort (Hutchinson 2005). The identified directive for older persons of 65 years or over comprises consequently various birth cohorts.

The cohort vision shows even clearer that chronological age is not the only directive for timing of lives, since it comprises a myriad of interdependent age provisions – respectively biological, psychological, social and spiritual age (Hutchinson 2005). A cross-cohort tendency that consequently can be noticed, is the importance given to making sense out of becoming older by constantly negotiating optimal physical, mental and social well-being. This perspective forms a renunciation of past visions about well-being in later life, in which an integrated self was taken for granted as an ageing-well end-state (Chapman 2005). Ageing-well theorizing is informed by the pursuit to "determine the 'right' mix of engagement and resources as sets of assets with which individuals could age well" (Chapman 2005:13).

[2] "The age dependency ratio is the ratio of dependents – people younger than 15 or older than 64 – to the working-age population (ages 15-64)" (The World Bank Group 2013). The old age dependency ratio is then the ratio of older dependents to the working age-population. In the European Union, the ratio of younger dependents often addresses people up to 19 years old (cfr. infra).

With its focus on assets and abilities, ageing-well theory moved gerontology away from its previous focus on deficits, dependency and withdrawal from society by associating later life with positive images and active roles. The envisioning of a 'right' mix of resources and engagement for self-integration suggests however a concern with later-life instrumentality in which a comprehensive, coherent whole has to be achieved (Chapman 2005). Ageing implies according to the life course perspective a further evolving of an individual's total sum of age-differentiated experiences and is thus "the negotiation of the co-construction and reconstruction of multiple selves in an ongoing, open-ended process of meaning making amid later-life events and transitions" (Chapman 2005:15). The self-making over time through past, present and future selves is consequently a never-ending – till death do us part – story without clear plot that is being told and acted out in relation to other people.

The open-ended narrative of ageing-well that accompanies the life course perspective on ageing implies that attention has to be paid to the uniqueness of each person's life course trajectory. However, the understanding of birth or age cohorts also inherent to the life course perspective entails that research about regularities in the timing of lives is possible (Hutchinson 2005). Thus, identification of particular characteristics, assets and interventions allows productive support for the ageing population and its open-ended narratives about self-integrated ageing-well. It is hereby important to note that the life course perspective and its adherence to the long-term effect of previous experiences, roles and choices, includes all ages into promoting ageing-well, encouraging individuals "to prepare and plan for their future regardless of their age" (Wealleans 2013:4).

2.3 Ageing-well

2.3.1 Active and healthy ageing

Older people consider ageing-well often in relation to or as 'healthy ageing' (Peel, Bartlett & McClure 2004). Since elderly define health referring to their ability to be active and participating despite any age-related symptoms and diseases, it is important to conceive health in a broader way than just with regard to physical well-being (Fänge & Ivanoff 2009). Also mental and social well-being are of great importance; this was already recognized in 1948 by the World Health Organization (2003).[3] Although there is no agreed standard by which health or healthy ageing can be measured, it is acknowledged, amongst others in the life course perspective, that it should be a lifelong process of optimizing opportunities irrespective of bodily and functional limitations (Peel, Bartlett & McClure 2004). This focus generated another concept of ageing-well, namely 'active ageing'. Active ageing should be defined as "continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force" (European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing 2011). Both healthy and active ageing envision maintaining autonomy and independence.

A great level of independency in later life is deemed not only beneficial for the self-esteem of the elderly population, but also for the social institutions charged with ensuring care for elderly, since claims on their scarce operational resources are thus limited. A major factor in retaining and stimulating autonomy at older age is physical activity (Michael et al. 2006). The benefits of a physically active lifestyle are numerous, including increased life expectancy and reduced risk of hypotension, diabetes, fractures and many chronic diseases (Crombie et al. 2004; Moore 2006; Van Cauwenberg et al. 2012). Besides these physical advantages, physical activity contributes also to mental and social health (European Union 2012; Van Cauwenberg et al. 2012). The positive effects are moreover not only reserved for those who start or improve their physically active lifestyle in youth, at middle age or whilst still in good health, but are also noticed with people starting only to be sufficient physically active at the age of 60 (Moore 2006). In spite of the benefits known to health policy developers and the older population itself, activity levels decline with age and many elderly are much less active than desired (Crombie et al. 2004). Physical inactivity in the elderly population has been related to activities'

[3] The WHO (2003) defines health since 1948 as follows: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".

financial cost, having no activity companion, having physical health problems and a lack of time, interest and, access to appropriate facilities (Crombie et al. 2004; Sugiyama & Thompson 2007). Addressing the identified key barriers would encourage older people to take more responsibility for their health, as is needed for minimizing the (perceived) costs of population ageing for society.

2.3.2 The importance of leisure and play

Along with this rather instrumentalist – even ageist inspired – interpretation of active ageing, older people also wish to partake actively and independently in society. "No matter what their age, people need or want to work, learn and play in order to gain a sense of self-efficacy from successful completion of activities" (Harris & Grootjans 2012:19). The life course perspective also suggested this need for opportunities for lifelong learning and building experience(s). Leisure activities may hereby come in handy, as Kleiber identified several key functions of leisure for development and learning, which are also operative in older age. According to him, "… becoming capable…, becoming secure…, defining self in relation to others…, connecting intimacy with others… and playing part in something bigger than oneself" (Kleiber 2001 paraphrased in Iwasaki 2007:260) are inherent to leisure participation. This makes leisure a context for creating meaning of oneself throughout the life course, by facilitating "a state of experience in which the actor's ability to act matches the requirements for action in his environment". This description is Bennett's and Csikszentmihalyi's definition of play (1971:45). Its usefulness is not coincidental, since play is key to human development across all generations, over all eras. Play precedes namely according to Johan Huizinga culture – "… human culture arises and unfolds in play, as play" (Huizinga 1950:25, translation and emphasis mine) – and thus also leisure. Asserting play's irreducibility, Huizinga was never able to come to terms with publishers' modification of the title of his canonical work *Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture.* This significant alteration is representative for the shifting meaning of and value dedicated to play, since civilization unfolded. Although certain characteristics are more or less universally recognized since Huizinga,[4] most definitions of play remain at play, as it is thought to be constantly redefined through changing social practice (Stevens 2007). According to Stevens (2007:26), play has thus – despite Huizinga's assessment of its incommensurability – become a rhetorical construction that is used to endorse wider objectives.

The human developmental value of play lies in the fact that "playful activities are essential aspects of learning and creative acts" (Flanagan 2009:4). Play is not only crucial for an individual's mental development, but also for the socialization of a human being by forming identity, social and cultural norms (Sutton-Smith 1997). In this capacity it is often related or applied to the experiences of children, however, "the full variety of play forms only appears with the achievement of a certain maturity" (Mouledoux 1977 quoted in Stevens 2007:27). Play's dialectical qualities (e.g. free and structuring) prosper in adults, and perhaps even more in elderly people. Adults' knowledge and abilities allows them to play in places, time and ways that are not available to children (Stevens 2007). Although studies that deal with adult playfulness are limited, it has been suggested that children's playfulness is rather trait-based than adult playfulness, which is more subject to situational or state-based stimuli (Yarnal & Qian 2011). This may be explained by the fact that adults have learned which are appropriate playfulness contexts or 'playfulness regulation' – "the ability to enhance or reduce playfulness as the situation dictates" (Yarnal & Qian 2011:72). As such, more than child play, "adult play provides far better illustration of the transformation of everyday life and of lived space into new experiences and new forms" (Stevens 2007:27), testing and transgressing the limits of their social existence and specific historical socio-spatial circumstances. Playful behaviour provide for older adults thus a chance to oppose the instrumental pursuit of social purposes, the idea of productive output and, especially, ageism (Stevens 2007).

[4] Huizinga's (1950; Stevens 2007) characterization of play can be enlisted as follows: Play is freedom; it stands, in a complimentarily way, apart from everyday life; it generates a world that is both spatially and temporally limited; the world of play has an absolute order; material interest and instrumental gain have no place in the world of play that is dubbed 'the magic circle'.

Playful older adults are defined as "happy, optimistic, cheerful, amusing, positive, enthusiastic, and relaxed. … they tend toward mischief, naughtiness, clowning, joking, and teasing; they embody fun and humour in ways that translate into laughter and amusement in others" (Yarnal & Qian 2011:71). As positive emotions and equilibrium are important to emotional health, playful behaviour in older adults is believed to contribute "to the maintenance of cognitive functioning, emotional growth, and healthy aging overall" (Yarnal & Qian 2011:52).[5] The definition of older adult playfulness reflects several characteristics of children's playfulness (e.g. spontaneity, pleasure, a sense of humour), but older people are more circumspect about their behaviour. The physical rigor inherent to childhood playfulness is therefore and as a consequence of any physical impairments in older age less present. The bodily component in older-adult playfulness is however important, but should rather be understood in terms of 'embodiment' (Yarnal & Qian 2011).

Bearing the benefits in mind, it is important to accommodate the *senex ludens* – in analogy with Huizinga's stipulation of the *homo ludens* – properly. However, by pursuing as older adult or policy maker the discussed advantages, they might be put on the line, since play and playfulness resist instrumentality and can thus not (easily) be acquired or designed for (Stevens 2007). It is however argued that *seneludity* – a made-up concept for ageing-well through playful behaviour – provides another aspect, complimentary to active and healthy ageing, of ageing-well. Its negative image, the existence of "play deprivation" (Brown quoted in Larkin 2012) – people enduring a depression and lack of optimism by not having the opportunities to play or being able to bring themselves to play – vouches for this. This phenomenon shows, once again, the concern of the older population for feeling engaged and participating in the world. *Seneludity* or the embodiment of playful behaviour by the older adult manifests itself thus as embeddedness in society.

2.3.3 Social capital

The importance of social anchoring for ageing-well was already mentioned in discussing healthy and active ageing. The attention for social determinants of health, of which the WHO definition since 1948 testifies, only slowly took effect. However, nowadays the international literature alleges constantly the influence of social capital on health and consequently, ageing-well.[6] Social capital is defined by Robert D. Putnam (1995:67) as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit". Although many scholars have defined social capital since Putnam, his definition suffices to explain the positive outcomes of social capital for individuals. Older persons' locally based social interaction ensures feelings of self-worth and prevents isolation and the reduction of self-confidence (Sugiyama & Thompson 2007). Social support and peer-to-peer engaging group activities diminish the effect of stressful life events much more than formal services, while social participation or engagement provides elderly with meaningful social roles (Leadbeater 2009). The importance of the latter was already mentioned in the discussion on the life course perspective, as they via reciprocal relationships confer a sense – open-ended – of purpose, value, self and community attachment.

The beneficial influences of social capital on health depend on the nature and the direction of the social networks involved (Vyncke et al. 2010). Three types of social networks can be identified, namely bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding refers to homogenous and horizontal relationships between a group of people that share a social identity. Bonding social support offers thus emotional support and mental health. Bridging social capital pertains to more heterogeneous ties across diverse

[5] Brown (quoted in Larkin 2012) also provides a physical explanation: "For older age groups, play has a role in fertilizing the brain and in producing increased brain-derived neurotrophic factor (a protein that encourages growth and new connections between nerve cells) [sic.], …".

[6] Since the theoretical framework focuses upon ageing-well, only the positive influences or determinants of social capital on health are discussed. It should however be noted that a great amount of literature also deals with social capital's negative effects on health. Buffel et al. (2009) provide an extensive elaboration on the subject.

social groups. These also horizontally oriented ties have been linked with diminished mistrust and heightened feelings of safety. Linking social capital denotes formal, vertical connections between various parties with different power levels, suggesting more formal social control (De Donder et al. 2010). Bridging and linking social capital ease accessing health care and voicing concerns through the presence of persons with relevant functions in the social networks (Vyncke et al. 2010). The different kinds of social capital complement each other and facilitate social cohesion. Whereas social capital generates benefits on the level of the individual, social cohesion and its implied cooperative networks are beneficial to the development of society as a whole (Buffel et al. 2012).

2.3.4 Social integration and community involvement

That social cohesion is a result of the complementarily working of the different kinds of social capital suggests the importance of social integration in and for activities undertaken. According to Agnes Elling (2001), whose research focuses on sport, social integration consists of three components, respectively structural integration, socio-cultural integration and social affective integration. Structural integration denotes the extent to which individuals or a social group participate in voluntary and societally required activities, compared to the majority of the population. Besides a structural level, integration also comprises a socio-cultural process, which means the continuously confirming and challenging of both marginal and dominant values and norms – Vonck et al. (2012) who look on the basis of Elling's framework at sports and older people mention here ageism. Social affective integration as third aspect entails the process of constituting social contacts valued by the individual – in fact the previously discussed bonding and bridging social capital. Without envisioning the different components of social integration, pursuing social capital contains the risk that homogeneous networks are overemphasised and that some people or population groups are excluded (Vonck et al. 2012). Overcompensating a previous lack of attention towards a certain population group is thus found to be detrimental, since an exclusive focus on peer activities such as senior activities and senior organizations might heighten feelings of unsafety (De Donder et al. 2010). In modern societies, few opportunities are however apparent for elderly and youngsters to meet and exchange ideas.

