



Lifelong Learning: Perceptions Collected through the “Age-friendly Cities” Method in the Neighborhood of Mooca, São Paulo (Brazil)

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Abstract In 2015, a report led by the mentors of the World Health Organization Age-friendly cities program, proposed a review of the concept of active aging, including, alongside the three pillars (health, security and participation), lifelong learning, both as formal education (access to grade and diplomas), and in their informal dimension (when learning take places in daily life or in leisure activities). This study aims to analyze if the question of lifelong learning was raised and what the salient themes were related to that topic during the discussions of some of the focus groups of a research that applied the “Age-friendly cities” method in two neighborhoods of São Paulo. The two focus groups were conducted in 2016 in Mooca neighborhood: one composed of 5 residents between 60 and 75 years old, and one of 6 residents aged 76 years and over. Although the age-friendly cities guidelines did not predict specific questions about lifelong learning, the theme came up with a number of nuances in the discourses. Five general content categories have been achieved: 1) Learning: Activities and Spaces; 2) Learning and Accessibility; 3) Education: Respect, Consideration; 4) Learning and Work; 5) Learning and Aging. There was little emphasis on formal education, but aspects related to respect for older people and opportunities for leisure and social participation were quite present. In participants view, the simple offer of activities does not guarantee lifelong learning, since different types of barriers may make it difficult for older people to access them. Moreover, participants recognize not only the importance of educational activities

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for adults and older persons, but also the need for education of all on gerontological themes.

Keywords Lifelong Learning · Age-friendly Cities · Aging · Brazil

Öffentliche Wahrnehmung von Altersbildung und Lebenslangem Lernen durch das Konzept der „altersfreundlichen Stadt“ im Stadtviertel Mooça, São Paulo (Brasilien)

Zusammenfassung Im Jahr 2015 wurde im Bericht der Weltgesundheitsorganisation, veröffentlicht durch das Programm für altersfreundliche Städte, eine Überprüfung des Konzepts des aktiven Alterns vorgeschlagen. Dieses schließt neben den drei Grundsätzen Gesundheit, Sicherheit und Partizipation auch die Erwachsenenbildung in Form von formaler (Zugang zu Bewertung und Abschlüsse) sowie informeller Bildung (Lernen im täglichen Leben oder während Freizeitaktivitäten) mit ein. Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es zu analysieren, inwiefern Fragen des Lebenslangen Lernens in diesem Kontext diskutiert wurden und ob sie Gegenstand von zwei Fokusgruppen waren, welche die Methode der „altersfreundlichen Städte“ in zwei Stadtvierteln von São Paulo anwendeten. Die beiden Fokusgruppen wurden im Jahr 2016 im Stadtviertel Mooça begleitet: eine Gruppe bestand aus fünf Einwohnern zwischen 60 und 75 Jahren, die andere Gruppe bestand aus sechs Einwohnern im Alter von 76 Jahren und älter. Obwohl die Richtlinien der altersfreundlichen Städte keine speziellen Anforderungen an die Erwachsenenbildung enthalten, so kam das Thema in den Gesprächen zur Sprache. Fünf allgemeine Kategorien wurden erfasst: 1) Lernen: Aktivitäten und Räumlichkeiten; 2) Lernen und Zugang; 3) Bildungswesen: Anerkennung, Berücksichtigung; 4) Lernen und Arbeit; 5) Lernen und Altern. Die formale Bildung hatte zwar einen geringen Stellenwert, dennoch waren Aspekte bezüglich der Anerkennung des Bedürfnisses nach sozialer Partizipation und Freizeitgestaltung älterer Menschen durchaus präsent. Aus Sicht der Teilnehmer wird Lebenslanges Lernen nicht nur durch schlichtes Anbieten von Lernaktivitäten sichergestellt, denn verschiedene Hindernisse können den Zugang zu den Angeboten für ältere Menschen erschweren. Darüber hinaus erkannten die Teilnehmer nicht nur die Bedeutung von Bildungsaktivitäten für Erwachsene und ältere Menschen, sondern auch die Notwendigkeit, dass gerontologische Themen stärker in der Gesellschaft vermittelt werden müssten.

Schlüsselwörter Lebenslanges Lernen · Altersfreundliche Städte · Altern · Brasilien

1 Introduction

Founded in 2005, and worldwide spread through publications of its methodological bases in several languages (WHO 2007a, 2007b), the “Age-Friendly Cities” strategy aims, due to population aging, to turn urban and rural spaces into environments

friendly to all ages. This movement was based on a conceptual framework called active aging, originally viewed as a process marked by optimized opportunities in health, participation and security (WHO 2007a).

In 2015, a report led by Alexandre Kalache and Louise Plouffe, mentors of the Age-friendly cities program (WHO 2007a), proposed a review of the concept of active aging, including, alongside the three pillars that underpinned this concept, lifelong learning, both as formal education (access to grade and diplomas), and in their informal dimension (when learning takes place in daily life or in leisure activities) (ILC – Brazil 2015). “Learning needs are multiple and constant over the life course” and increasingly “it is in demand across adulthood for reasons of professional specialization, career change or simply for personal enrichment” (ILC – Brazil 2015, p. 47). In addition to promoting formal education, it is important to implement health literacy for self-care, financial literacy to manage income and expenses, and technological literacy so that the person can be fully connected (ILC – Brazil 2015).

The “Age-friendly Cities” program was initially implemented in 33 cities in all World Health Organization (WHO) regions, including the city of Rio de Janeiro. The idea was to consult older persons and some professionals on eight topics: 1) Outdoor spaces and buildings; 2) Transportation; 3) Housing; 4) Social participation; 5) Respect and social inclusion; 6) Civic participation and employment; 7) Communication and information and 8) Community support and health services. No topic aimed directly and exclusively at lifelong learning, but education and leisure relate to several items on that list. The main friendly characteristics observed generated a checklist for each of the eight items, allowing other localities to have indicators for their own assessments in those aspects (WHO 2007a). The project was very successful and nowadays, the Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities has more than 500 members spread across five continents (Beard 2017). One of the possible explanations for this broad diffusion is the proposal’s methodological flexibility, which can be adapted to different spaces while still attending local specificities. Thus, it is possible to mention diversified “Age-friendly” initiatives (Plouffe et al. 2016), adapted and applied at different levels (national, regional, local), including neighborhoods (Doran and Buffel 2018; Rosa et al. 2013).

Based on an initiative that applied the “Age-Friendly City” method in the neighborhood of Vila Clementino, in São Paulo (Rosa et al. 2013), a similar proposal is to be implemented in the capital’s neighborhoods of Brás and Mooca. In a metropolis such as São Paulo, working the WHO method at district level may be easier and more effective. The population of the chosen neighborhoods (75,724 inhabitants in Mooca) is indeed equivalent, in numbers, to many Canadian or French counties (for example) that have already embraced “age-friendly” initiatives.

The objective of the present study is to analyze if the question of lifelong learning was raised and what were the salient themes related to that topic during the discussions of some of the focus groups of that research. This analysis focused on two focus groups held in Mooca, a traditional Italian immigration neighborhood where 19% of the inhabitants were 60+ years in 2010, a high percentage compared to the Brazilian population, in which the percentage of older persons were 10.79% the

same year.¹ This neighborhood presents a very particular and challenging scenario: the demographic characteristics in terms of percentage of older persons population are similar to those from developed countries, however the deficits in terms of resources and public policies are typical from emerging economies. Moreover, the accelerated Brazilian demographic transition led to the urgent need in preparing the families, the society and the State for the new challenges and opportunities related to this transformation. This specific study may present clues for further interventions on a topic that is a major challenge in Brazil: lifelong learning. It may also contribute to assess how “age-friendly” initiatives method can integrate and promote this fourth active aging pillar. The conceptual framework adopted by the WHO mentioned above sustains our analysis that is also based on literature related to age-friendly initiatives, such as the diverse studies selected and organized by Moulaert & Garon (2016). In the field of educational gerontology, our main references are the Brazilian studies from Doll (2008) and Cachioni (2012).

2 Method

The two focus groups chosen for this analysis were conducted in 2016 in the neighborhood of Mooca: one composed of residents between 60 and 75 years old, and one composed of residents aged 76 years and over. The qualitative research in which the focus groups were carried out adapted and applied the method of the Age-friendly cities program (WHO 2007b) in two districts of São Paulo: Mooca and Brás. The principles of information and participation were observed, promoting a bottom-up approach. A committee composed by researchers, representatives of the public administration, and civil society followed the implementation of the project, and assisted in the organization of 8 focus groups in Mooca, 8 focus groups in Brás and 20 individual interviews. This structure was inspired by similar initiatives implemented in the French cities of Quimper (Le Borgne-Uguen et al. 2012) and Lyon, in France (Chapon and Felix-Faure 2011), or in some Quebec counties, in Canada (Garon et al. 2014).

The greatest possible diversification was sought for the composition of the focus groups, with people who did not know each other or were not closely related, in order to avoid possible influences (Gondim 2003) and promote the free expression of opinions. The sample was randomly assembled for convenience. Each focus group was expected to present five to ten participants, with some flexibility, as allowed by literature (Gondim 2003). Age and residing in the neighborhood were self-declared, with no verification of the truthfulness on this information. Participants were invited through leaflets on the streets and on events in the neighborhoods, visits to institutions and organizations, publicity e-mails, and ads on social networks. The help of the committee members and of some community leaders was fundamental. Both focus groups under analysis in this study met on two locations in different regions of the neighborhood, which could attract people who lived near or already knew the localities, taking in account several realities of the whole neighborhood.

¹ IBGE. Demographic Census 2010: Universe. SIDRA: table 1378.

The focus groups were based on the guidelines developed by the WHO (2007b), and one question was added: “How was your experience participating in this research?” A form with sociodemographic data on the participants was individually filled before the start of each focus group. The research project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities of the University of São Paulo, and the research participants signed free informed consent terms.

The discussions were recorded, and subsequently transcribed. The collected material went through three stages of treatment: 1) Transcription by a member of the research team; 2) Transcription’s revision by another member of the research team; 3) Content analysis, by one of the researchers of the team.

The content analysis of Laurence Bardin (2010) was used for treating the transcribed data for the analysis presented in this article, noting not only the explicitly expressed semantic expressions, but also more subtle and implicit manifestations, such as emotion, silencing and all interurrences during the meeting. The sociodemographic data was tabulated in a worksheet, and the frequency percentages were calculated, respecting some key aspects.

3 Results and Discussion

It is important to describe and discuss the participant profile (3.1.), as well as the salient themes related to lifelong learning raised by participants (3.2.).

3.1 Participants

In total, 11 people participated in the focus groups under analysis: 8 women and 3 men. The focus group of 60–75 year olds (60–75 group), on 08/26/2016, had 5 participants (3 women and 2 men) and lasted approximately 1 h and 53 min. The focus group of 76 year olds or older (76+ group), conducted on 11/4/2016, had 6 participants (5 women and 1 man) and lasted approximately 1 h and 33 min. The analyzed groups had a number of participants that meets the standards suggested by the literature (Kind 2004; Gondim 2003). With fewer participants per group, they had the advantage of allowing more speech time for each participant (Gondim 2003).

Not surprisingly, the studied groups had more women, similarly to what was observed in the total sample of older persons participants in the research, both due to the feminization of old age (in 2014, 55.7% of Brazilian older adults were women; IBGE 2015), and to the fact that older women tend to engage more in social interactions (Neri 2007), which could explain their greater interest in this type of activity. This prevalence of women among participants of educational or cultural activities is repeatedly observed, for example, in Brazilian Third Age Universities for (Castro et al. 2007; Irigaray and Schneider 2008; Pinto 2009; Alexandre et al. 2009; Souza and Russo 2009; Kretzer et al. 2010; Sonati et al. 2010; Roque et al. 2011; Cachioni 2012). According to Debert (1999), while women represent the majority of participants in Third Age Universities and Community Centers, older

men usually are members of associations, federations and confederations of retirees or professional trade unions. Moreover, greater female participation in the focus groups under analysis coincides with some findings in the literature on “age-friendly” initiatives in other countries, where women’s participation was also more significant, such as in the French cities of Lyon (Chapon and Felix-Faure 2011) and Quimper (Le Borgne-Uguen et al. 2012), in the city of Manchester, England (Buffel 2018) or in the city of Aveiro, Portugal (Centeio et al. 2010).

In the 76+ group, 4 women were widows, one was married, and the man was married; all have lived in the Mooça neighborhood for over 15 years. In the 60–75 group, the three women were single, one man was separated and the other was divorced; only the women has lived in the neighborhood for over 15 years. Of the 11 participants, only two women (in the 60–75 group) reported not having children.

Participants were highly educated compared to the overall Brazilian older people population. In Brazil, schooling is one of the aspects that “can contribute to the more vulnerable status” of older people, since they make up the population age group above 15 with the lowest average years of schooling among the employed population (IBGE 2016). In the 60–75 group, five participants had completed tertiary education, and one female participant had completed secondary school. In the 76+ group, only one participant, a man, had completed tertiary education; one woman had completed secondary school, three had completed elementary school, and one had incomplete elementary school education. The level of schooling was, therefore, considerably higher for younger participants.

In Brazil, the average number of years of schooling among older persons in 2014 was 4.8. However, this indicator has been improving as the more educated population ages: the average number of years of schooling among older people was 3.5 in 2004. In addition, the percentage of older persons with 9 or more years of schooling increased from 12.7% in 2004 to 20.7% in 2014, while the percentage of older individuals with less than 1 year of schooling dropped from 36.5 to 27.3% in the same period (IBGE 2015). There has also been a decline in illiteracy rates, although the population over 65 is still the age group with the highest incidence: 25.7% in 2015 (IBGE 2016).

According to the information provided, the analyzed sample was a select group in terms of schooling, with a percentage of people who completed higher education well above the percentage observed in Brazil in 2015 for people between 25 and 64 years of age (14.7%); this percentage increased when compared to that of 2005 (8.9%), but is still far behind the average percentage in OECD countries (33.5%) and in countries such as Chile (21.1%) and Mexico (18.5%) in 2014 (IBGE 2016).

Only one participant from each group—both of them women—did not own their home; therefore, there was a prevalence of homeowners. Considering the ten focus groups with older people from our broader research, the majority of participants (63.6%) declared that they were owners of their homes, a high percentage when compared to other situations. In the city of Lyon, for example, only 42% of older person-participants were homeowners (Chapon and Felix-Faure 2011), while in Aveiro 56.8% owned their homes (Centeio et al. 2010). It is possible to relate this housing aspect, observed in the neighborhoods under study, to the fact pointed out by Pasternak and Bógus (2014) that, since 1940, Brazilian housing policies have

been aimed at promoting access to home ownership. These policies seem to have contributed to the fact that the percentage of housing leases in Brazil is considerably lower than that of more developed countries such as France, where this percentage was 37% of residential properties (Pasternak and Bógus 2014), while in Brazil it was 18.32% in 2010 (Graeff and Pudenzi 2016), and 17.9% in 2015 (IBGE 2016).