While discussing social capital and social integration, it has been shown – once again – that older people's community involvement should be encouraged, since it benefits both older adults and the general society. As a feeling of belonging to a neighbourhood is considered to be both cause and effect of localized actions like volunteering (Buffel et al. 2013), it should be envisioned in addressing the older adults' recruitment potential, i.e. "the number of older people that doesn't volunteer but is willing to do so" (Dury et al. 2010). The fact that a 'sense of community' is stimulating can also be explained by the concept 'emotional energy' (EE) which is part of Randall Collins' theory of interaction rituals . An interaction ritual (IR) is, paraphrasing Collins (2004), a situation in which at least two people are affecting each other (un)consciously by their bodily presence in the same place. At the moment that the IR is taking place, barriers to the outsiders make clear who is participating and who is excluded– this brings Huizinga's 'magic circle' to mind. Participants of IRs share thus a common mood or emotional experience which generates EE as the outcome of one's participation. EE is best understood as the psychological concept of 'drive' with a specifically social orientation.

EE is but one outcome for IR participants, as also a feeling of membership, symbols that represent the group present and feelings of morality are experienced and valued (Collins 2004:48). Through the charging of both individuals with EE, remnants of the group solidarity and morality, and symbolic objects with cognitive significance during IR, the mere stand-alone situation is transcended – Huizinga describes a same phenomenon with regard to the play community[7] – and a chain of IRs becomes set

[7] "But the feeling of being 'apart together' in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game." (Huizinga 1950:12).

up over time. The individual can thus metaphorically be understood as an IR chain – "a precipitate of past interactional situations and an ingredient of each new situation" (Collins 2004:5).

As a complement to the discussion on the life course perspective, the IR chains theory proves in fact once again the importance of recognizing, and often also ensuring, continuity, not only during an individual's life course, but also in society's life course. Thus, the importance of older adults as long-term participants of society's IRs should also be emphasized. They define(d) and foster(ed) the distinctive features of the next generations' society and could and should still play a key role in the further unwinding of this process, being the representatives of the communities ageing. This calls for a genuine model of participatory, collaborative governance, in which the voices of the elderly population are heard – especially since they in fact initiated the tendency towards a more deliberative democracy in which participation accounts for potentially achieving transformative outcomes.

2.4 Quality of life

Different elements and theories have been reviewed in singling out the 'right' mix of factors that contribute to ageing-well across the life course. In order to make this conglomerate of components quantifiable an overarching concept and outcome indicator that captures all discussed aspects of ageing-well was sought for. It was found that the notion 'quality of life' (QOL) might be of use. QOL subsumes a number of related factors that are "concerned primarily with whether people have a good life, and what constitutes a good life" (Iwasaki 2007:234)– or here, ageing-well. The value of QOL lies in the fact that it is informed by "individuals' perception of their position in life and value system and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns" (WHO 1995:1403). QOL has thus been found to be affected by a person's physical health, psychological state, independence level, social relationships, personal beliefs and relationship to the surrounding environment (WHO 2007). These attributes of QOL summarize the properties that were here recognized as favouring ageing-well. By having elaborated in a rather descriptive way upon the different elements contributing to ageing-well, the use of the QOL-concept can also be understood as prescriptive for interventions that try to enhance ageing-well – and an independent predictor of its 'success'.

Up till now a lot of attention has been given to the importance of a person's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships and – to a lesser extent – personal beliefs, the relationship to the surrounding environment has not yet been considered. Self-assessed quality of life is however not to be parted of high quality environments, especially in older age (Phillipson 2012). The concept of environment is – in analogy with the WHO definition of health – a complex one, with not only having physical and material dimensions, but also social, cultural and psychological dimensions (WHO 2007). Since the latter aspects of the environment's multidimensionality are already dealt with, the next section focuses on the material and physical environments that elderly thrive best in.

2.5 Environmental Gerontology

In the open-ended narrative of the life course, one's sense of self also has to be negotiated as a 'being in place' by turning unfamiliar spaces into meaningful places (Antoninetti & Garrett 2012). This is particularly important since an individual's life course is (co-)developed through "the manipulation of one's appearance in the eyes of strangers" (Stevens 2007:11), thus in areas external to the body. The French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962 quoted in Antoninetti & Garrett 2012:365) expressed this as the "[b]ody is our medium for having a world". As a consequence of the ageing process however, "the *body we are* – our interests, goals and desires in relation to a place – and the *body we have* – our pertinent past experiences about that place as they are mediated by our present physical and mental conditions"(Antoninetti & Garrett 2012:368) head towards an increasing mismatch. Physical settings or environments remain mostly unaltered for generations, while older adults' diminishing physical and cognitive capacities push them towards modifications of their established routines in otherwise familiar settings (Antoninetti & Garrett 2012). Such developing discrepancy generates a discord between objective and subjective or perceived aspects of place, which leads in the older population to lower estimations of quality of life and to undesired transformations (Oswald et al. 2007).

In gerontology, a great amount of researches studies therefore how the ageing process is being influenced by environments and the corresponding perceptions of a socio-spatial (mis)match. This extensive field of study is bundled under the denominator 'environmental gerontology', of which the coming into being can be traced back to the turn in the social sciences (Wahl & Weisman 2003; Schwarz 2012). In this since the 1960s booming multidisciplinary research, especially Powell Lawton's Press Competence Model has been influential. His environmental press paradigm focuses on how older people can be restricted by the built environment and how seemingly negative effects of ageing are accounted for by either a drop in competence, or an increase in environmental pressure (Hanson 2012). Therefore, the model implies also that a significant reduction in environmental pressure might be experienced following small improvements to older persons' physical environment. Thus applies that "the payoff for effective environmental intervention is very high for older people in poor mental or physical health" (Lawton 1974 quoted in Hanson 2012:145) – and by extension for all elderly. The design of environments should consequently, according to Lawton, envision three functions vital to the older population: maintenance, stimulation and support (Sugiyama & Thompson 2007). Although Lawton studied the 'person-environment fit' and older people's adaptive skills particularly in the context of the home environment (Wahl & Weisman 2003; Previll 2012), his conceptual framework is also widely acclaimed for and adopted to underpin health-enabling or *salutogenic* environments and service provision for older people in society (Harris & Grootjans 2012).

2.5.1 Ageing in place

In order to enhance the person-environment fit, older people fold increasingly back on the local environment, due to their diminished and further diminishing action radius (Dury et al. 2010). Van der Meer's model (2006) that depicts the world of people as three circles of social and spatial activities illustrates this. Since the most external circle represents the situation of employment, the second one the activities outside the home (e.g. leisure activities and voluntary work) and the third layer the home-based activities, the model shows clearly "that when people age each layer ceases gradually from the most external one to the home-based circle" (Dury et al. 2010:2). The spiral narrowing down is different for every older adult, but it generates a more sedentary lifestyle (Sugiyama & Thompson 2007). However, this should not have as a consequence that the home-based circle is equated with standstill or negative perceptions, since the home environment provides for elderly also chances to broaden their action radius. The home is after all said to be the "hub of health" and is perceived as both a support for health and a driving force to maintain health (Fänge & Ivanoff 2009:340), as older people challenge their abilities within the home environment in order to stay put as long as possible. "Ageing in place" or growing old(er) in one place without having to move as a result of health impacts, is thus understood as contributing to ageing-well and QOL in old age (Buffel, Phillipson & Scharf 2012).

It allows older people some kind of environmental mastery over a space that is moreover "meaningful as a result of physical, social or cognitive-emotional aspects" (Oswald et al. 2007).

This meaningfulness generated throughout the life course points to place attachment – a positive affective link between an individual and a particular place that is associated with individual experiences or a common sense (Buffel et al. 2011). Thus, it can be said that the home equals the cognitive charged symbol of Collins' interaction ritual chains that conduces to the production of emotional energy in the form(ation) of place identity. "In other words, as people construct places, places construct people" (Cloutier-Fisher & Harvey 2009:249). The mutually constitutive and therefore also dynamic and changing relationship – mindful of the open-ended narrative of contemporary selves – between an individual and his/her home, which makes older people favour 'ageing in place', is moreover also co-opted by policy makers. "Ageing in place" implies after all also a reduced economic burden on governmental institutions through diminished demands for institutionalised aged care (Vine, Buys & Aird 2012). This line of thought is particularly interesting in view of the elastic quality of the concept 'home', which can be conceptualized as "an array of spaces radiating away from the dwelling … to specific outdoor settings in the immediate neighbourhood, to large scale environments in the community and region" (Oswald & Wahl 2005 quoted in Cloutier-Fisher & Harvey 2009:248). Health and active ageing-enabling interventions should thus try to substitute "architectural disability" (Goldsmith 1997 quoted in Hanson 2002:144) with "environmental support" (Sugiyama & Thompson 2007) by generating local environments where older people that leave their home, feel at home. This is especially important to understand the roles of the outdoor environment in older people's QOL.

2.5.2 Age-friendly cities

The awareness about this has generated design measures and initiatives that envision out-of-home-mobility for older people – after all "a pre-requisite for commercial, cultural and social activities" (Vine, Buys & Aird 2012:160) – and thus participation in society. The pursuing of environments in which – also – older adults thrive, gave rise to a "senior friendly boom" in North American and European environmental interventions over the past decade (Lui et al. 2009:116). However, as the main insight of the life course perspective – the ageing process is integral to the life course trajectory – becomes more generally adopted and as measures envisioning or benefitting a particular population group have been shown to provoke social segregation rather than integration, the notion of 'senior friendly' is increasingly substituted with "age-friendly" (WHO 2007). This last concept is closely aligned with terms like "universal" or "inclusive" design and conceives the creation of accessible and sustainable environments for all ages (Phillipson 2012; Vine, Buys & Aird 2012). There is, however, not one saving age-friendly programme, since different institutions and policy makers that adopted the notion place particular emphases on the concept. Thus, slightly different approaches manifests themselves as a range of discourses that can be represented as nuances on a two-dimensional continuum (Lui et al. 2009). Whereas the vertical axis delineates a continuum "between an emphasis on physical infrastructure/services and a stress on quality of the social environment" (Lui et al. 2009:117), focuses the horizontal axis on models of governance that differ "with respect to the breadth of participation in defining and implementing age-friendly features of a community" – from top-down to bottom up (Lui et al. 2009:117). The WHO (2007) provides, with its definition of age-friendly environments as supportive communities and environments for older people that encourage active ageing, once again a valuable formulation that overarches both ends of the previously mentioned vertical and horizontal axes. The WHO's model of an age-friendly environment responds thus to the ideal that emerged from the two-dimensional continuum, which is characterized by "an integral physical and social environment, and a model of participatory, collaborate governance" (Lui et al. 2009:117).

The WHO's (2007) conceptualization of age-friendly environments pays thus attention to physical infrastructure (e.g. outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation and housing) and also to the social environment by taking into consideration social participation, respect and social inclusion. The latter aspects indicate already the importance that is attributed to a model of governance that includes the (older) population, which is determined by looking at the (older) people's say or civic participation and

employment, communication and information and community support and health services. The 'right' age-friendly mix that contributes to ageing-well across the life course is thereby established by the levels and components being positively assessed by older adults with regard to QOL.

What is particularly interesting in the WHO's (2007) negotiation of 'age-friendliness' is that it is invariably being formulated in relation to the context of cities. By realizing especially the importance of age-friendly city environments rather than age-friendly rural areas, the WHO recognizes that besides population ageing another tendency characterizes the contemporary, globalized world, which parallels and shapes the population ageing (Buffel, Phillipson & Scharf 2012). This twin force is urbanization. The demographic trend of population ageing and the spatial progression towards urbanization are identified as "among the most significant social trends affecting life in the twenty-first century" (Buffel, Phillipson & Scharf 2012:598). As a societal consequence, more and more older people's 'ageing in place' materializes in cities and urban regions. This is seen as a positive trend, as urban areas provide a wide range of resources that are of value to older people (The UK Urban Age Consortium 2013). For instance, the presence of museums, libraries and concert halls in the vicinity of each other due to cities' density, give older people the chance to enjoy a culturally active lifestyle. This heterogeneity is also equalled with regard to amenities and services on which elderly have to rely, such as administrative institutions and health care assistance (Buffel, Phillipson & Scharf 2012). A broad spread of social networks is moreover present in cities, which generates a wealth of diverse initiatives and bonds being constituted within urban neighbourhoods (Sonmez Turel, Yigit & Altug 2007). Furthermore, the proximity of facilities such as pubs and shops are found to account for higher levels of social participation among older adults. In short, it is thus suggested that cities create "opportunity structures" for elderly – i.e. features of the physical and social environment which promote (in)directly a healthy and active lifestyle through the possibilities they provide for people to live healthy and active lives (Macintyre & Ellaway 2000 quoted in Buffel, Phillipson & Scharf 2012:605). Cities' existing and potential advantages for the older population imply their function as catalyst for outdoor activities in public spaces. Provided that these public spaces are well-equipped in terms of environmental support (e.g. resting places), they allow older adults to fulfil the range of activities that constitute an active lifestyle, respectively necessary, optional, social and communal activities (Sonmez Turel, Yigit & Altug 2007). The latter two activities result from and evolve in connection to the two previous activity categories, since cities' spatial fabric is indissoluble connected with the juxtaposition of the bodies of its unrelated inhabitants – the social fabric.

2.5.3 Play in the contemporary city

The existence of optional activities and the social contact resulting from the co-presence of others in cities refers to a category of activities which is not understood as productive within the contemporary timeframe, which is economically guided by neo-liberal aspirations. Cities, which are seen as "the engines of modern economic life" (Stevens 2007:5), are within the neo-liberal line of thought "principally planned to optimize work and other practical, rational, preconceived objectives, and are designed accordingly" (Stevens 2007:5). The instrumentalist planning and designing fit the ongoing transaction cycles of capitalism which envision the continuously heightening of exchange value. The heterogeneity of aspirations of the juxtaposed individuals that are gathered in the dense urban fabric of cities are however not reflected in the capitalist project. As such, "places, objects and practices which at one time may have formed an enduring core of the individual's sense of themselves and their place in the world have become external to them" (Stevens 2007:20). The search for love and self-actualization, which is integral to the life course and which has been argued to come about through the relation to place, becomes thus a source of individuals' alienation instead of a constructive struggle with one another that shapes the city as an *oeuvre* (Stevens' paraphrasing Lefebvre 2007).