Of the 11 focus groups participants, 4 reported living alone. Taking into consideration the 10 focus groups conducted with older people residents in the two neighborhoods, 21.8% of participants stated that they lived alone, a higher percentage than that of older people living in single-dweller households in Brás and Mooca, which corresponds to 16.21% of older persons residents.² The percentage in our sample was also much higher than the national average, which in 2013 was 15.1% of older persons population (IBGE 2014). This data suggests a greater risk of isolation for older people in our research sample and raises the following question: would people who live alone and thus are supposedly more pre-disposed to socialization be more likely to participate in the research?

All of the participants declared they were retired, although three reported to be still working (one man with complete tertiary education, and two women, one with complete tertiary education and one with complete secondary education, all members of the 60–75 group). The man stated that he was a civil engineer, while one of the women said she was a lawyer and the other declared she was a volunteer in a charity.

Within the Brazilian population, 26.3% of older people declared to be working in 2015, whereas in 2005, this percentage was 30.2% (IBGE 2016). One possible explanation for the employment rate among older adults not to have increased, but on the contrary, to have decreased, could be the greater vulnerability of older persons in the labor market—a fact recognized by the International Labor Organization—due to age discrimination, as they would be allegedly more expensive and less productive employees according to employers (Ghoshed et al. 2006; apud IBGE 2016). As an additional difficulty, in 2016 the IBGE pointed to an increase trend in the unemployment rate of the Brazilian population (IBGE 2016). In 2014, 65.7% of the Brazilian older people were retired (IBGE 2015); in that same year, 16.4% of retirees continued to work (IBGE 2015). In 2015, the percentage of employed older people who received retirement pay within the Brazilian population was 53.8%, well below the 62.7% recorded in 2005. According to the IBGE (2015), this decrease, as well as the increase from 47.6 to 53.3% in the percentage of people aged 60–64 among the employed older persons population, is related to legislative changes in the rules of social security regimes in order to postpone retirement.

In sum, the participants of the present research have, in several aspects, favorable socioeconomic characteristics, when compared to the average characteristics of the Brazilian older persons population, particularly regarding education.

² This percentage was calculated based on data from the 2010 Demographic Census regarding the number of older people residents (14,528 in Mooca neighborhood) and the number of single-person households belonging to older individuals (2238 in Mooca). IBGE. Demographic Census 2010: Universe. SIDRA: table 1134.

Table 1 Content categories

General Category	Specific Categories
3.1.1. <i>Learning: Activities and Spaces</i>	a) Learning and Public Policies b) Types of Activities and Spaces c) Participate in Research
3.1.2. <i>Learning and Accessibility</i>	a) Proximity b) Admission c) Information and Communication d) Affordability e) Security f) Concern
3.1.3. <i>Education: Respect, Consideration</i>	a) Lack of Respect for Older Persons b) Respect for Older Persons c) Other Issues
3.1.4. <i>Learning and Work</i>	a) Paid Work: Discrimination despite the Knowledge b) Voluntary Work: an Opportunity to Teach
3.2.5 <i>Learning and Aging</i>	a) Learning in Gerontological Topics b) Learning and Stages of Life

3.2 Topics

Participants in the 60–75 group will be identified with a letter followed by the number “1” (ex: Ms. A1), while those in the 76+ group will have the letter followed by the number “2” (Ex: Ms. A2).

In a first classificatory attempt, the selected excerpts were divided into three categories: formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. As synthesized by Johannes Doll (2008), non-formal education corresponds to activities that are intentionally planned as educational, but are generally free of the norms that fit formal education, and can serve specific interests or certain groups. It was noticed that there were few explicit and exclusive references to formal education, while numerous lines were related directly or indirectly to informal education, whether in relation to leisure spaces, the media and other topics. This may reflect the reality pointed out by Johannes Doll (2008) that the vast majority of educational activities take place from the perspective of non-formal or informal education, although it is possible to find older people in the formal education space. In the dialogues analyzed, many of the references to education were, however, made so generically, in a broad sense, that they could relate directly or indirectly to the three types of education (formal, non-formal, informal), as in this example:

Ms. B1: “Put preferential boarding, young people go there!”
[other two ladies: “Exactly!!” “Exactly!!”]
Mr. E1: “But then we go back to education ...”

Here Mr. E1 refers to education in the sense of respect; previously, in this same group, it has already been said more than once, with the agreement of all, that what is lacking is education (respect) towards older persons. Lack of respect or

education can be related to both gaps in formal education and failures in non-formal or informal education (e. g. negative prejudices and stereotypes of old age). It is difficult to determine whether participants refer to non-formal or informal education activities in many comments such as: “[...] we do have free activities, such as the library ...” (Ms. B1) or “I worked out, in knitwear, sewing and darning [...] I learned this in Italy ...” (Ms. B2)

In this way, a second reading of the selected excerpts was made, identifying themes (“sense cores”) that made up the communications. The pre-established categories were discarded and an “analogous and progressive classification” (Bardin 2010, p. 147) was added, with the registration units being grouped by semantic criteria. Five general categories divided on specific categories have been achieved, as described in Table 1.

Next, the registration units classified in the general thematic categories and their specific subcategories will be presented and discussed.

3.2.1 *Learning: Activities and Spaces*

A number of comments from the participants point to the question of the existence or not of educational, cultural or leisure activities and spaces, beginning with the fragility of public policies (a) and passing through examples of activities and spaces that may or may not exist (b) and perception of one’s own participation in research as a learning activity (c).

a. **Learning and Public Policies**

One participant complains about the lack of leisure policies, a recognized source of informal learning, and policies for “old age” in general. The participant criticizes the density of the park where the City Hall of the district of Mooca is located with several equipment, including, according to him, “four or five schools” that should be spread, leaving more green space or leisure in that area:

“[...] as if the State or the City Hall itself did not have land to build! Even because we have four or five schools out there. I do not think there is any need for such densification in this place. You need to spread it a little more, right? What’s missing, I think it’s out of purpose, but what’s missing is a policy, let’s say, for older people, whether for leisure or for food ...” (Mr. D1)

The speech of this man, who declared himself retired and no longer working, denotes the importance that leisure can play for older people, especially those with free time. The participant recognizes that there should be public policies in the leisure sector, as determined by the National Policy on Older Persons³ (article 10, VII) and the Statute of Older Persons⁴ (articles 20 and 23). In a study in the city of Nice, France, it was found that older people left home more often for leisure than for shopping (Chapon et al. 2011).

³ BRASIL. Law n. 8842, dated January 4, 1994.

⁴ BRASIL. Law n. 10741, dated October 1, 2003.

In another dialogue, where the majority of the group agrees on the lack of public policies in general and related to older people in particular, education stands out as a “fundamental”, “basic” issue, which would guarantee “assistance” and greater care for older persons:

Mr. D1—“It’s just that we do not have any kind of politics at all.”

Mr. E1—“No, there is not!”

Ms. A1—“No, not for older people or for nothing.” [...]

Mr. D1—[...]. “Our fundamental question is education in itself. It starts from the root.”

Mr. E1—“It starts down there ...”

Mr. D1—“Yes, if we have education, we will be able, without needing anything, to ask for nothing, favor to nobody, we will have assistance. Right?”

Mr. E1—“Yeah, that has to be a task that has to start now, for here ...”

Ms. C1 [talking overlap]—“The child of today ...”

Mr. E1—“But it has to start, because otherwise we’ll never have ...”

Mr. D1—“We will not enjoy it ...” [...]

Ms. C1—“And you’re going to be an old man who will not be taken care of ...”

Ms. A1—“And many are ignored, are not they?”

Ms. C1—“Why? Because you did not prepare to take care, and you did not prepare your children to take care of you. So, what happens? Older people are thrown into ILPIs⁵, thrown into some places or left to fend for themselves ... why?”

Mr. E1—“That’s true ...”

Ms. C1—“The son did not prepare to take care of older persons. [...] And you do not realize that tomorrow he’s going to be old. The basis is education!”

In addition, having “education” or “knowledge” is considered by some participants (Ms. A2, Ms. B2 and Ms. D2) as a condition for an older person to participate in public life: “And if he does not have schooling, but he likes to be informed, and everything, he is able, if not, no!” (Ms. A2).

Finally, the precariousness of existing public policies is also emphasized, both those that indirectly affect formal education and the insecurity around a Faculty at night (in the concordant lines of two women in the 60–75 group), such as the lack of resources in the rural area schools:

Ms. B2—“Even if you save yourself ... those in rural areas suffer! Those children in that school, abandoned! They have no bathroom inside, no food! The teacher takes a ... a, a little green vegetable to make a soup, a little something to give a soup to the child. It’s a sadness!”

Participants recognize the impact that education and leisure policies would have on socialization and health and they present a suggestion:

Mr. D1—“[...] I think this is missing for us. Something that calls us and that can unite us. I mean, what do we need? We end up being alone at home. [...] Any-

⁵ “ILPI” stands for the Long-Stay Institutions for Older People (Nursing homes).

way, either now or later, we’ll be alone at home. Alone at home, it’s just problems. Right? So, this socialization of people is necessary. I think it needs programs aimed at meeting somehow, or walking or running or just participating in some kind of talk about food, which I think is very important.”

Mr. E1—“No doubt ...”

Mr. D1—“Right? Health, kind of prevention, I do not know what. So that would have to be a regular program. Not only in the neighborhood ...”

b. Activities and Spaces

Although participants complain about the precariousness of public policies for education and leisure in general, and in particular for older people, they recall, throughout the discussions, the innumerable activities and spaces existing in the neighborhood. They mention both formal education spaces (schools, colleges) and non-formal education and informal education spaces (with emphasis on churches, equipment within the City Hall of the district of Mooca Park and the SABESP Park).

After complaining about the insecurity and consequent impossibility of attending a square where gym equipment for older people had been installed, a woman complains about the lack of alternatives in addition to the churches:

Ms. C1—“[...] What happens, most of the old people, what they do: they go to church. So that’s where you see the mamas of San Gennaro, the mamas of San Vito ... The people go to church. It’s the only focus left for older persons, as if being religious was the only function we have.”

However, throughout the speeches in the two focus groups, various educational and/or leisure activities offered in the neighborhood or nearby are remembered, such as: “language courses”; “Tai Chi Chuan”, “gymnastics”, “swimming”, “shows”, “walks”, “water aerobics”, “Senior dance”; “Lian Gong”, “parties”, “theater”, “card game”, “chess”, “embroider”, “crochet”, “read”. They complain about the lack of leisure activities and the precarious disclosure of those that exist. They remember two theaters, the typical festivals (especially those of the churches), shows and concerts. Participants in the 60–75 group criticize the lack of activities in the neighborhood’s nursing homes, noting that the older people are “apathetic” in front of the television. They note that only very expensive institutions of this type offer theater and parties.

Participants complain about the closure of some spaces where there were shows. They suggest the use of some areas and facilities of the neighborhood for other activities, such as the area of a “confined fair” (Ms. C1 and Mr. E1 and Ms. A1), and some old fabrics (Ms. A1 and Mr. E1).

c. Participate in Research

The socio-educational dimension (Salgado 2007) related to the participation in the research was highlighted, and this represented an opportunity for socialization, to meet new people. Several studies (Wilhelmson et al. 2005; Bowling 1995; Wiggins et al. 2004) point to the importance of social relations as one of the quality of life factors in the perceptions of older people.

Participating in the research was considered an opportunity to learn by listening to the opinions of others: “Well, we learn, listen, the opinion of others” (Ms. D2), everyone’s opinions being respected (Ms. C1).

Participants also emphasized their willingness to contribute to research and the hope that it would have some effect:

Ms. C1—“May it be a seed that will bear fruit for us. Of course, maybe it will take a while. Yes ...”

Mr. E1—“Ah, yes ...”

Ms. C1—“But if we do not start planting today we will not be able to harvest it tomorrow!”

Mr. E1—“I hope something grows!”

Finally, they thought positively the experience, something: “very interesting” (Mr. E2), “exceptional” (Ms. A1), “fun” (Mr. E1). They mentioned that they would like to participate again if there are new opportunities:

“Very interesting, this ... I would always like to participate in things like that!

How the time passed quickly!” (Mr. F2)

“Every time you have something, you can call me and I’ll come!” (Ms. A2)

3.2.2 Learning and Accessibility

Although the research participants recognize that there are some educational activities in the neighborhood, they identify barriers that often compromise access to these opportunities. They also identify factors that would facilitate access to some sites and services. According to the Brazilian Standard of Accessibility to buildings, equipment and the urban environment (ABNT NBR 9050, of 2015), accessibility means:

possibility and condition of getting, perceiving and understanding for a safe and autonomous use of spaces, furniture, urban equipment, buildings, transport, information and communication, including its systems and technologies, as well as other services and facilities open to the public, of public, private or collective use, both in urban and rural areas, by people with disabilities or reduced mobility.

A study in France with older people revealed that those living in more favorable geographical environments used to go out more frequently than those living in environments with higher geographical barriers (Chapon et al. 2011). In Mooca, the participants’ speech revealed factors that hinder or favor this condition of reaching educational facilities and activities: proximity (a), admission criteria (b), information and communication (c), affordability (d), security (e) and interest (f).

a. Proximity

Proximity appears as a positive factor for access to educational and leisure facilities and services: “For example, we have *Sesc Belenzinho*, which is relatively close to us” (Ms. C1). The existence of public transportation is a facilitator on the matter

of distance: “Yes, it is only there at *Bom Pastor*, right? It’s quite close, you take a bus and there it is!” (Ms. B2).

This finding confirms the WHO (2007a, p. 33) view: “Living close to services and facilities is also seen as an age-friendly feature”. As mentioned by the WHO (2007a, p. 33): “in San José, older people valued living in close proximity to public, commercial and religious services”, and “in a number of cities, such as Nairobi, Udaipur and Udine, not living in close proximity to such services is seen as a problem”.

b. Admission

The access to educational, cultural and leisure activities will also depend on admission criteria, such as, for instance, a limited number of vacancies:

Ms. A1—“But you have to sign up and wait for them to call you.”

Mr. E1—“It’s because they have a limited number, right?”