The notion 'oeuvre' is a key concept in Henri Lefebvre's analysis of the city that envisions urban space as a social milieu (Stevens 2007). According to Lefebvre (1991), three distinct aspects can be identified in the social experiences that are constituted in and through space – respectively spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces. Whereas spatial practices actually take place as

material social interactions to (re)produce a particular social formation, representations of space are conventions or social codes that are used to understand and refer to material space and spatial practices (e.g. place names). They filter people's understanding and perceptions of the so-deemed 'reality' of social life in space, as they are shaped by the power relations that operate in society. The representations of space tend thus to be more ideological than the representational spaces, which are spaces as lived by their inhabitants – complex symbolic association and imagery constitute these (Lefebvre 1991; Stevens 2007). "Space as conceptualized 'is the dominant space in any society … tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relationships impose" (Lefebvre 1991 quoted by Stevens 2007:6-7). In correspondence with Michel Foucault's *Discipline and punish*, it can be said that representations of space as powerful mechanisms "try to reshape 'human subjects from without' (cited in Philo 2004, 123) according to economic rather than social imperatives" (Antoninetti & Garret 2012:266). Lefebvre depicts, according to Stevens (2007:12), the central tension in the use of urban space in contemporary society consequently as follows:

> 'being between the abstract space of production, structured by exchange value and defined and reified by representations of space, and 'social space, or the space of use values produced by the complex interactions of all classes in the pursuit of everyday life': in other words, space as lived.'

It can be said then that individuals "despite being in the city, they are not fully of the city," (Painter 2005 quoted in Phillipson 2012). Furthermore, the city is not fully theirs, since it is being produced for them, rather than by them (Mitchell 2003). This made Henri Lefebvre formulate "the right to the city", the idea that "citizens have a right to make use of the city, and that is not just a collection of resources to enable economic activity" (Painter 2005 quoted in Phillipson 2012). The right to the city implies that places and objects must account for the needs of the everyday life, acknowledging thus representational space and, amongst others, its function of play (Stevens 2007). Lefebvre envisions play as a critical tactic in use value's and exchange value's contestation of space that thrives on the heterogeneity and density of people and the diversity of experiences inherent to urban public space – "the city frames opportunities for play" (Stevens 2007:8). Play's before mentioned irreducibility (cfr. Huizinga 1950) makes it being appreciated as having an end in itself, having use value, and, as such, "as evidence of a non-instrumental, non-commodifiable basis for urban social relations" (Stevens 2007:12). Play presents thus a "lived critique of instrumentally rational action" (Stevens 2007:8). In this capacity, play reveals, amongst others, "the potentials that public spaces offer" (Stevens 2007:1).

The generation of worlds apart that was said to typify play can with regard to the urban public space rather be perceived as instigated by the capitalist pursuit of instrumentality, since the latter induces the tying of practices to "functionally and symbolically determined locations" (Stevens 2007:12). As a consequence, ideologically coloured 'appropriate' places and times were defined, not only for work, but – amongst others – also for play. Lefebvre's play – and by extension leisure – is thus, "at one and the same time a product of the process of everyday life, a contradiction of that process, and a producer of it" (Stevens 2007:23). This assertion suggests that Lefebvre's conceptualization of play has to be understood as far more dialectical than Huizinga's notion of play (Stevens 2007). This dialectical character has to be taken into account when thinking of the right to the city, which includes – as previously explained – the right to the uses of the city spaces. This implies the right to inhabit urban public spaces and demands thus for the development and maintenance of "*a space for representations*, a place in which groups and individuals can make themselves visible" (Mitchell 2003:33).

Concerning the older population, the right to the city implies the establishment of spatial contexts that fit the phenomenon of *urban ageing*. Urban ageing is conceptualized within the confines of this paper as the overarching term for the combined trends of population ageing and urbanization and for the complex entity of factors discussed here that constitute QOL in older adults living in urban areas. Bearing the extensive elaboration on the total of urban ageing's (QOL) aspects and paradoxes in mind, the reality of seniors' playgrounds – the object of this research – is presented in the following section.

2.6 Seniors' playgrounds

Seniors' playgrounds are generally believed – as was said before – to have come into being in urban areas in China (Dhand, Zhang & Josephson 2010). Outdoor adult playgrounds are erected by the Chinese government in order to get (older) adults moving, fitting thus the general health care's angle that people should account for their health (Dhand, Zhang & Josephson 2010). As such, the establishment of (older) adults' playgrounds exhibits similarities with the development around 1900 of the first public playgrounds for children, which were not only conceptualized as an outlet for children's surplus energy – a consciously chosen term to bring to mind the creation of surplus value in the capitalist accumulation processes in which children had to take part – but also as generators of mentally and physically healthy individuals (Frost 2012). However, the phenomenon of seniors' playgrounds has known a steady rise during the last two decades in America and Europe. As such, seniors' playgrounds address as it were the population that have outgrown the fit-o-meters that were trend during their 'younger' adulthood in the 1980s and 1990s. The implementation of recreational equipment for elderly in public space has in Europe boomed in particular since 2000 (own observations), with Finland as leader in the playground market – also literally, since the Finnish playground manufacturer Lappset has developed seniors' playground product lines that have generated international acclaim, imitation and purchases. Shortly after being found in Finland – the seniors' recreational equipment is due to the Northern European weather conditions also placed inside –, Southern European seniors' playgrounds rose frequently, benefitting of the prevailing favourable climate. More recently, seniors' playgrounds can be found in Western Europe, with examples in England, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands – the latter two countries represent respectively the national contexts of the elected case studies.[8]

The European variants of seniors' playgrounds are generally more demarcated from public space's mere functional parts – being implemented for instance in parks rather than in streets – and also more mono-functional equipped than their Chinese pendants.[9] Whereas the Chinese adult playgrounds gather different activities besides the physical exercises on the for that purpose placed equipment (e.g. board games) (Dhand, Zhang & Josephson 2010), the European seniors' playground lay out envisions primarily physical activities on the playground equipment. This implies that the implementation of seniors' playgrounds provides opportunities to participate in leisure – which was said before to facilitate meaning-making and enhance the quality of life in later life – including dealing with the before considered lack of physical activity of older adults – although elderly are well aware of the benefits of a physical active lifestyle. The personal and communal key barriers previously identified as contributing to a sedentary lifestyle and its negative spiral of inactivity – "finding time, finding a partner to exercise with, physical health problems, financial cost and lack of access to appropriate facilities" (Sugiyama & Thompson 2007:22) – could namely partly be undone by the presence of seniors' playgrounds. The free of charge and appropriate facilities of the seniors' playground in the immediate residential environment – easily accessible when implemented in a neighbourhood that delivers adequate environmental support – present thus a chance to participate in physical activities or leisure in a rather informal context that comprises social and communal activities. This is of great importance, not only for finding partners to exercise, but also because older people tend to the negative spectrum of social integration when being physical active, as exercising in inner circle – settings like social organizations and community activities – prevents them, more or less, from the confrontation with structural constraints (Elling 2001; (Vonck et al. 2012) . This minimal integration – in fact a form of segregation – results from more formalized contexts like sport organizations in which particular norms and values are dominant. Although sports organizations' socio-cultural climate seems neutral, older people and their performance abilities are often perceived as inferior to the unspoken norm of the psychically able, young, white and heterosexual men (Vonck et al. 2012).

[8] All the observations are based on a literature review process of months, reading everything on the topic.

[9] The assertions concerning seniors' playgrounds are increasingly formulated with the elected case studies in mind, but they apply generally to the European seniors' playgrounds variations.

Ageism is thus also embedded in sports, which shows – echoing play – leisure's dialectical character, being "one distinct part of everyday life, and … a critique of life's other dimensions… that in its critique … reflects other dimensions of life" (Stevens 2007:21). Physical activity and sports occupy thereby moreover a special position, as their social function, especially with regard to older people, is often "considered from a functional and instrumental point of view" by policy makers (Vonck et al. 2012:9). The mere health perspective – this should be understood here as referring mainly to physical health – considers sports as a tool rather than as an aim and pays little or no attention to the point of view of elderly persons themselves (Vonck et al 2012). This instrumental approach to sports and leisure activities is generally alluring in a time where "leisure, not paid work or housework, is now the part of life where the most physical activity occurs" (Godbey & Mowen 2010), which is all the more true for the older, retired population. That the older population is made up of cohorts of older elderly having no sports identity or a negative one – sports were practiced by a limited group until the sixties – and younger elderly having experienced sports as constituent to their life course trajectory (Vonck et al. 2010), is thereby only important to the extent that it can be operationalized or put to use. Sports and physical activity as particular practices of the social construct that leisure is, tend to be demarcated in time and space, in accordance with the spatial reorganization under capitalism. As such, the instrumentalist approach to sports and physical activity and the allotment of their spaces can be said to be "shaped as part of the broader power relations operating in society" (Stevens 2007:6). This conception leans towards Lefebvre's representations of space.

Contrary to this, Wearing believes that leisure "presents the potential to challenge ageism and the self-fulfilling prophesy of underuse of physical and mental abilities in old age" (1995:263). Within sociocultural and individual constraints the participation in and personal choice for leisure can generate a space for oneself, within the more sharply ideological one (Gibson & Singleton 2012). Claiming the right to the city as the negotiation of a space for representations can thus also be heralded by leisure. As a consequence of leisure's – and consequently sports, or vice versa – dialectical nature, which positions itself between the representations of space and a space for representations, seniors' playgrounds as lived space should be addressed as a complexly unfolding phenomenon. This becomes even more clear, when focussing on play. Playfulness or playful behaviour was raised as an important aspect of older adults' QOL and should thus preferably also be targeted in the laying out of seniors' playgrounds. However, play's nature ensures that it "cannot always be predicted and can not always be designed for" (Stevens 2007:211). It is moreover limited by the social segregation and ordering of leisure, as this undermines the playful potential of every social experience – "It is a fact of life that most play does not take place on sites formally designated as play spaces" (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2004 quoted in Steven 2007:202).

2.7 Research questions

Bearing this elaboration on seniors' playgrounds in mind, research questions were formulated that attempt to transcend the mere physical health perspective towards seniors' playgrounds, accounting thus for a multidimensional conception of health – in accordance with the definition of health provided by the WHO.

The main research question is; 'How – if so – and to which extent does the implementation of seniors' playgrounds accommodate adequately for urban ageing and quality of life – and thus playfulness – in older adults?' Sub questions are; 'To which extent facilitates the presence of seniors' playgrounds the relation of older adults to members of the peer group and other age groups, and the urban context – or assist in respectively bonding, bridging and linking capital and intergenerational contact, and neighbourhood involvement?' and 'To which extent can the implementation of seniors' playgrounds be understood as an instrumentalist tool?'.

3 Method

3.1 Research Process

This thesis is the result of a 10-month-long research process that started in November 2012 and during which divergent topics – ranging from truckers' mobility to smart cities – were considered. In February 2013, population ageing was finally selected as the subject for the comparative research concerning urban culture(s). Following this decision, a thorough literature review of articles was conducted. The online academic citation indexing and search service "Web of Knowledge" (Thomson Reuters 2013) was thereby extensively used to find articles. Entry words were, amongst others, "environmental gerontology" and "ageing-well". As the literature review progressed, the research terms became further concentrated (e.g. "age-friendly cities" and "active ageing"). This led to the decision to focus on what could be argued to be a common denominator of these concepts, namely "seniors' playgrounds" or "seniors' outdoor exercise equipment". At the end of June, two cases were selected; the 'movement park for seniors' – "het bewegingspark voor senioren" – in Sint-Truiden (Belgium) and the 'sports playground' – "de sportspeeltuin" – in Hillesluis, a neighbourhood in Feijenoord, Rotterdam (the Netherlands). To compare the particularities of the two cases, interviews were conducted during July and the beginning of August.

3.2 Cases

Two cases were selected from a deep understanding of what constitutes urban ageing and QOL in older persons and of the phenomenon of seniors' playgrounds. Both cases represent pioneering examples in their respective countries, but with regard to the spatial implementation and the follow-up large differences can be noticed. This selection process of cases based on relative differences was opted for, as it allows, according to Swanborn (2010), exploring the scope and testing of an explanatory model through theoretical replication. This is important in order to respond to the preconceived research objectives.

3.3 Empirical data collection

Primary and secondary data have been gathered for the in-depth qualitative case-study analysis. Besides newspaper articles on the two cases, the collection of secondary data about the Hillesluis case consisted of two researches about the implementation of the equipment for older adults in the neighbourhood (De Vreede et al. 2007; Dirkse Anders zorgen 2011), At the stage of data collection, the existence of this kind of transmissible secondary information indicated already how the phenomenon of seniors' playgrounds is much more imbedded in the Netherlands than in Belgium. For the Sint-Truiden case was looked into a press release and a publicity pamphlet issued by the project's initiator, the municipality of Sint-Truiden.

The data gathered were supplemented by the collection of primary data via interviews and personal correspondence via email. Possible respondents for interviews were picked on the basis of having knowledge as an expert on one of both cases, seniors' playgrounds in general or the context in which to frame the phenomenon being studied. The selected experts all obtained their expertise in the context of their professional occupation. As expert interviews imply the provision of in-depth information in a short period of time, this was deemed the most appropriate for the explorative nature of the research (Mortelmans 2011). The interviews' semi-structured setup was based on a topic list of which the items were determined by their extraction of the literature review as constituent elements for the theoretical framework (Appendix 1). The choice for semi-structured interviews was motivated by the flexibility that allows interviewees to elaborate their ideas.