Another admission criterion identified is to be part of a certain professional category or to be associated with a determinate organization. Participants in the 60–75 group complain about an important facility that was once open to all, but which was now restricted to commerce workers and their dependents. One participant noted that the activities of a major industry-maintained association remain open to all. Participants of the 76+ group pointed out that for activities in the SABESP Park it would be enough to enroll, and there is no need to be a member of the institution that promotes activities in the area. The excess of people (crowded places, such as the reminded San Gennaro Church party) also represents a barrier for some of the study participants.

c. Information and Communication

The main accessibility problem explicitly identified concerning the access to educational, cultural and leisure activities in the neighborhood was the lack of divulgation:

“Look, there are things around here, just like you said, right, that we don’t have access, that we don’t know. [...] So there are some courses, but it is not being publicized.” (Ms. C1)

“[...] that’s what she said: this kind of thing is not disclosed to people from Mooca!” (Ms. A1)

“When it does, it should be more publicized.” (Mr. D1, on activities of an older persons association)

Participants in the 60–75 group mention that few people know about the reopening of a public theater and the existence of another theater. At one point, one participant talks about a free show that would take place in the City Hall of the District of Mooca and two participants did not know:

Ms. A1—“I didn’t know!”

Ms. C1—“[...] You see? Something that is not widespread!”

Participants complain that the only communication they receive is advertisements of pizzerias and, at election time, of candidates! They agree that a neighborhood newspaper would be a good alternative for the broadcasting of events and activities, but they consider that there should be a greater distribution of the existing neighborhood newspapers.

Participants in the 76+ group affirm that the dissemination of activities and events is by “word of mouth”. Two of them state that if one searches, he finds activities (bringing the idea of a more proactive attitude in access to information). Still on the media, some participants report listening to the radio, but they say there are no news about the neighborhood or the country. They point out that, about the neighborhood, the only thing reported are the typical church parties, but that, according to them, it is to invite people from all over the city, and not specifically the residents of Mooca.

Three of the five participants in the 60–75 group say they use the Internet as a means of information and communication. They mention groups in social networks and cell phone apps that publicize activities and news about the neighborhood. In the 76+ group, three women mention TV as an information medium they use and a man points to his preference for the Internet.

Participants agree that the Internet has everything: “from the whole world, from the whole Brazil, from the whole São Paulo” (Mr. F2), and even “gossip” (Mr. F2 and Ms. B2). One of the women said she was not interested in the Internet because it “absorbs you”, in agreement with two other women. On the media content, two participants say they hate news about politics and like watching sports. Some women say they like to watch soap operas. In short, in terms of content, participants report that there are lots of good things, but also “a lot of crap”. In this regard, two participants comment that they are not able to pay for operators that would broaden the alternatives of television broadcasts. In Brazil, watching television is a common leisure activity for older people: in 2013, about 32% of older persons declared to watch television for 3h or more a day (IBGE 2014; APUD IBGE 2015).

Therefore, the focus group discussions under analysis reveal not only barriers related to access to information about educational activities that take place in the neighborhood, but also to the media and information (such as the low distribution of neighborhood newspapers or the impossibility of paying for television operators that offer an expanded range of channels). The new media appear more as an alternative for younger elder participants than for older ones.

d. Affordability

The Statute of Older Persons (art. 23) established the right to at least 50% discount in sport and cultural events to promote this group’s access to culture and leisure. The issue of gratuity was highlighted in several speeches, appearing as an important factor in the participants’ opinion:

“[...] In that gym, every morning, there is a free physical education teacher, I know it because my wife goes at 8:00 in the morning [...] it is free!” (Mr. E1)

Ms. C1—“[...] If it was free for older persons, it would be, for us, here in *Mooca*, something super close, very clean, well structured ...”

Mr. E1—“Wow, very well remembered!”

Ms. C1—“And free!”

According to some participants, even if there are free activities, they are more restricted, and places are limited. Some of them remember a seniors’ association that charges a monthly fee, because it would have “teachers, instructors”. Thus, some of these participants seem to admit the levying of a contribution in some cases:

Mr. D1—“Look, the issue of gratuity ...”

Ms. A1—“It’s relative, right?”

Mr. D1—“Yes.”

Mr. E1—“Yes, sometimes there is no problem with a nice contribution.”

This conversation is followed by a critical reflection in the sense that the society has not yet awakened to the fact that older people are “good consumers”:

Mr. D1—“But over time I also think that society itself will realize that we are also consumers.”

Mr. E1—“Without a doubt.”

Mr. D1—“Right? It’s going to wake up to this.”

Mr. E1—“A good consumer!”

Ms. A1—“Much more than the others!”

Mr. E1—“Oddly enough ...”

Mr. D1—“Unfortunately we are ... just consumers [laughing]”

Ms. C1—“We only consume ...”

This dialogue reflects the recognition of the economic man’s rise in the contemporary consumption society (Marques 2007), which also marks a change in the role of older persons in society, freeing them from the exclusion paradigm due to lack of productive work, but meaning an inclusion in the world of consumption with chances and dangers (Doll 2008).

e. Security

The attendance of some places in the neighborhood is, according to some opinions, compromised by the feeling of insecurity, which is caused by the presence of homeless people:

Ms. C1—“Near where I live, they made a, a park for ... with activities, with those fitness equipment for older people, it was invaded by homeless people, so we don’t have that thing down there, and it was a very good place. And ...”

Ms. A1—“On *Piratininga* Street, right?”

Ms. C1—“No, I live in *Visconde de Parnaíba*, near the Museum.”

Mr. E1—“Right ...”

Ms. A1—“What happens is that, at first, you could visit the museum; now you can’t.”

Mr. E1—“It’s a shame!”

Ms. C1—“No, it has become no man’s land over there!”

Ms. A1—“Lots of homeless people ...”

Mr. E1—“Wow!”

Ms. A1—“So there’s no way!”

In fact, the speech of one of the participants suggests that if they do not really represent an insecurity factor, the homeless may represent, for some, a nuisance:

“[...] it opens at 9 am, they get inside and sleep over the tables. So, I say: ‘Gee, right, this is no place to sleep, isn’t it?’ But neither security nor the librarians nor the staff will say a word to them. They just keep drooling over the newspapers ...” (Ms. B1, referring to their attendance in a public library).

Another security issue that may compromise the participation of older people in educational and leisure activities is the inadequate and bumpy paving of the streets. This was one of the major criticisms about the open spaces of the neighborhood (Graeff et al. 2017). Several participants reported already having suffered falls due to this problem. In that sense, when commenting on the low attendance of the library, Ms. B1 also mentioned the poor condition of the neighborhood’s sidewalks as a barrier.

f. Interest

If on the one hand some participants point to the older people’s willingness to “be useful” and not staying at home, as it will be discussed later, the lack of interest or the “laziness” are also remembered as a factors which compromises the participation in existing activities:

“You know that also people are kind of lazy, isn’t it? Because there are free activities.” (Ms. B1)

“There are great things here, within the Regional Park [City Hall of the District of Mocoa]. But there is not much attendance. [...] So people are very lazy ...” (Ms. B1)

The same lady also criticizes the low attendance at Sunday morning concerts that existed in a public theater, saying that although she invited people and there were many residential buildings near the place, nobody would go.

In the 76+ group, the participants remember the strong absenteeism in a group of older women who meet in the library because, according to them, older people have no interest, they want to stay quiet:

Ms. A2—“[...] I think that the older women lacked interest in wanting ... don’t wanna ...”

Ms. B2—“Mingle!”

Ms. C2—“They want their peace! [...] They miss a lot of the meetings, don’t they?”

The lack of interest and the laziness can be attitudinal barriers of the person himself; but other people’s behaviors and attitudes may also restrict the participation of older people, which will be seen, partly, in the next analytical category.