The interviewing process was documented in an Excel-spreadsheet. 18 people were initially contacted, which resulted in 14 semi-structured expert interviews, conducted throughout July and August. Every interview was fully recorded with consent of the interviewees and at the end of every interview 'snowballs were thrown' (Mortelmans 2011). Four interviews – of which one double interview – were conducted face-to-face, for the others the voice-over-IP service Skype was used – in combination with

Callnote, an application to record Skype conversations. Since the interviewees were not asked if they wanted to be identifiable, the respondents' anonymity is preserved by referring to their functions. After a first mentioning in the results section, the functions are moreover abbreviated. An overview of the conducted expert interviews can be found in Appendix 2.

For the movement park in Sint-Truiden, 4 persons were interviewed. The interviewees were respectively a Sports Official (SO) and a Social Worker (SW) of the municipality who both assisted in the development of the movement park and the Director of the Flemish Elderly Advisory Board (DFEAB) and a Physiotherapist of 't Meiland (PM) – the elderly nursing home adjacent to the movement park – who were not unilateral positive about the project.

For the sports playground in Hillesluis, 6 interviews were conducted. Among the interviewees were an Alternative Health Care Consultant (AHCC) who assists both governmental and private parties with the establishment of seniors' playgrounds, a Policy Advisor of Feijenoord (PAF) who was co-responsible for the implementation of the equipment, a Sports Ambassador (SA) who stimulates programmes for older adults movement, a Trainer (TH) who co-organizes trainings for older persons on the sports playground Hillesluis and a Civil Servant (CS) of Hillesluis who co-developed the seniors' playground. A double interview on site with the two Playground Managers (PMH) took also place.

Especially with regard to the interview respondents of the Netherlands, it should be noted that the interviewed experts often have relations to or are persons that benefit of the further stimulation of seniors' playgrounds. Their status as experts with broad knowledge on the researched topic and cases is also derived from their 'activist' function. The unavailability of more neutral experts – especially with regard to the assumed social aspect of seniors' playgrounds – assures that independent research like the one here presented is highly necessary. Therefore, experts that had little or nothing to do with the selected cases, but who could contextualize the issues at hand were also addressed. 4 such experts interviews were conducted, with respectively a Belgian Researcher of the Belgian Ageing Studies (RBAS), a Dutch Researcher specialised in Preventive Physical Activity in elderly (RPPA), a Dutch Professor of Quality of Life in older persons (PQOL) and a Sports Counsellor of the incumbent Flemish minister for Sports (BE).

The primary research data consists also of single observations on the particular sites of the cases. The surrounding environment was also explored. The observations were on the moment of exploring recorded by Dictaphone.

3.4 Data analysis

The duration of the interviews ranged from 28 minutes to 67 minutes – adding up to an estimated average of 45 minutes. The records of the interviews and the observations were played in slow motion using VLC Media Player and thus transcribed verbatim. I am however accountable for the translation – figuratively but also literally, since the language of all the interviews was Dutch – of the interviewees' ideas in my analysis.

To analyse the unstructured data of the interview transcripts, the transcripts were various times reread with the here presented theoretical framework in mind. Relevant phrases and sections were afterwards labelled, covering both spectra of information presence – the abundance and the lack of it. This process of coding linked thus preconceived theories and concepts with new input, while identifying underlying patterns. This fits into the research design being explanatory and exploratory. In view of answering the formulated research questions, the plethora of codes were reduced by generating overarching categories – respectively 'coaching', 'the spatial implantation', 'social capital' and 'active ageing' and 'communication'. The identified categories and their connections are in the following chapter described.

4 Results

This chapter describes the results of the case-study's empirical data collection. Every case is first introduced by a presentation of the socio-demographic context. The results for the cases are then described on the basis of the 4 categories – respectively 'coaching', 'the spatial implantation', 'social capital' and 'active ageing' and 'communication' – that were distinguished during the analysis of the interviews with the case experts. In a following, concluding chapter, their insights will be complemented by those of the general experts in a comparative discussion of the two cases. The results for the Hillesluis' case are considered first.

4.1 The sports playground in Hillesluis, Feijenoord (NL)

4.1.1 Context

Although the percentage of Dutch persons aged 65 or over is relatively smaller than the number for the EU-27 (15,3% to 17,4%), the Dutch total age dependency ratio is a bit higher than the EU-27 (64,0% to 63,2%), implying that the Netherlands have a relatively younger population than the EU-27 (European Commission – EC 2011; Appendix 3, table 1).[10] This trend is even more present in Rotterdam's borough Feijenoord of which Hillesluis is a neighbourhood, where almost half of the people is younger than 35 (Deelgemeente Feijenoord Rotterdam – DFR 2010a). The sharp contrast with the national population ageing is explained by Feijenoord's great ethnic diversity, only 35% of Feijenoord's population is autochthone; in the neighbourhood Hillesluis even only 19% (DFR 2010b). This accounts for a higher fertility rate. The older population in Feijenoord is still predominantly of autochthonous origin, with respectively more than 60% of the people aged 55 or more and 80% of 75 years or older (DFR 2010a). The particular socio-ethnic composition makes the borough a place of transition left by social climbers. Neighbourhood attachment and community involvement present thus challenges which have to be addressed in order to break the vicious circle of moves. Investments in the public space to improve the perceived QOL, stimulation of the talent potential and strengthening the neighbourhood identity are consequently high on the agenda of Feijenoord (DFR 2010a).

The older neighbourhood inhabitants are thereby considered a target group of great importance, as they also have the propensity to move away, especially when they are living in the neighbourhoods Bloemhof en Hillesluis (DFR 2010b). They are thus perceived as valuable assets, since being able to foster in this population group the tendency to 'age in place' through neighbourhood modifications is thought to favour all the inhabitants and the neighbourhood cohesion (cfr. age-friendly cities). Together with the determination that Feijenoord's inhabitants are not physically active enough and that its public squares are the "living room of the neighbourhood[s]" (DFR 2010a:38), this frames, as it were, the seniors' playground that was implemented in Hillesluis by the same questions that guide this thesis. The seniors' playground was inaugurated in 2005 by Feijenoord's council in imitation of Finnish and Spanish examples. The selected seniors' outdoor exercise equipment, Lappset's 'Design For All'-concept,[11] is placed on the site of the playground association Hillesluis – a group of mainly volunteers that manages since 1938 a public playground (for a map and pictures, see Appendix 4).[12]

4.1.2 Coaching

A first aspect to consider, 'coaching', came not only forward from the interviewees' statements, but also from the observations that were carried out and during which not a single person was seen on the equipment. The organisation of coaching or training on the seniors' playgrounds is said by all people

[10] It should be noted that the EC (2011) defines the younger age dependency ratio as constituted by people younger than 19 that are dependent on the working-age population (ages 19-64).

[11] Lappset is a Finnish playground manufacturer who is active in the Netherlands since 1980. The Dutch branch is called Yalp since 2006. Their 'Design For All'-concept is developed for people of various generations and with divergent abilities. Elderly are the main target group, generating thus also play opportunities for all (Yalp 2011).

[12] The Dutch phenomenon of playground associations dates back to around 1900, when playgrounds were established and maintained by neighbourhood volunteers. Some consolidated into beacons of neighbourhood interaction, like in Hillesluis (NUSO 2013). It is a public playground, without subscription, with opening hours.

interviewed to be of utmost importance for their use. Although the statement is motivated in different ways, the underlying idea adhered by everyone is that free play or exercise on the equipment is scarcely taking place by its target group – "They come not without, no, but always with supervision" (Playground Manager Hillesluis - PMH). On the Hillesluis seniors' playground – and many subsequent examples – are therefore training programmes organised with older adults on the equipment. A civil servant (CS) of Hillesluis sees this need explained by elderly being difficultly stimulated to move, what demands for "a personal approach". Or, as an alternative health care consultant (AHCC) puts it, elderly need to be "seduced to move". A trainer is then believed to be best suited to provide this extra stimulation by "translating the ability to perform certain rather abstract exercises into what is gained in view of the general daily actions" (Sports Ambassador – SA). A trainer is also able to draw exercises appropriate to the divergent physical capacities of the participants – "But sometimes it is awfully pondering what they can do" (Trainer - TH). By the trainers' creation of a safe environment, older exercisers retrieve and maintain confidence in their physical capabilities (SA).

Whereas the interviewees all agreed on the necessity of framing guidance, its duration heralded different opinions. Some interviewees are convinced that only giving an impetus is sufficient – "the playground is afterwards inviting enough to move on independent basis (paraphrasing SA) –, while other experts consider a trainer's presence as necessary for the functioning of the seniors' playground. Older people were said to feel more secure within the familiarity of the training framework (TH & CS), not only physically, but also mentally, as this lowers any possible feelings of embarrassment – "… when there is not the safety of the group, the threshold is immediately very high" (AHCC). The relevance of the training as group activity is further on explicated, but for now the importance of organizing this group activity should be clear. A policy advisor (PAF) of Hillesluis endorses this, when he observes that three of the four seniors' playgrounds in Feijenoord – implemented after the Hillesluis one – run smoothly "due to their organizational approach and a guiding exercise programme" (PAF). This does however not imply strict hierarchical arrangements, since organizers' inclination to settle everything prevents it from "becoming … the activity … the game … of the people themselves" (AHCC). Therefore, the coaching concept should be thought as the need of enthusiastic pioneers – be it paid or volunteering, younger or older people – that support, according to most experts essentially long-term, seniors' playgrounds (exercise) programmes. "Someone who maintains the verve … is just a major failure or success factor" (AHCC). 'Coaching' is thus predominant for success, since continuity has to be guaranteed, rain or shine.

4.1.3 The spatial implementation spot.

The previous idiom is used, because the weather was brought forward as another element important to the functioning of seniors' playgrounds. It is deemed by most respondents necessary that internal spaces are available to the public of the seniors' playground – the weather impacts severely the willingness of older people's propensity to move outside (AHCC). In addition to this, TH observes that play equipment for seniors is and should be implemented on "a logical place", being not in a forest or street, but on a location with facility resources. It was pointed out that this could be found in the proximity of senior service flats and nursing homes, but also on the domain of playground associations (AHCC). The centrality of the seniors' equipment in both the neighbourhood and the playground domain itself is moreover of utmost importance, as AHCC recalled the example of a seniors' playground that was implemented, which was put in a draughty and barely visible place and was consequently hardly used. A relocation to a more visible spot increased its use dramatically; "seeing moving, does moving". The central place of the 'Design For All'-equipment in Hillesluis' sports playground and neighbourhood is thus considered positive.

All Dutch interviewees made reference to the accompanying infrastructure of the playground association as environmentally supporting the older practisers on the seniors' playground. The benefits of implementing the Hillesluis' one on the sports playground are the presence of sanitary facilities, a canteen, an interior space and resting places across the whole playground. The older persons can thus be at ease and "exercise all year round" (AHCC). The context of the children's playground is also

experienced as an asset by (most of) the elderly. “They enjoy it, they were used to go to the playground, and now, once again, they have the opportunity to do so” (AHCC). Especially, in view of the need of ‘coaching’ and the offered group activities, the playground associations locations are useful, as they provide the chance to socialize before and after the training “over a cup of coffee” (TH).

4.1.4 Social capital

Drinking coffee together is understood by all interviewees as an indispensable framing ritual of the training – “[it] is almost more important than the exercising itself and certainly for boosting it” (AHCC). This suggests that older people’s participation in exercise programmes on the seniors’ playgrounds contributes to the (further) development of ‘social capital’, and the resulting social capital is also perceived as impetus to participate by the older exercisers. TH believes that 35% à 40% of the older participants’ motivation revolves around the social contacts and the sociability – the other 60% to 65% is accounted for by the health and physical benefit. Other respondents are convinced that the social contact precedes the importance of the possible physical gain (AHCC & PMH). However, the social contact and the resulting social capital is said to be both stimulated by the design of the exercise programme and emanating from the interaction of the participants’ singularities. The outlay of the seniors’ equipment as a compact play set on which several people can exercise at the same time while facing each other and the trainer’s putting together of exercise pairs prompt after all social interaction (SA). Reciprocity is experienced to be of great importance “in the run of a nonagenarian on a balance beam, while an octogenarian put his arms around her”, as “someone who is supported loves it when he can support someone else later on” (AHCC).

Some experts (AHCC & PMH) notice how this mechanism continues beyond the seniors’ playground and trainings, in cooking for each other and doing other activities together (e.g. bowling), in which the relationship between the dependent and helping hand are often reversed. “And with such little exchanges, you see that groups are made” (AHCC). The provision of tracksuits by the playground manufacturer with different colours for each training group and the consistently wearing of them by the participants is moreover observed to mark the existence of a social group (PMH). According to PMH, the social interaction makes the exercise programme “a game rather than sports”, and consistent with this AHCC notices: “let them have fun, let them make fun of each other while exercising; tease and bully one another”.