3.2.3 Education: Respect, Consideration

In both groups analyzed, the term education was more often used with the meaning of respect, consideration. The recurrent subject in this regard was the lack of respect for older persons (a), perceptions were also identified in the opposite direction, the respect for older persons (b), and, lastly, other subjects less present related to the lack of education/respect in relation to other aspects (c).

a. Lack of respect for older persons

The opinion about the existence of a lack of respect in regards to older persons was very strong among study participants. Many speeches reveal this feeling regarding the treatment received by the young people, by people in general (society) and by government.

The following speeches are some examples that explicitly refer to young people:

Ms. C1—“[...] Because the young run over!”

Mr. E1—“Yeah, the young really do not worry a lot.”

Ms. A1—“The education go away, people!”

Ms. C1—“Another day I cried arriving at home because, as I told, near my house has a sports field, and I live there over twenty years, in my home, sporadically that kids are there. And I have my cats. Of course, at night I call them. I was in the middle of the street, and a kid shouted: ‘here comes the old crazy cat woman!’ I was so shocked! I stopped and started to cry! I was hurt! [...] But the lack of education ...”

Ms. A1—“The education disappeared, people!”

Mr. E1—“Disappeared ...”

Ms. C1—“[...] these kids are cruel! [...] We see many older people in my region helping each other. But if you need a young, you forget!”

When asked if there are intergenerational activities, the participants not only reinforced this neglect by young: “First, young does not like to be with the older people” (Ms. A1), but also revealed the other side of the coin:

Mr. E1—“This new youth, he is right, because this new youth has few to transfer to us. It is a youth that, unfortunately, is empty.”

Ms. A1—“Hunting Pokemons!”

Mr. A1—“The Pokemon hunters, precisely! So, what happens? It turns out that it is difficult to interact with a person who has nothing to interact with. Do you know? So, you should interact with people who was, at least, something a little closer to you.”

Ms. A1—“If not, nothing comes out.”

Mr. E1—“It is impossible! With the kids, it is impossible, do you understand?”

This perception of neglect of youth regarding to older people also appeared in the 76+ group: “The youth only wants to stay with the youth, never mix with older persons. Today, older people does not exist to the youth!” (Ms. B2). The exception was a retired professor that states feel that they, in general, “are polite, in large part polite” (Mr. F2), although it is not possible, according to him, to expect that the treatment is like London or Paris, nor like “antiquely”, according to Ms. B2. Mr. F2 shows a positive feeling dissonant about the young: “[...] the young of Moooca are ... the young of São Paulo ... I like too much! [...] I’ve worked with young people the whole life. There was a very large improvement! Nobody can escape from evolution, ok? [...]”

Regarding the responsibility towards the youth in terms of formal education, an old woman reports an interesting case. In a bus that she used to take there were always a group of students with hearing impairment occupying the priority seats (reserved by the Brazilian law for older persons, pregnant and persons with disabilities, among others), while many older people with reduced mobility were stand, holding on to keep from falling. She said: “they are healthy teenagers with 13, 14, 15 years old. They have the hearing impairment, but it is not as if they were disabled” (Ms. B1). She told that one day she complained of this situation for a teacher who follows the group of teenagers and the teacher said: “Oh, you know what you have to do, don’t? You need to touch in their arms and speak, you have to show the picture [referring to the signaling of priority seats]!” During the focus group, the participant said that she would never do that, because she think that it would be “ugly” for the school. However, she thinks that the teacher probably has commented something with the students, because they no longer occupied those seats. The interesting aspect in this case is to confirm the difficulty of the population (and the own interested) to deal with the priority seats: one often lacks common sense.

Most of the speeches from participants agree that neglect and disrespect for older people by young are unfortunately common in Brazil. In contrast, as highlighted in a dialogue in the 60–75 group that will be explored later on, participants consider that in other countries, the young would be taught to respect older people.

With regard to people in general, many of the disrespect situations to older people reported occur in public transport:

Ms. A1—“There are some drivers here [...] And sometimes there are many people, and an older person that does not want do pass the card. They give a show! They give a big show! They made an old man ... get off everybody, to the old man pass the card on the bus ratchet, turn and send everyone up. I told: ‘I can’t believe in a thing like this’. He did this!” [...]

Mr. D1—“Well, we return to the root ...”

Ms. A1—“Yes, the education!” [Many of them spoke at the same time: “the education.”]

Ms. C1—“I’m without the card, so I am passing by front. Some drivers see my ID, I show; another day, one ripped out of my hand to look. I told: ‘Do you know that you can’t remove the ID from my hand? This is unlawful!’—‘I have

to see!’ I told: ‘But I am showing for you. So, you look. ’And they get angry! They don’t accept this!’

Ms. A1—“I already took people from older people place to other person to seat ...”

Ms. C1—“To other older person seat.”

Ms. A1—“Because they stay like this: [pretends to be sleeping] or in the cell phone ...” [Ms. C1 mentions the cell phone at the same time].

Mr. E1: “But there is no respect with older persons!”

Mr. D1—“Ok, now if I have 20 years and don’t have conditions to stand up, I have the right to seat.”

Ms. C1—“Of course!”

Mr. D1—“Right?”

Mr. E1—“Sure!”

Mr. D1—“As well as I have more than 60, can I stand up? Yes! I will stand up! [...] And again we return to issue of the education, to look, to look at each other. If you think that he is worst, so you will give your seat. It is this assessment that we don’t have!”

The following dialogue reproduces a same feeling of indifference of the society in general regarding to older people, concerning to the need of space adaptations:

Mr. E1—“[...] People don’t concern with older persons. Older people have limitations. So, they need to have a handrail, they need to have a support, they need to have something, because this is [cough] what we have. Here the Tobias Barreto Church has nothing. You just have to go there and see.”

Ms. A1—“Really nothing!”

Participants also report that the society considers an older person as high “cost” (Mr. D1), that “only disturbs” (Mr. D1), a “nuisance” (Ms. C1), a “useless” (Mr. E1). That there is no space in the politics for older adults, because they “don’t trust” (Mr. E1) in older people; that “nobody want to hear older persons!” (Mr. E1), that older people “just talk rubbish” (Ms. E1). They also consider that older persons “want to be useful” (Ms. A1), and that society is allowing this, “as long as you have no cost” (Mr. E1), “as long as is volunteer work” (Mr. D1). Some participants share negative images about the old age: “I think that neither we do like to mix with us. [Laughter in general]” (Mr. D1), or, sometimes, they disagree:

Mr. D1—“I think that we are a dead weight!”

Mr. E1—“It is true!”

Mr. D1—“It is a burden for society!”

Ms. B1—“Oh, don’t talk a think like this! We already made so much!”

Lastly, the neglect of the government itself regarding to older people also does not go unnoticed, although with some nuances:

Moderator—“And with regarding to the government?”

Mr. E1—“No!”

Moderator—“Do you think that there is respect regarding to older people?”

Ms. A1—“Imagine, none! Nothing!”

Moderator—“No?”

Ms. A1—“No.”

Moderator—“Is there a consensus?”

Mr. E1—“They even made an office ...”

Moderator—“So Ms ... I think that there is a nuance there ... How do you see?”

Ms. B1—“Is there any policy, no? So they try to be attentive, but many thing is not respected, no?”

b. Respect for older persons

The reports also bring positive examples, of education/respect in the treatment to older people, being, however, almost all related to “other societies”, “other countries”:

Ms. C1—“In other societies, an older person is valued by the experience he/she can convey [...]”

Mr. E1—“I know other countries” [...] “I know the public transport in other cities, and it is even a problem, no doubt, of education, because you go, enter in the bus, you enter in a train, enter in somewhere, and people note that you are an older person and offer their seat.”

Ms. A1—“Precisely!”

Mr. E1—“There are a few shameless who puts in the invitation jobs an age limit. [Other agree] I think it’s an absurd! You go in countries, for example, mainly the Eastern, where an older person is highly valued!”

Ms. A2—“And in the Europe, so?”

Mr. E1—“You know, in the Europe ... Why? Because he has ...”

Ms. C1—“Experience!”

Mr. E1—“ [...] Thing that the young doesn’t have! But here in Brazil, no. We are a very young country!”

Ms. A1—“A country that doesn’t have these things is France. [...] France doesn’t treat you well just for being an older person ...”

Mr. E1—“No, doesn’t treat.”

Ms. A1—“ [...] I was in Portugal, I was in Spain, in Switzerland ... they treat you [in a positive sense]! Because you are an older person! In Italy ...”

Mr. E1—“It’s the respect, but it’s also the education ...”

Ms. A1—“Yes, also ... In Italy also no. But the worst country that I found was France! They don’t have education ...”

Mr. E1—“None!”

Ms. C1—“... with older people! Nothing!” Not even to serve!”

Mr. E1—“They have no education neither with them [...]”

Ms. A1—“Paris!” [...] “In Paris ... they don’t pay attention to you!” [...]

Mr. E1—“You go to Japan, the people ...”

Ms. B1—“But you need to speak French, don’t?”

Mr. E1—“[...] care of you! It’s so different! [...] But they are polite. [...] People respect you. The young, look, the young with yellow, pink painted hair, they care of you. Why? He was educated to take care of you. He was educated to know that he would be an older person. That is the difference.”

Ms. C1—“It’s necessary the Eastern conception, that the child of today is the older person of the day after tomorrow ...”

Mr. E1—“But he, he, he is taught to this!”

Due to the respect and the public policies that, according to the participants, would benefit older people in Portugal, a participant points to the idea of migrating to this country:

Ms. C1—“Look, in terms of service, one think that my son talks a lot for me, which he wanted me to go to Portugal. He says that there an older person, a retired is very well seen, the Brazilian.”

Mr. E1—“Very!”

Ms. A1—“Very! [...] They treat you like this, outside normal.”

Ms. C1—“We stay ... The retired is ten years exempt of ...”

Ms. A1—“Of anything!”

Mr. E1—“It is true!”

Ms. C1—“[...] of taxes.” [The participants continue talking about advantages in health service in Portugal.]

Ms. C1—“I told to my son, I will complete the Graduation and I will go to Portugal!” [...]

Mr. E1—“I went to Portugal last year, the uncles of my wife live there. Obviously, they are all older persons, and it is an extraordinary service!”

In Brazil, according to some participants, at least the older people would respect older people:

Ms. C1—“Only if is other older person helping an older person.”

Ms. A1—“Precisely!” [...]

Mr. E1—“But older people yet help older people.” [...]

Ms. C1—“So older persons help themselves! We see many older adults in my region helping themselves.”

c. Other issues

In both focus groups, there are reports about the lack of education/respect of the Brazilian people regarding to other aspects. In the 76+ group, the opinion of some participants stands out (Ms. B2, Ms. D2) about the lack of respect of the young people who don’t greet the bus drivers in the public transport. In the 60–75 group, the Brazilians’ neglect with the public assets is criticized, especially the public toilets:

Ms. B1—“This thing of toilets? For example, here in the library, there is the accessible toilets, doesn’t? People can use. [...] But they spoil too much toilet

paper. They should put cut toilet paper there in the office to the people take, because they would throw the whole roll over there to clog. Do you know?"

Mr. E1—"It's education ..."

Ms. A1—"Brazilian people don't have education!" [...]

Ms. C1—"It's lack of education!"

Ms. B1—"It's like on the train, they complain because the toilet is closed, there is no paper, etc. Well, I think if each one of you carry your toilet paper, it's good enough. Because, if it's put, it ends fast! [...]"

Mr. E1—"Unfortunately this is true!"

Ms. B1—"[...] take only 5 or 6 to dry, which there is no need ..."

Ms. C1—"Sometimes, people take away, they pick up the paper roll and take away!"

Ms. A1—"Sometimes they take away."

Ms. B1—"No, and by venom, people throw in the toilet!"

Mr. E1—"Besides, they clogged the toilet!"

3.2.4 Learning and Work

Learning-related issues were invoked by research participants in both paid work (a) and unpaid work (b).

a. Paid Work: Discrimination despite the Knowledge

One lady pointed out that despite having a background and knowledge, she was discriminated against in access to paid work:

Ms. A1—"Look, after they trampled over me, that 'my age did not allow' [emotional voice], I never looked for anything anymore! They humiliated me, because I spoke English, I spoke Spanish [...]. They came to my face and said like this: oh, your resume is good, but your age does not allow it. Girl, I went out from there devastated, devastated!" [...]

Mr. E1—"[...] So no one wants to hear, forgetting that an older person has in his back an average of 40 years of experience, each one in his own area, we have an experience that we would sell easily! And secondly, onh ... when you think onh, in a, in a ... let's say like that, in a job proposal, in a proposal, you're automatically discarded! [...] There is no chance, there is no chance!"

Ms. A1: "After so much studying, college, two languages, and the guy looks at me and says, 'Your age does not allow it!' It devastates you ... so what did you study so hard for?"

The perception of an ageism prejudicial to older people in access to paid work is corroborated in other speeches, such as this: "When an older man can get a job, it appears in the press, right? [in ironic tone]" (Ms. B1).

Research participants recognize the relativity of the age frame that determines being too old to work: "When you are fifty you are old! The firms no longer want it!" (Ms. C2, with the assent of Ms. B2).

Another interesting aspect highlighted in the 76+ group was the idea of the changing role of women, who would seek formal education and work in building their independence:

Mr. F2—“But today the woman is an important part in the home economy!”

Ms. D2—“That’s right!”

Ms. B2—“It’s true!”

Mr. F1: “So it’s hard for a woman to want to stay home.”

Ms. D1—“You can’t!”

Mr. F1—“She wants to graduate and go to work, [...] to make her own independence!”

Ms. B1—“Independence!” [simultaneous speech]

The conquest of this independence seems fundamental, since in the 33 cities that gave origin to the “Age-Friendly Cities” guide, the situation of many older women was that of facing the barriers that affected the economically most vulnerable groups (WHO 2007a). Finally, it should be pointed out that ageism related to older people in labor relations is certainly not a Brazilian peculiarity. It is a challenge to be faced on a world scale, since “reports of age discrimination in the workforce are widespread” and “this is manifested in a variety of ways, ranging from feelings of disrespect to other workers to flat refusal by employers to hire older workers” (WHO 2007a, p. 54).

b. Voluntary Work: an Opportunity to Teach

According to the research participants, if there is a lack of alternative paid work for the qualified older person, the same does not happen regarding voluntary work. In both groups, the results suggest that this is a more common alternative for women than for men, revealing itself to the older persons as an opportunity to teach. A lady who volunteers comments, with the agreement of others: “[...] there is always something that one knows and can pass on to others, you know, an embroidery, a ..., I don’t know, a knit, crochet, internet ...” (Ms. B1). Both the value of voluntary work for the person (“leaving the house!” Ms. B1), and society (“getting others out of the house,” Ms. B1) are recognized.