Two interviewees (PMH & TH) acknowledge however that the idea “if they have fun, they stay active and they come on their own” (AHCC) adheres especially to the first exercise group of elderly that was established in Hillesluis in 2006. This one is much closer and active than subsequent groups. PMH thinks that this can be explained by the fact that they were also the first group of supervised seniors’ playground users in the Netherlands, being actively recruited as a test audience and later on actively put to use as a demonstration team on new seniors’ playgrounds across the country. It is also noted that the here described development of social capital not only stays within a particular exercise group, not transgressing to other similar groups, but is also limited within the exercise group to people with more or less the same socio-ethnical background (TH & PMH). TH remarks that mixed groups of autochthonous and non-autochthonous neighbourhood residents do exist, “but usually there is an excess of one or the other, because we do not have fifty-fifty groups”. PMH emphasized moreover the “disproportionateness” of the predominantly ‘white’ nature of the exercise groups in Hillesluis, as this is a colourful and young neighbourhood.

The implementation of the Hillesluis seniors’ playground in the already present sports playground that addresses (mainly) children was envisioned – as PAF mentioned – by the borough’s council to strengthen the ties between the generations at the other end of the age spectrum. Also SA observed that “that intergenerational contact is part of our [the organizing agencies’] philosophy”. However, PMH highlights that in reality this intergenerational contacts remain limited, as the seniors’ groups practice when the children are at school and they merely use it without the previous described ‘coaching’. She described how outside school time children use the seniors’ equipment as were it any

other playground equipment. She elaborated upon her efforts as head of the playground association to involve the participants of the seniors' playground programme more in the neighbourhood. The PMH sees the exercising seniors' group as a source of potential volunteers that she appeals to, by demanding them, amongst others, to co-organize reading afternoons. Although some older people – "the grumbling pots that dislike all that children's noise in their head" (PMH) – are not amused by the idea, others recalled do it with pleasure. This kind of neighbourhood involvement further increases the social capital and fits, like PMH says, into the history of the playground associations, as they were mainly ran by older volunteers called "playground grandpa".

4.1.5 Active ageing

In the previous section it was proven that participation in the seniors' playground exercise programs increases – better, may increase – an older person's social capital. Together with this, the understanding was also formulated that the idea of further increasing one's social capital through participation also stimulates the activation of the older person. These mutually increasing forces are also present in the fourth aspect under discussion, 'active ageing'. The interviewees mentioned all – in one way or the other – that participation on a regular basis in trainings on a seniors' playground contribute to active ageing. However, it was also generally admitted that most of the older people participating in the trainings are those that could previous to their participation already be categorized as active or actively ageing. TH refers consequently to the older participants as follows: "They are all basically pretty active people. They may all be retired, but they still do a lot for society, and themselves too. They are also socially very busy to live in the best way possible." With regard to the first Hillesluis 'cohort' of older exercisers this was deemed to be even more logical, as they were recruited in older people's organizations or community centres (CS). PMH's description of the participants made however clear that this does not apply to everyone. Through the radiating conviviality, the previously mentioned factors, and the word of mouth or doctor/district nurse advice (TH), SA suggested that also rather "inactive people come out of their sofa". The big absence of non-autochthonous exercisers who are known to move even less than their autochthonous peers show however, according to TH, how difficult this is. This line of thought made PMH conclude with the following remark concerning the Hillesluis case: "The practicing elderly are then in fact the die-hards and they disappear after a while through attrition".

4.1.6 Communication

Most of the interviewees mentioned that the implementation of seniors' playgrounds made the voices of critics rise (e.g. "'Older people are not children'"), not only with the first one in Hillesluis in 2005, but also with all subsequent examples (SA, TH & AHCC). Therefore, open communication both to the (future) older users and the rest of the world are considered important (PMH & AHCC). The personal approach whereby critics – also often belonging to the target group – can experience, or not, the assumed and praised benefits themselves by being invited to make use of the seniors' equipment under supervision is generally dubbed the best (TH & AHCC). Also the presence of already exercising elderly is said to encourage trying:

> 'If older people are a little bit sceptical and they hear older people that are exercising exclaim 'Oh, did I do that? I did not know that I was still able to do that… Let me do it again!', they come reluctantly closer and they want to experience it themselves… And then they get all excited about the effects.' (SA)

According to all interviewed experts is the lowering of participation thresholds and the generation of positive images thus primordially. In Hillesluis was therefore also neighbourhood- and nation-wide interest generated through press coverage, in which the elderly participating in the project were – in accordance with the project design – "put in their strengths" (AHCC), by having their say rather than leaving the word to the projections of an organizing agency.

4.2 The movement park for seniors, Sint-Truiden (BE)

4.2.1 Context

The Belgian figures regarding population ageing are more similar to those of the EU-27 ones than the Dutch ones. Whereas the old age dependency ratio of the Netherlands was 'only' 25,1%, the Belgian 28,6% leans closer to the EU-27 (28,4%) (EC 2011; Appendix 3, table 1). A rather high number of people aged 80 or over are equalled by the presence of a great number of younger people, as the young age dependency ratio is 38,2% (cfr. EU-27 34,8%; EC 2011; Appendix 3, table 2). Bearing the Dutch figures in mind, it can be suggested that the older population is rather autochthonous Belgian than the younger population (EC 2011).[13] Sint-Truiden scores, however, under the Belgian average of both non-autochthonous people and people with different nationalities in Belgium (Decoster & Lemaître 2013). The associated lower fertility rate reflects also in the dependency ratio of Sint-Truiden, in which the older population (65+) has a slightly higher share than the younger population (0-19) – an unlikeliness in relation to the figures of the Flemish Region (Decoster & Lemaître 2013; Appendix 3, table 3).

The older population group is consequently important in and for Sint-Truiden. This is, amongst others, indicated by the fact that they distinguish both 'mediors' and 'seniors' as policy target groups (Sint-Truiden 2013). This differentiation is moreover also symptomatic for the continuity the city's council tries to guarantee across the life-course, in correspondence to the strong policy of 'ageing in place' that characterizes Belgium (De Witte et al. 2010). The creation of favourable environments for the population group(s) under question is therefore also an important item on the agenda of Sint-Truiden's policy makers, both for people ageing at home and in nursing homes. When resort to the latter is taken in the same community, it should ideally form an extension of ageing in place at home and its supposed quality of life. The implementation of a 'movement park for seniors' in park domain 't Speelhof at the back of the building of the nursing home 't Meiland fits herein, and endorses thus – in analogy with Hillesluis – the formulated research questions. The movement park for seniors was established in the summer of 2008, being the first and – to my knowledge – up till now only seniors' playgrounds in Belgium, following Finnish and Spanish examples (for a map and pictures, see Appendix 4).

4.2.2 Coaching

Two interviewees – respectively the social worker of the municipality Sint-Truiden (SW) and the director of the Flemish Elderly Advisory Board (DFEAB) – recalled that at the time of the implementation of the movement park in Sint-Truiden in 2008 safety concerns were raised. As a consequence, the sports department of Sint-Truiden offered two initiations to familiarize with the equipment, "out of fear that people would be a little too enthusiastic, risking thus muscle tears". After these two sessions no structural coaching has been provided, although all the interviewees endorsed from their expertise the importance of guidance. The need therefore is especially felt in view of the conceptual novelty – still – of the equipment and its target group. It was moreover suggested by SW that "if you want to keep it [the movement park] alive, you should do something to keep it active". The guaranteed occupation of the seniors' playground is, as a municipality's sports official points (SO) out, without coaching or an exercise programme not achieved. "The audience consists now of loose visitors and groups who happen to pass by" (SW), who often not even fall under the indicated target group (SO). High schools, revalidation programmes and supervised groups of mentally disabled people make use of the seniors' equipment exceptionally, as part of their trail through the park domain. Only the organisation *Senioren Actief Sint-Truiden* who sometimes start or end their walking tours on the movement park, the exceptional grandparent exercising with his/her grandchildren and the small and little present supervised groups coming from the adjacent nursing home fit the intended audience (SW & SO). In addition to this, the number of visitors and their motivation is not monitored or evaluated at

[13] I make use of the term autochthonous very cautiously, as I am fully aware about the debate that recently has been raised about it in the Belgian context. However, I do not know how to express the information of important but sensitive nature in English otherwise and in the Dutch context it is, to my knowledge, not yet that problematized. I use it here, to get the reflections on the same denominator.

all (SW & SO), making it difficult for the interviewees to make statements about the seniors' movement park's use. It could however be supposed that the exercising guests of the movement park for seniors are there because of its spatial implementation.

4.2.3 The spatial implementation spot

The park in which the seniors' playground is implemented is considered by all interviewees as an important asset for the municipality, as it is near the municipality's centre and comprises a wide range of recreational facilities, like a Finnish track, a fit-o-meter, a cafeteria and an extensive children's playground. Initially, the movement park was going to be located next to the children's playground, based on the idea "if the seniors don not use it, then at least the children will" (SW). The location was however reconsidered, due to the thought that children might laugh at the older people exercising – "After all, how bad would you feel, if you at the age of 85 are using a balance beam, while a little kid is alongside you acting crazy?" (SW). The current implementation spot is therefore separated by hedges from the rest of the park, but fully visible to 't Meiland. SW regards this as positive, as she believes "that many people are embarrassed to use the equipment, and if you do it here, no one sees you".

The adjacent nursing home 't Meiland is as a public social welfare centre owned by the municipality, but its accommodation is not available to older exercisers that are not connected to 't Meiland themselves. This implies that no interior space can be used when the weather is bad, a physiotherapist of 't Meiland (PM) is bothered by this, as "it is from May to September theoretically possible to exercise in the movement park, but the weather often prevent this from happening" (PM). Consequently, he plans rather no activities on the movement park. He considers the movement park exercises moreover unfit for the population of 't Meiland. "With an average age of 80-85, it is almost impossible to motivate the residents to use the devices, simply due to them being too old and their geriatric state-of-being" (PM). Nevertheless, he also recognizes the qualities of the seniors' movement park as allowing practical exercises suitable for revalidation. However, "it could have been even better, if experts with regard to the target group were asked about their experiences" (PM).

4.2.4 Social capital

The development of 'social capital' was envisioned in the functioning of the movement park for seniors, as the press release issued by the municipality motivated its implementation saying that "the placing of such a movement park has a big impact on increasing social contact for seniors" (mail correspondence with SW, 9/07/2013). However, as the seniors' equipment was said to be used primordially by individuals – often not fitting the heading 'seniors – and already formed activity groups, nothing was mentioned in the interviews about a possible contribution of the seniors' movement park to the social contact and social capital of seniors. Whenever questions addressed the topic of social capital (in)directly, the item of 'coaching' was brought up in one or the other form as possessing the untapped potential to redeem the established lack of social capital development – "For now, there is not really a huge bond with the neighbourhood created …" (SW).

The various groups that exercise together on the equipment are believed to thus maintain and slightly improve the already present social contacts and social capital across different occasions – "If you come in a group, I believe that the laughing and chatting together is then important; the social aspect" (SW). This is also the case for grandparents and grandchildren exercising, while performing – individually or group-wise – the recondition and revalidation exercises that the seniors' movement park allow are suggested to offer opportunities for (re)integration in the urban and social fabric (PM).

4.2.5 Active ageing

The latter point, implies that the equipment can foster active ageing, which was also the reason of its implementation at the back of 't Meiland. With regard to this, it is however necessary to bear PM's remarks in mind and the assumed fact that "you do not exercise alone here, unless you are really fanatic" (SW). This statement implies that the individuals found exercising on the movement park are those that are already actively ageing. It presents after all not the only opportunity to pursue active

ageing. SW and SO pointed out that Sint-Truiden's policy concerning 'mediors' and 'seniors' became very developed under the previous political conduct – "They have really put their joker in this area and they have done everything within their power for the largest population group of Sint-Truiden" (SW). This group forms thus one of the key operating points of the sports department, which is said to be "very much oriented towards them en envisions to activate them and stimulate them to stay active. We do a lot to get people out of the isolation of their house."(SO). Consequently, "the elderly themselves indicate that the supply of Sint-Truiden is incredible great in all areas" (SW).

4.2.6 Communication

When the experts for Sint-Truiden were interviewed, it was noticed that the communication in preparation for the implementation of the movement park for senior's in 2008 was perceived differently. Whereas SW mentioned the project as a cooperation between the municipality's council, the welfare service, the sports department and responsible ones of 't Meiland, the interviewees SO and PM did not recall this as such.[14] This led to a lack of a more formal, internal evaluation just after the implementation and on the long run, which was felt by all interviewees as a shortcoming.[15] Time and money was however invested in the communication about the park with press releases and leaflets issued by the municipality, and with signage and exercise demonstration boards on the location itself (observations).

With regard to the perception of the movement park for seniors, it was said that the initial idea to name it really 'a playground for seniors' was deemed denigrating and led to jokes between different services. Consequently, the name chosen was 'movement park'. "This fits rather within a fitness background. I do not consider it denigrating at all, right? But the fact is, it is all about how you communicate it" (SW).

[14] SO puts it as follows: "We as sports department were called in at a later point to provide information about the devices and their placement in a little trajectory – on the moment that the firms were contact, the contracts were agreed and thus the devices were already chosen and bought". PW said: "The municipality's council has not consulted us for selecting and installing the equipment. It was not previously questioned which devices would serve which group. This is obviously far from ideal, as physiotherapists and other care experts know what is appropriate for the targeted age group".

[15] "I must admit that the evaluation is less. We make no samples or anything, but sometimes we exchange experiences, talking about when we passed there and saw some people. But that's not a real evaluation, the numbers and approach are not tracked" (SW). And "a point for improvement is certainly the evaluation of the project" (SO).

5 Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Comparative discussion of the results

The discussion of the results that were distracted from the interviews and observations unfolds as a comparative case-study. The two cases and their results are compared along the lines of the three distinct aspects that Lefebvre identified in his assessment of space as a social product. In doing so, Lefebvre's rather abstract considerations about space as a complex social construction are made more susceptible on the one hand, while on the other hand the discussion and interpretation of the results is lifted to a more conceptual level. This method of comparing allows moreover to discern the dialectical qualities inherent to each case by telling apart their different aspects or levels – of which none is more important than the others, but some might be more dominant. The themes that covered the results from the empirical data analysis are thereby no longer held as titles, but discussed interchangeably under the headings of respectively 'representations of space', 'spatial practices' and 'representational space'.

5.1.1 Representations of space

'Representations of space' were in the theoretical framework said to be the social codes or conventions that define space according to a society's operative power relations (Lefebvre 1991). In this capacity, they are also dubbed 'conceived space'. They are taken as the starting point of the discussion, as the top-down defining of a "functionally and symbolically determined location" (Stevens 2007:12) for seniors' outdoor exercise equipment started the implementation of respectively the seniors' playground in the sports playground Hillesluis and the movement park for seniors in Sint-Truiden's park domain. In both cases, the responsible policy makers motivated their particular initiative by referring to examples in other countries and the assumed benefits for older people's physical and social well-being (SW & PAF 2013). The seemingly altruistic motives that were proclaimed are however difficult to tell apart from ageist inspired argumentation that envisions the normalization and productive co-optation of the older individual in society. After all, a small difference exists often only between being an end in itself and a tool that serves a larger ideology. As a consequence, it is very important when considering seniors' outdoor exercise equipment to take into account both the obvious and the (possibly) underlying framing of its implementation.

The specific equipment that was chosen and the particular places that it was inserted in are significant for this. The board of the district Feijenoord opted for Lappset's 'Design For All'- equipment. This is developed for older people and is assumed to stimulate three-generational-play, as its one-piece structure looks similar to classic children's play sets and allows more than 200 different exercises – of which some are indicated through stick men on the construction pillars (observation). In combination with its implantation in a children's playground, the equipment's name and structure suggests the wish to activate elderly in a sportive manner, with the bonding between generations of the neighbourhood envisioned as an inherent – and thus an inherently envisioned – favourable consequence.

In Sint-Truiden equipment of two manufacturers was chosen – Rudeco (DK) and Robinia (BE) –, resulting in separately placed basic wooden devices and metal fitness-device-variants on which the minimum age of 14 is indicated (observation). As the explanatory boards picture older people practising simple exercises that have a reality-link (e.g. turning the steering wheel), the target group is suggested to be more specific than in Hillesluis, addressing in particular the inhabitants of the adjacent elderly nursing home and older passers-by. This conception is also stimulated by the official name of the project, the movement park 'for seniors'. As such, it is not only explicitly reflect how the space is conceived, but also how its users should use it – much more than is the case with Hillesluis.

The bare act of conceiving a space, with which the mere spatial implantation of the seniors' outdoor equipment is here equated, does however not generate *de facto* the envisioned use or desired public *per se*. This was evident from the interviews in which several times the lack of elderly exercising individually was indicated. An additional explanation, besides the ones already mentioned in the

interview results (e.g. embarrassment), for this phenomenon – or its lack of – was offered by the expert specialized in preventive physical activity (RPPA 2013):

> 'It is a type of movement stimulus that asks people to spend extra time. …Instead, when you establish a hiking trail, to move there, it is much more freely, because people still have to move within the district; that has to happen anyway. Such a playground, however, is really an activity that you are going to do next to all the other things you do.'

Echoing Stevens' *The Ludic City* (2007), it might thus be argued that the creation of a seniors' playground in an urban neighbourhood, does not turn the neighbourhood or municipality into a playground for seniors more than before. Of both cases, the choice to implant Sint-Truiden's movement park in the park domain is most consistent with the latter idea by, "creating a milieu" (SC 2013). However, by narrowing down its focus and target audience explicitly via its name and the demonstration boards, the concreteness undoes the aspect of being 'much more freely' – against the idea of the "luxurious space" that Stevens (2007:198) mentions as necessary for play. It provokes thus, as it were, subversive use to its conceiving, by a public – except for the few 'fanatics' (cfr. supra) – that is able to address it in a non-functional way, such as the imaginative game of children or the hanging about of teenagers – the cigarette buds that were observed in the little alcove adjacent to the seniors' outdoor equipment might proof this. In order to reach out to the target group, general expert RPPA also suggests, reconfirming the interviewees' statements, that it is "not so much about the physical presence of a movement device or playground, but much more about the support and guidance of older people in such facilities."[16] Otherwise, the implemented seniors' playgrounds risk to become cemeteries of good intentions – be they instrumental or essential – instead of sources of active living or renewed youth – as a matter of fact also normative ideas.

5.1.2 Spatial practices

As was suggested by Lefebvre is the conceived space thus complemented and filled in by "spatial practices". The second aspect of space as a social construct is also known as 'perceived space' and refers to the material social interactions that actually take place and generate physical, material and social consequences or the (re)production of a particular social formation (Lefebvre 1991). As such, the perceived space is tried to be anticipated and incorporated by the conceived space, amongst others, by naming. With regard to the cases under discussion, it was shown that naming is an act of including and excluding elements that heralds often subversion on account of both included and excluded parties. This was already considered in the theoretical determination on what constitutes old age, an act that risks both the generating of self-fulfilling prophecies and denying non-identification.[17] It also emerged from the interviews when the experts were asked about their (practice's) conception of older people. Besides the cautious enumeration of various chronological ages, with 50 to 65 as the lower limit, different angles of incidences were presented (e.g. physical ability, involvement in society), in which age was not only envisioned as a social practice but was also explicitly formulated as a spatial one, negotiating, in accordance with was said in the theory chapter, a 'being in place':

> 'Being 'old' depends on the vitality of the people themselves. I do not link it to any particular age, but to an understanding of 'hey, I need some more exercise, because I feel that my space, my experience and movement world is getting smaller'.' (SA 2013)

Bearing this in mind, the coaching presented as necessary at the end of the previous section might then definitely be pictured as a means to connect conceived and perceived space more closely.

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[16] "And you see that many of these devices are purchased in the Netherlands, so that the municipality can show 'look how good we take care of our elderly that they can be active as well'. Only dropping them has however not sufficient effect. They should be really supported by guidance or recruitment or promotion." (RPPA 2013)

[17] Echoing Lefebvre, it is here very clear how the different aspects of space as a social construct intermingle, as the imaging of identification could also be used in the section on 'representational space'.

The motivations that the experts respondents offered to emphasize the importance of structural guidance differed slightly. Whereas in Sint-Truiden extra guidance was deemed necessary because safety concerns rose and structural occupation of the equipment was sought for, the interviewees for Hillesluis put emphasis on the motivational nature of coaching that increases occupation. Safety concerns were with regard to the Hillesluis case not uttered at all. The case-related discrepancy that can be noticed between the interviewees' statements about guidance might be explained by the fact that in Hillesluis – and from there, by extension also in Feijenoord, Rotterdam and the Netherlands – experience with organizing seniors' outdoor equipment has been building up from the very start in 2005. The fact that almost every member of the first initiated training group is still partaking – a few stragglers aside – testifies that this approach is paying off. According to the interviewees for Hillesluis, the success of the coaching is determined by a combination of factors, respectively the continuity (rain or shine), the usefulness (e.g. the translation of exercises to daily life activities), the playful aspect and the social contact. These determinations are in line with earlier scientific research that studied the predictors of older adults maintenance of exercise participation in organized exercise programmes. This singled the perceived quality of the programme out as a determining factor for continued participation, which depends on older people's appreciation of the quality of the instructor, the quality of the programme content and the quality of the programme conditions (Stiggelbout et al. 2006). As the expert interview results suggested that the older participants in the Hillesluis exercise programme were appreciative of all these factors, the trainings on the outdoor equipment for seniors in Hillesluis can be considered as a 'good practice' in its field.

The Hillesluis programme conditions – amongst others, being cheap, its proximity to the neighbourhood residences of the participants, the daytime programming,[18] and the suitability of the exercises – address moreover the reasons that were mentioned in the theory chapter as preventing older adults from leisure participation. Although the seniors' outdoor equipment in Sint-Truiden can be said to have the same advantages without an accompanying programme, it misses out on one of the main motivational aspects to start and continue moving – i.e. the being surrounded with practice partners. In the theory was the lack thereof also indicated as problematic to leisure participation. A sports counsellor (CS 2013) of the Flemish minister of sports sees this explicated as follows:

> 'Older people who live alone and moreover have to work out alone, then they will quit that activity quicker than when they are pulled by others. … That social aspect is very important, having in the meantime their say about anything and everything.'

Similar considerations were in the description of the interview results bundled under the heading 'social capital'. It has become clear that the spatial practices on seniors' outdoor equipment present opportunities with regard to bonding, bridging and linking social capital. These forms of social capital are however found not to be all equally present in both cases *an sich*, and also when the two cases are compared huge differences become manifest. It is important to note, that the results concerning presence of social capital are often not in line – both positively and negatively – with the objectives and expectations with which the Hillesluis' and Sint-Truiden's seniors' playgrounds were conceived.

Based on the interview results and the observations can be said that bonding, bridging and linking social capital are terms inapplicable to the movement park for seniors in Sint-Truiden, as no social organization whatsoever surrounds its implementation. The noticed communicative issues on policy level are exemplary for how from the start on the seniors' outdoor equipment was spatially and materially implanted, but not socially embedded nor assisted in socially embedding individuals. However, the presence of the equipment allows members of organizations that were already existent, like *Senioren Actief Sint-Truiden*, as participants in group activities on the movement park to maintain their social capital *status-quo*. It could thus also be said that the devices retain and renew the bonding between like-minded peers through performing sports and playful activities together – in analogy with

[18] Older adults dislike to do leisure activities in the evening and at night (Buffel et al. 2013).

Randal Collins' (2004) concept of emotional energy. In a similar manner it could also be argued that the bridging social capital between grandparents and their grandchildren is strengthened by joint use of the seniors' equipment. No new intergenerational ties are stimulated by the equipment, but this was also not a pursued objective of the implantation of seniors' equipment in Sint-Truiden. The interview results and observations did not hint at any gains qua social capital for the residents of 't Meiland, although this was one of the prime goals of the project. It is however suggested that grandchildren might visit their grandparents more often now that they have the opportunity to play with or without them on the equipment (SW 2013) – despite the normative users age of 14 years.

In Hillesluis where the seniors' outdoor equipment is placed centrally in the sports playground, no age restrictions can be found. Even more, the choice for this exact location wanted, as it were, to undo the non-explicitly communicated upper limit that is associated with playgrounds, which results in a 92-years old woman being currently the oldest participant of mentioned exercise programme. This framing guidance is of utmost importance when considering the implantation of the seniors' outdoor equipment in relation to bonding, bridging and linking social capital. It was already clear from the interview results for Hillesluis that all these forms of social capital are more abundantly present than in Sint-Truiden. Their coming into being and development is however hugely, if not completely, indebted to the structural organization of activities on the equipment. As the responsibility for the organization of the exercise programmes lies with district Feijenoord and its department Sports and Recreation, the participating older adults develop linking social capital. Moreover, by coming together, by literally and figuratively 'moving' each other – cfr. the exercise pairs –, by joking around, they not only create a safe haven – similar to Huizinga's (1950) magic circle – for their sportive and playful behaviour, but they are also charged with what could be considered emotional energy. This motivational power is believed – echoing Collins (2004) – to be transferred by the participants across training interactions that start and end with the same ritual, a cup of coffee together. The group specific track suits can then be acknowledged as charged symbols of these rituals that are both cause and result of further interactions, while the seniors' playground itself becomes a hotspot radiating feelings of being appealed to. As such, they develop also bonding social capital, which was said to influence positively the mental and social health of older adults (Vyncke et al. 2010). It can be argued that in this manner a second magic circle is created, not only on the spot and moment of being active itself, but as the vicious circle of active ageing – 'I am active, thus I do, thus I am active, …' –, which was also dealt with in the interviews and consequently under the heading 'active ageing'.

Although the development of intergenerational ties was a main rationale behind the implantation of the devices, traces of the establishment of bridging social capital purely due to the 'Design for All'-equipment were barely found in the results of the empirical data. The equipment provides, similarly to the Sint-Truiden case, the opportunity to grandparents and their grandchildren to maintain their bridging social capital. Especially interesting here is the initiative of PMH (2013) to appeal to the older participants of the exercise programme to recreate together with children in other activities (e.g. reading afternoons). Through the developing of bridging social capital in this manner, the elderly are once again put in power, while their volunteering increases their neighbourhood involvement.

Whereas it can be assessed that the seniors' outdoor equipment in Sint-Truiden does not meet its assumed benefits and thus contributes little or nothing to the QOL of older adults in Sint-Truiden, the interviews and observations for the Hillesluis case presented different results. The attention that was paid to the aspect of coaching from in the beginning indicated that this is not a consequence inherent to the spatial implantation of the seniors' equipment. On the contrary, the effects ascribed to the implantation of the seniors' outdoor equipment (e.g. neighbourhood involvement) were by the expert interviewees always mentioned in one breath with stimulating programmes organized on a structural basis. This implies that the movement park for seniors in Sint-Truiden has a wide growth potential.

5.1.3 Spatial representations

The last part of the comparative discussion is hung on Lefebvre's 'spatial representations'. The concepts refers to how spaces as social constructs are lived by their inhabitants as a set of complex symbolic associations and imagery (Lefebvre 1991). It is here argued to be an aspect of space that in the consideration of seniors' outdoor equipment is of utmost importance, as the associations that adhere to seniors' playgrounds are manifold and elicit divergent opinions. Therefore, it could be of use in the conceiving of space, as it gives also rise to the spatial practices. However, the 'lived space' is often –ideologically motivated – overlooked when moulding the material reality of urban space.