Our study’s results match the results obtained in the 33 cities that participated in the first study of the “Age-friendly Cities” strategy: “in most cities, participants say there are many opportunities to volunteer” (WHO 2007a, p. 51). According to “Age-friendly Cities” guide, “in many of the participating cities, older people are very actively engaged in voluntary activities and enjoy many benefits from volunteering, including a sense of self worth, of feeling active, and of maintaining their health and social connections” (WHO 2007a, p. 51).

The problem is that an age-friendly community should provide options for older people to continue to contribute to their communities not only through voluntary work, but also through paid employment (WHO 2007a), if they need, or if they choose. In the neighborhood of *Mooca*, the opinion of some retirees is that the alternative of paid work would be difficult for older persons.

3.2.5 Learning and Aging

This category includes two themes that have emerged in the focus groups: learning in gerontological topics (a) and learning in different stages of life (b).

a. Learning in Gerontological Topics

Who is responsible for education in gerontological themes, so that there would be more understanding and respect for older people in society? The speeches analyzed here sometimes hold the school, sometimes the families accountable for the failures in this sense. At times, people claim that older persons themselves play some part in this awareness-raising process. The report on the young students with hearing impairment mentioned above clearly revealed this tension: who should be brought to draw the attention of the youngsters who occupy the priority seats in the presence of the supposedly most needy older person, the teacher or the older person himself? The changes that participants seem to want in terms of greater respect and consideration for older people require a broad cultural shift that should be encouraged in all three spheres of education (formal, non-formal and informal).

In the 33 cities originally investigated using the “Age-friendly Cities” method, the common view was that “education about aging should begin early and extend to all groups in society” (WHO 2007a, p. 47). In the neighborhood of Mooca, in more than one moment, the participants talk about changing de culture of older adults care, an awareness that, according to them, should start early and at home:

Ms. C1—“At my home, my son was born seeing my grandmother and my parents ... they were getting older. He saw my grandmother pass away, all of us taking care of her.”

Ms. A1—“Wow, just like my brother. Sorry, you see, people ...” [crying, emotional]

Ms. C1—“He saw my father pass away, and we all took care. My mother ... So he went along with our older people who died at home.”

Mr. E1—“Yeah, the example is very important.”

Ms. C1—“So today, when he’s going to assist an older man, he attends with an exceptional affection because I say ‘take it as if it were your grandfather or your grandmother’. So, I guess if you don’t give it from the cradle, it’s no use demanding society afterwards.”

At another moment, when an older woman told about a fight for a priority seat on public transport involving a mother with a toddler and another woman, Mr. E1 noted: “We didn’t learn it at school!”, leaving doubts about whether his understanding is that the school has failed in these issues, or if he thinks that this is not something you learn in school, but rather should come from home. Be that as it may, by these and other lines, participants seem to understand that the primary responsibility in terms of education for older people care is up to the family. They do not comment on the obligation to insert content related to the aging process at all levels of formal education, provided for, by law, since 1994 (National Policy on Older Persons, art. 10, 3, b) and reinforced in the Statute of Older Persons (art. 22), although still little implemented.

b. Learning and Stages of Life

In the most interesting speech about the perception of roles related to learning in the different stages of life, Ms. C1 said that in Brazil, the children are taught that they have rights and guarantees and that everyone should respect them. She also said that the young person has to study because it is a given right and that “adults are tired because they work”, so, therefore, in her opinion, nobody notices that they are aging, approaching the ones they does not care because they were not educated to take care of: the older people. It is clear in several speeches that most of the participants consider that there are failures in today’s education of children, who live with the “television nanny” (Mr. E1). As for the youth, as mentioned before, except for Mr. F2, the vision of the other participants is quite negative. The criticism that Ms. C1 seems to make is that, in her view, there would be more emphasis on the teaching of rights than on the teaching of the duties of children and young people. As for the adults, still in her opinion, educational possibilities seem to be suffocated by work. It is interesting to note that this participant is herself an undergraduate university student, although she was already graduated from a higher education course. It is, therefore, an example of some retired seniors who have been returning to university for a second degree.

It is curious to notice that in some of the two analyzed groups there was no mention of Third Age Universities, although there have been several initiatives of this type for some years in São Paulo (Cachioni 2012), and even special courses offered to older people in as university located in the neighborhood of Mooca.

Finally, it should be remembered that an age-friendly city should promote not only educational, cultural and leisure activities exclusively for older persons, but also provide intergenerational meetings (WHO 2007a), where different age groups can learn from each other. Participants in the two focus groups pointed to the difficulties in intergenerational activities involving older people and young people because of the different interests that would separate them. At the end of the discussions of the 60–75 group, a typical activity was nevertheless remembered as something that would unite all generations: football matches at the Juventus Stadium, where “you see from a newborn baby in Juventus uniform to older people with Juventus shirts” (Ms. C1).

In short, it seems that in a neighborhood where people understand that the relations between neighbors are still something important and somehow preserved (Graeff et al. 2017), perhaps this proximity could be harnessed in the development of opportunities for the reestablishment of intergenerational dialogue. As highlighted in the Age-friendly Cities guide (p. 42): “Better integration of generations is seen as a way to counter ageism in society”. In the Mooca neighborhood, the analysis of two groups of older people suggests that raising awareness of this intergenerational contact should not only be directed towards the young, but also to the older persons themselves. To what extent are older people groups and other institutions attended by the older persons today opened to discussion about youth and acquaintanceship with the youth?

4 Limitations

Due to the small sample in both the number of focus groups and the number of participants, the results of this study cannot be considered exhaustive and they are not generalizable to all Mooca's old persons population. However, the findings have likely captured the majority of the themes on the lifelong learning topic, including those most broadly shared, that could have been raised by older persons living in Mooca through the age-friendly cities method as described above. In their broad study on data saturation in focus groups (with a total of 40 focus groups), Guest et al. (2017) assessed that almost two-thirds of the content codes were generated from the first focus group. Their data suggest that, in a study with a relatively homogeneous population using a semi-structured guide (that was the case of our research), a sample size of two to three focus groups will likely capture at least 80% of themes on a topic, including those most broadly shared. They also concluded that: "90% of themes could be discovered within three to six focus groups" (p. 18).

5 Final considerations

The content analysis of the transcripts from two focus groups with older persons residents of Mooca revealed that the theme of lifelong learning crosses several of the eight topics proposed by the "Age-Friendly Cities" method. Still, perhaps it would be important to insert on the focal groups' guidelines some specific questions about formal and informal education, in order to stimulate debate on these topics.

In the speeches, there was little emphasis on formal education, but aspects related to respect for older people and opportunities for leisure and social participation were quite present. Could one suspect that formal education and literacy did not come up as a salient theme in these two groups because the participants are a comparatively highly educated segment of the Brazilian population, or could one suspect that it happened because of the inexistence of questions related to this specific topic? It would be important to conduct further research, with a more heterogeneous profile of participants.

As verified in the speeches of the analyzed groups, the simple offer of activities does not guarantee lifelong learning, since different types of barriers may make it difficult for older people to access them.

If lifelong learning can be considered as one of the pillars of active aging, it is necessary for society and public authorities to recognize this broader concept of education as a public policy to be implemented and strengthened. The participant's reports reinforce the importance of thinking about education, culture and leisure in an integrated way with the different areas of public policies: transportation, health, housing, among others. The participants seem to recognize that lifelong learning is not only achieved through educational activities for adults and older persons, but above all with education of all on gerontological themes. Therefore, regarding the challenges related to aging and old age, Gerontology seems more than ever to be the privileged interdisciplinary field for the various knowledges called to dialogue.

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