As a consequence, the social reality – the spatial practices – might not always follow the intended trajectory of the conceived space – literally and figuratively seen in the well-known notion of 'elephant path'. The subsequent "fanciful recontextualization" (Lutfiyya 1987 quoted in Stevens 2007:48) manifests itself in the seniors' playground cases under study dually. On the hand a surplus audience (e.g. 'fanatics', children) is attracted that complements the presence – or perhaps a more appropriate term is 'absence' – of the target audience, while on the other hand the members of the envisioned audience can be said to slightly modify their reason of being in that particular space with regard to its conceiving. The exercise or sport programme offered in Hillesluis becomes thus enjoyed for its social contacts and playfulness. This implies however a second recontextualization, as the Sint-Truiden case showed by changing the name of the project from 'playground' to 'movement park'. Fancying this as initiator, the municipality's council recognized however not that it is not the name that makes or breaks something, but who initiates it. After all, the level of qualifying an activity heralds another vicious circle – 'you play?', 'I move', 'you move?', 'I play', 'you play?', 'I move', … – that accounts for the fact that it is difficult to design, conceive or 'move' someone to play or move. The "subversive plagiarism" (Plant 1992 quoted in Stevens 2007) that in Hillesluis is thus present and that moves the older participants more than anything else, is in fact 'a cry and demand' for the right to the city, for a space and self-generated representations (cfr. Lefebvre paraphrased in Stevens 2007); the demand to be the 'initiator' instead of the 'initiated to'. This may counter the idea that the absentees do not know what they are missing. Perhaps they are absent, because they do know.

The here developed elaboration revolves around 'empowerment'. However, the need for 'coaching' that was clearly observed for both cases, suggests that the idea of empowerment in older adults is generally also manifesting as 'a need for organizing or organized empowerment' – the same goes for hobby and card clubs – rather than being (completely) self-organized by elderly. Following this, the initiating of seniors' playgrounds should then rather be thought of in a form *à la* urban regime. The municipality of Sint-Truiden could for instance have attracted the existing activity groups or combined perceived needs of older adults, prior to the implementation of its movement park. As such, by guaranteeing more identification with the project, more visualizations of older adults on the exercise equipment could probably have been noticed. Identification and visualization of the envisioned groups, by the envisioned groups, prior and subsequent to the carrying out of projects, were considered by the general experts interviewees as of utmost importance for their succeeding.[19] A cultural shift with regard to both older persons and moving in public space is thus envisioned as necessary by both SC and RBAS (2013).[20] Seniors' playgrounds' success could then be envisaged as both the result and cause of the city as a playground for seniors, and vice versa. It might then all be 'about how you communicate it' (cfr. supra), but it are the perceptions that move, literally and figuratively, people.

[19] Especially the Belgian respondents emphasized this (SC & RBAS 2013). This is probably due to the fact that no coaching is offered in the Belgian case and the lack of real visualization and identification is thus more visible.

[20] "I think that these devices can not suddenly be imposed, first, there needs to be accomplished a cultural turnaround in a natural way about the visualization of moving, the visualization of elderly and the visualization of elderly and moving in the public space" (SC 2013).

5.2 Evaluation

The sub questions that guided the research were answered throughout the comparative discussion of the results. They are here shortly recapitulated in order to answer the main research question.

An answer to the first sub question 'To which extent facilitates the presence of seniors' outdoor equipment the relation of older adults to members of the peer group and other age groups, and the urban context?' was formulated by looking at how the implementation of the seniors' sports playground in Hillesluis (NL) and the movement park for seniors in Sint-Truiden (BE) stimulated the bonding, bridging and linking social capital and the neighbourhood involvement of their older users. For the case in Sint-Truiden the implementation of the seniors' outdoor equipment did not improve these elements, a status quo could thus be observed. What the Hillesluis case concerns, small improvements could be noticed, mainly with regard to bonding social capital and to a lesser extent to bridging social capital, and only for those older adults participating in an exercise programme that is structurally organized on the seniors' outdoor equipment present. Opportunities for the development of linking social capital and neighbourhood involvement were noticed, but should actively be pursued by each individual older person.

The second research question, 'To which extent can the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment be understood as an instrumentalist tool?', was borne in mind throughout the whole research process in order to critically assess both the discourses surrounding seniors' outdoor equipment. On the basis of the case-study and Lefebvre's threefold conception of space as a social construct, it is advocated that there is no single answer to this question. The assessment is a matter of framing and perception. The following digression may clarify this.

Based on the theoretical framework, it is suggested that conceiving seniors' outdoor equipment as an exercise device assigns it the same place or value as sport, which was envisioned within an essentialist approach on the one hand and within an instrumentalist approach on the other. If the outdoor equipment for seniors is understood as a play device, it fluctuates between the will and the inability to plan play. The reality of the seniors' outdoor equipment in both Hillesluis and Sint-Truiden showed however that neither the two ways of conceiving the equipment, nor their inherent dialectics were mutually exclusive. This point of view is consistent with Tamboer and Steenbergen (2004), who characterize sport as inherently twofold approachable – as if it were the inseparably dialectic pair of contraction and relaxation that constitutes the muscle. Possible preferences for one or the other have to be determined then on the basis of the experiences of both the envisioned and surplus audience.

This brings us to the main research question; 'How – if so – and to which extent does the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment in public space accommodate adequately for urban ageing and quality of life in older adults?'. Based on the thorough study of two cases and a profound understanding of the field of gerontology, it is ascertained that the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment in public space may contribute to the adequately accommodating of urban ageing, provided that a structurally organized exercise programme is offered that fits within a broader policy strategy of encouraging ageing-well. As seniors' outdoor equipment allows both physical exercises and playful behaviour, its implementation has the inherent ability to address older adults' mental and physical well-being. These two important aspects for older people's well-being can be expanded with the other factors that constitute older adults' self-assessed quality of life, if the wider social and material environment are considered supportive. It is of utmost importance that the implementation of the seniors' playground in the urban fabric is equated by the urban fabric as a playground for seniors. Ageist considerations should be tackled at any time by generating visualizations of the diversity that characterizes growing older. The life-course perspective is thereby considered a valuable directive.

Although, the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment possesses great potentiality for accommodating adequately urban ageing and quality of life in older persons, it is important to note that it should be activated continuously – unless a major cultural shift takes place in the near future.

Moreover, there appears to be evidence that the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment and the corresponding exercise programmes might be particularly attractive to already actively ageing elderly. This might imply that invested and future funds are better used elsewhere, to entice them to move that are up till now considered non-active. The desirability of this and similar projects should however, as was mentioned before, always be critically assessed. The Hillesluis case showed for instance how the increasingly greater value assigned to active ageing and sports is strongly culturally determined, which might make us blind for other valuable ways of ageing. A last remark with regard to the main research question concerns the difference between generational cohorts of the same culture. Even though there is no conclusive research about the ageing process of the baby boom generation, it might be suggested that this cohort and following ones are not interested in group-organized outdoor activities under the watchful eye of a (slightly) higher authority, as working out on an exotic island or at home with the Wii and effectiveness-monitoring webcam eyes is also possible.

5.3 Conclusion

The main aim of this comparative research was to find out, if the implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment in public space can accommodate adequately for urban ageing and quality of life in older adults. It wanted thus to fill a knowledge gap identified in the field of gerontology. At a time that the international community is buzzing with terms like 'age-friendly cities', the field itself also proclaimed its interest in the research findings (RPPA & RBAS 2013). As the first international case-study that provides moreover a long-term evaluation of seniors' outdoor equipment, the thesis meets the need for critical scientific research that looks beyond the hype of an implementation moment. The results of analysing the empirical data that were gathered for the seniors' sports playground in Hillesluis and the movement park for seniors in Sint-Truiden and the subsequent discussion can best be summarized as follows: seniors' outdoor equipment "is a process, rather than a product" (Godbey in Larkin 2012). In this process, the initiator of – the municipality's councils – and the initiated to – the older exercising participants – the seniors' outdoor equipment should enter in a long-term commitment to each other.

It should be noted that the dichotomy of initiator and initiated that is held here presents a deficit of the research, as the selected cases present two examples of top-down implementation of seniors' outdoor equipment. Since the research results/findings were formulated with an eye for nuances, many factors and agencies in between these two positions have been revealed as contributing to the success – or not – of the process. Therefore, a triangulation of cases might have been beneficial for the research findings.[21] This consideration provides opportunities for further research, now that by this exploratory study the medians of future evaluations of seniors' outdoor equipment implementation projects – or better, processes – are plotted. In addition to examining the functioning of existing seniors' outdoor equipment in view of possible modifications, there is a role for research in gaining more insight in the world of future elderly cohorts. This is of utmost importance to determine the desirability of projects that are planned under the guise of 'being an 'age-friendly city'. Only in this way, it can become and stay a label of value – "instead of being an empty box, another fair-trade label for cities" (RBAS 2013). Therefore, research and politics need to find each other, giving thus a new impetus to environmental gerontology by leading it back to its roots as applied research (Schwarz 2012), while providing policy makers with deliberate implementation choices that 'guarantee' – however always subject to subversive plagiarism – quality of life in the older adults, and consequently, in all the inhabitants, of their city.

[21] Initially, I had a third case in mind – the movement garden for seniors on the Purmerplein in Amsterdam North (NL) – in which the initiator and the initiated coincide, but several attempts to reach the people involved were fruitless. In retrospect, the externally motivated dropping of the third case might have been beneficial for me, given the limited time period in which the research was to be completed.

6 Reference list

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: Item list

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"><u>Introductory questions</u>
- Which organisation & function?
- How related to older people (OP)?
- Definition of ‘old age’ or ‘older person/senior’ within field of expertise?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Local experts item list</td><td>General experts item list</td></tr>
<tr><td>- Local policy & change over years
- Local trends
- Coming into being of case’s project + aims
- Cooperation of services & agencies
- Equipment choice
- Functioning of seniors’ playground
- Participation levels & reach
- Experience participants
- Importance & effectiveness of:
- physical activity
- social contact & capital
- playfulness
- surrounding facilities
- other elements?
- Integration of implementation & OP in urban fabric?
- Importance of perception
- Follow-up?</td><td>- General, national policy & change over years
- Identification of trends
- ‘Good practices’ regarding OP & movement
- Awareness of seniors’ playgrounds
- Possible contribution?
- Which aspects needed to make it ‘good practice’?
- Additional questions about:
- Importance & effectiveness of:
- physical activity
- social contact & capital
- playfulness
- surrounding facilities
- other elements?
- Following cohorts OP: how ageing?</td></tr>
<tr><td>+ Personal evaluation of the particular case</td><td>+ Reaction to statements and preliminary results of interviews of ‘local’ experts</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Interpretation & possible explanation of differences between Belgian and Dutch case?</td></tr>
</table>

7.2 Appendix 2: Overview of conducted expert interviews

	Experts Function	Abbreviation	Date	Skype/Live
General Experts (BE/NL)	Sports Counsellor of the incumbent Flemish minister for sports (BE)	SC	22/07/2013	Live
	Researcher Preventive Physical Activity (NL)	RPPA	29/07/2013	Skype
	Researcher of the Belgian Ageing Studies (BE)	RBAS	19/08/2013	Live
	Professor Quality of Life (NL)	PQOL	13/08/2013	Skype
Experts Sint-Truiden (BE)	Physiotherapist of 't Meiland	PM	9/07/2013	Skype
	Social Worker of the municipality Sint-Truiden	SW	30/07/2013	Live
	Director of the Flemish Elderly Advisory Board	DFEAB	2/08/2013	Skype
	Sports Official of the municipality Sint-Truiden	SO	21/08/2013	Skype
Experts Hillesluis (NL)	Trainer Hillesluis	TH	18/07/2013	Skype
	Alternative Health Care Consultant	AHCC	23/07/2013	Skype
	Sports Ambassador of 'The Netherlands/Older adults in motion'	SA	25/07/2013	Skype
	Civil Servant Hillesluis	CS	20/08/2013	Skype
	Policy Advisor Feijenoord	PAF	21/08/2013	Skype
	Playground Manager Hillesluis 1 & 2	PMH	22/08/2013	Live

7.3 Appendix 3: Relevant statistical data

Table 1. Population age structure by major age group, on 1st January 1990 and 2010 (%) (Table taken from (EC 2011: 63))

	0-19		20-64		65 or older	
	1990	2010	1990	2010	1990	2010
EU-27	26.7	21.3	59.5	61.3	13.7	17.4
BE	24.8	22.9	60.3	59.9	14.8	17.2
BG	27.8	19.1	59.3	63.4	13.0	17.5
CZ	29.7	20.1	57.9	64.7	12.5	15.2
DK	24.3	24.4	60.1	59.3	15.6	16.3
DE	21.8	18.8	63.3	60.6	14.9	20.7
EE	29.3	21.2	59.2	61.7	11.6	17.1
IE	36.7	27.5	51.9	61.2	11.4	11.3
EL	27.0	19.4	59.3	61.6	13.7	18.9
ES	28.8	19.8	57.8	63.3	13.4	16.8
FR	27.8	24.4	58.3	58.8	13.9	16.8
IT	24.5	19.0	60.8	60.8	14.7	20.2
CY	33.5	24.0	55.7	63.0	10.8	13.1
LV	28.4	20.1	59.8	62.5	11.8	17.4
LT	30.1	22.2	59.1	61.7	10.8	16.1
LU	23.2	23.7	63.4	62.4	13.4	14.0
HU	27.9	20.8	58.8	62.6	13.2	16.6
MT	30.9	22.3	58.8	62.9	10.4	14.8
NL	25.7	23.7	61.5	61.0	12.8	15.3
AT	24.4	20.8	60.7	61.5	14.9	17.6
PL	32.6	21.8	57.4	64.7	10.0	13.5
PT	29.3	20.5	57.5	61.6	13.2	17.9
RO	31.9	21.0	57.8	64.0	10.3	14.9
SI	28.2	19.2	61.2	64.3	10.6	16.5
SK	33.5	22.1	56.3	65.6	10.3	12.3
FI	25.4	22.9	61.3	60.1	13.3	17.0
SE	24.5	23.4	57.7	58.5	17.8	18.1
UK	25.9	23.9	58.4	59.8	15.7	16.3

UK: 2009 instead of 2010.
EU-27 and FR exclude France's overseas departments.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjanind)

Table 2. Median age and age dependency ratios, 1 January 2010. (Table taken from (EC 2011: 63))

	Median age	Dependency ratio			Pop. aged 80 or over
		Young age	Old age	Total	
	(years)	(%)			
EU-27	40.9	34.8	28.4	63.2	4.7
BE	40.9	38.2	28.6	66.8	4.9
BG	41.4	30.1	27.7	57.7	3.8
CZ	39.4	31.0	23.5	54.6	3.6
DK	40.5	41.2	27.5	68.8	4.1
DE	44.2	31.0	34.1	65.1	5.1
EE	39.5	34.4	27.7	62.0	4.1
IE	34.3	44.9	18.5	63.4	2.8
EL	41.7	31.5	30.7	62.3	4.6
ES	39.9	31.3	26.6	57.9	4.9
FR	39.9	41.5	28.6	70.2	5.3
IT	43.1	31.2	33.3	64.5	5.8
CY	36.2	38.1	20.7	58.8	2.9
LV	40.0	32.2	27.8	60.0	3.9
LT	39.2	36.0	26.0	62.1	3.6
LU	38.9	38.0	22.4	60.4	3.6
HU	39.8	33.2	26.5	59.7	3.9
MT	39.2	35.4	23.5	58.9	3.3
NL	40.6	38.9	25.1	64.0	3.9
AT	41.7	33.9	28.6	62.5	4.8
PL	37.7	33.7	20.9	54.6	3.3
PT	40.7	33.3	29.0	62.3	4.5
RO	38.3	32.9	23.3	56.2	3.1
SI	41.4	29.9	25.7	55.6	3.9
SK	36.9	33.7	18.7	52.4	2.7
FI	42.0	38.0	28.3	66.3	4.6
SE	40.7	40.1	31.0	71.0	5.3

UK: 2009.
EU-27 and FR exclude France's overseas departments.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: demo_pjanind)

Table 3. Dependency ratio, 1 March 2013 (Taken from (Decoster & Lemaître 2013: 7)

	Sint-Truiden										
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
0-19 jaar	7.358	7.320	7.289	7.347	7.374	7.398	7.463	7.541	7.506	7.500	7.530
65+	6.523	6.632	6.725	6.791	6.856	6.921	7.069	7.212	7.357	7.505	7.669
20-64 jaar	23.433	23.549	23.708	23.851	24.017	24.108	24.296	24.364	24.446	24.574	24.548
Afhankelijkheidsratio	*59,24*	*59,25*	*59,11*	*59,28*	*59,25*	*59,40*	*59,81*	*60,55*	*60,80*	*61,06*	*61,92*

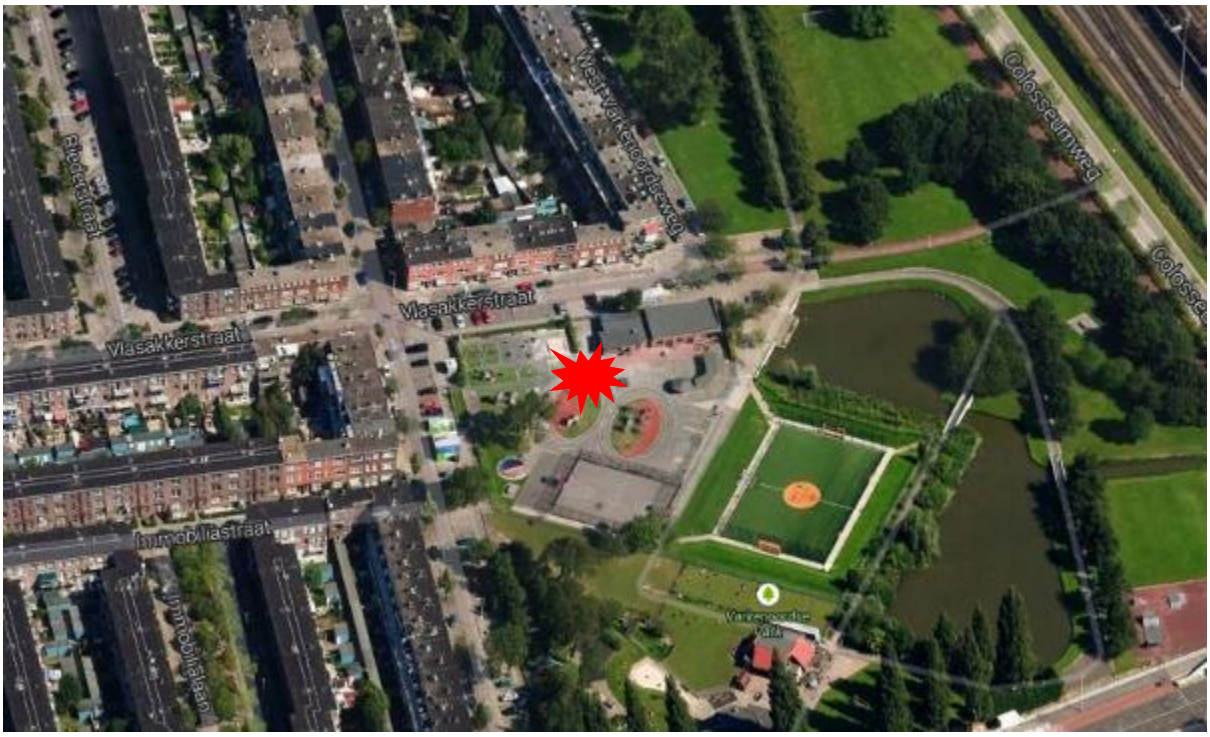
	BELFIUS.Middelgrote steden (Cluster V5)										
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
0-19 jaar	138.144	137.466	136.764	136.937	137.688	138.045	138.289	139.160	139.598	140.297	140.646
65+	115.990	117.507	119.228	121.013	122.011	122.366	123.662	125.545	127.241	129.416	132.155
20-64 jaar	389.152	389.949	391.085	391.824	394.247	396.727	399.334	400.817	402.593	404.672	406.404
Afhankelijkheidsratio	*65,30*	*65,39*	*65,46*	*65,83*	*65,87*	*65,64*	*65,60*	*66,04*	*66,28*	*66,65*	*67,13*

	Vlaams Gewest										
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
0-19 jaar	1.351.286	1.345.685	1.342.137	1.342.718	1.348.899	1.354.371	1.360.229	1.369.455	1.376.385	1.384.084	1.387.668
65+	1.024.653	1.040.554	1.056.974	1.073.880	1.084.246	1.089.307	1.100.194	1.116.407	1.135.045	1.153.567	1.180.040
20-64 jaar	3.596.842	3.609.314	3.616.913	3.626.563	3.645.455	3.673.762	3.701.177	3.723.015	3.740.553	3.769.209	3.783.287
Afhankelijkheidsratio	*66,06*	*66,11*	*66,33*	*66,64*	*66,74*	*66,52*	*66,48*	*66,77*	*67,14*	*67,33*	*67,87*

7.4 Appendix 4: Maps & Pictures

7.4.1 Hillesluis map

Hillesluis, a neighbourhood of Rotterdam's borough Feijenoord is indicated on the map (Google maps). Hillesluis is a densely built urban neighbourhood with some green areas. In 2004 about 11.500 people lived in Hillesluis (Wikipedia). The letter A indicates where the seniors' playground is located. An overview of the area is presented on the picture underneath (Google maps). The red star presents the exact location of the seniors' outdoor exercise equipment.



7.4.2 Hillesluis pictures

The pictures give an indication of how the seniors' playground looks and what the surrounding facilities are. They were all taken on the day that I observed the playground, 22/08/2013.

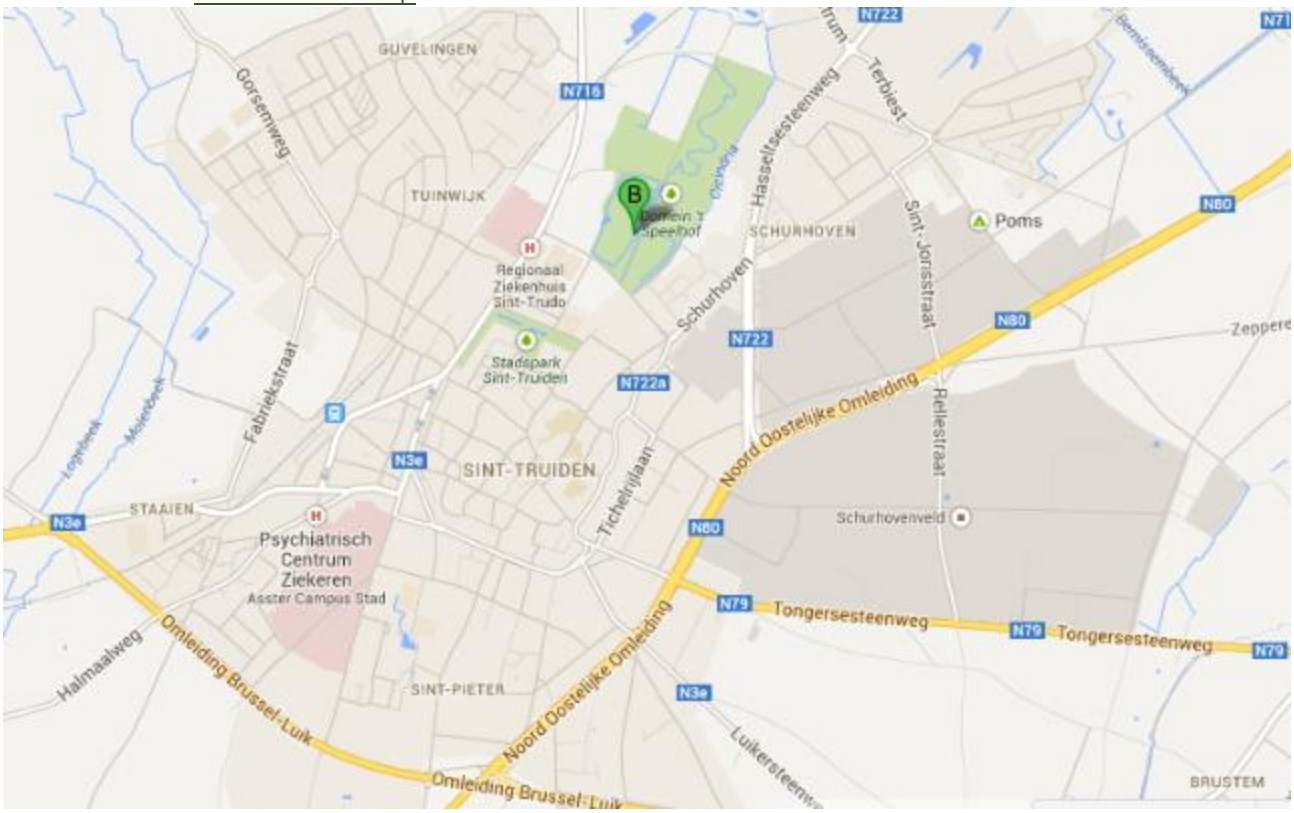
The 'Design For All'-concept looks similar to children's play equipment.

The playground association closes the playground at night and on Sundays.

The club house allows to drink a cup of coffee before and after trainings. In the winter, the exercise programme continues inside the building.

The first exercise group (°2006) that is still existent now with their 'personalized' tracksuit. The picture in the club house can be considered another symbol of their group.

7.4.3 Sint-Truiden map



This map offers an overview of the city of Sint-Truiden. In 2011 about 39500 people lived in Sint-Truiden (Wikipedia). The B – and in the following picture the star – indicates the exact location of the seniors' outdoor exercise equipment, in the park, close to the city centre and at the back of the building of a nursing home (Google maps).

7.4.4 Sint-Truiden pictures

All pictures were taken on the observation day, 30/07/2012.

At the entrance of the park domain is the movement park for seniors clearly indicated. However, it is not indicated on a map for cyclists that a little bit further can be found, although children playgrounds are indicated on that map as well. On the place of implementation itself are also explicatory boards. Here are exercises for the wooden equipment shown.

The metal equipment with another explanatory board. They face the back of the nursing home building.

From a different point of view. The bench that can not be used anymore is problematic for the targeted public. Moreover, the fact that the back of the bench is towards the exercise equipment, is not fruitful for playful interaction (cfr. Stevens' *The ludic city*, e.g. on people sitting in public space).

7.4.5 Other pictures

At the time of the Dutch case observation, a little detour was made to various other examples of seniors' playgrounds in Feijenoord and Rotterdam. Here are some of the noted particularities of the five places visited expressed in pictures.

Children use the 'Design For All'-equipment during holidays or free moments.

Whereas the Hillesluis seniors' equipment is consciously very centrally placed in the playground, the picture hereunder shows an example where the equipment is shoved in a corner to forget.