

POINT OF VIEW

MOBILITY FOR AN AGEING POPULATION

An ever-expanding population segment that is demanding and far from captive. What if mobility for seniors were the real laboratory for tomorrow's flexible, easy-to-access transport offerings?



Transport for seniors. An obligation? A headache? A business opportunity? In fact, it is probably all of these. For Transit Authorities as well as for transport operators, two statistics and one reality are impossible to ignore. In almost every country, whether industrialised, emerging or developing, the percentage of over-65s is steadily rising and will reach 25% in 2030 in the countries of Western Europe. But alongside that fact, their percentage contribution to public transport patronage is small: just 5% for example on the Belgian capital's network (Brussels); the same is true for a network of middling size in the north of France (Maubeuge). The figure is marginally higher in Madrid, Spain (7%). And the aforementioned reality stems precisely from this mismatch: travellers of senior age are not a uniform category; they are difficult to pin down and even more difficult to satisfy.

Senior ambivalence ... Less hurried than the harried worker, seniors have no intention of allowing any interference with the management of their own time and are fussy about timetables. And although they are not short of a euro, they want nothing to do with season tickets, which they see as restrictive, preferring flexible billing or no charge at all. This is an equation operators try to resolve with a multitude of programmes: special passes, or even free travel, transport on demand, assisted transport, more comfortable facilities, etc. The new imperatives of road safety and the downward trend in percentage ownership of individual vehicles in congested cities is amplifying this demand for mobility, one that cannot be ignored by transport operators or elected representatives. Because seniors not only travel, they

also vote, they are a source of managers for organisations in civil society, and they write letters to customer claim services, etc. In short, they are often primary partners, as well as demanding and observant customers, of the public transport service offering.

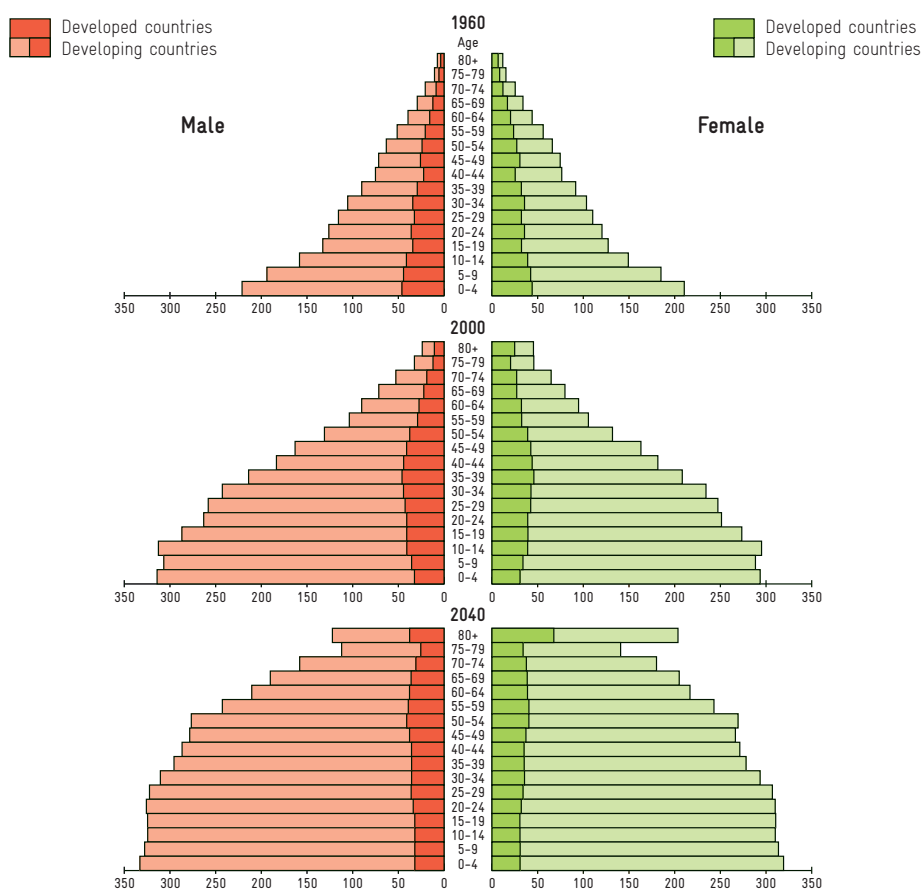
They already embody an individualisation of behaviour that is radically changing our contemporary society. As such, their needs and mind-set probably herald the nature of transport demand over the next few decades. "The rates, reasons and regularity of traveling by retired people are not captured by conventional models," explains Sandrine Garnier, author of a study on the mobility of seniors in Europe (GART¹, 2009). Only a flexible, varied and segmented market offering can meet these new needs, which are far removed from solutions focusing exclusively on infrastructure or technology. Might this be quality getting its own back on an obsession with volume and reproducible journeys? The mobility of seniors does in fact demand flexible, reli-

able and highly secure provision of services based on effective and comprehensible information. Could this be, in a way, a laboratory for tomorrow's public transport? What it certainly is is a challenge for every actor in day-to-day living in the city and its outlying districts, in the forefront of whom are the transport operators and Transit Authorities, sources of initiatives that are both numerous and unusual.

/ More numerous ...

By 2040, it is estimated that the over-65s will make up 28% of the population of Western Europe and more than 20% of that of North America.

The "grey tsunami" has already begun. Its source can be found in the baby-boom that occurred in western countries in the years following the Second World War and in increasing life expectancy. In 1960, life ex-



SOURCE:
United Nations
Department of
Economic and Social
Affairs ; and US
Census Bureau,
International
Data Base,
December 28, 2007.

FIGURE 1. Population in developed and developing countries by age and sex: 1960, 2000 and 2040.

¹ Formed in 1980, the Groupement des Autorités Organisatrices de Transports (GART) [Grouping of Transit Authorities] is an umbrella body for the elected representatives of local authorities with public transport as part of their official remit (conurbations, territorial, regional government). As a forum for discussion and reflection on travel, it speaks to institutions and the press at national and European levels on behalf of elected representatives with responsibility for transport. It also endeavours to foster exchanges of good practice to meet the expectations of the public where mobility is concerned and to bring together all actors in the transport domain. GART has 275 members.

pectancy at 65 in the Europe of 25 was 10 years. By 2000, it stood at 15.7 years; and in 2020, it will be 20.7, rising to 29.9 in 2050.

Not only are we living to be older, but we are living better when we are older. Life expectancy in good health is rising and the 60-year limit, traditionally the milestone for entry into old age, seems less and less relevant. If the threshold is shifted, this changes perceptions somewhat: in 2040, the over-75s will form 17.8% of the population of Western Europe whereas the over-65s formed 15% in 2008. This has the effect of mitigating the “grey wave”. Such blurring of categories in fact reflects a gradual uncoupling of advancing age from entry into retirement. Today, people can be in their seventies without feeling old. Some even talk in terms of a new life beginning ... especially as current retirees benefit from comfortable retirement income and enjoy living standards close to those of people still in work.

However, such observations should not distort our view of the situation. Firstly, the further retirees get from their period in work the lower their living standards fall, a fact that puts the notion of “increasing wealth” for seniors into perspective. Secondly, even if, given longer lifespans, loss of independence arrives later on average, an increase of half as many again in the numbers of dependent elderly individuals is expected by 2040.

/ but not very homogeneous ...

Although the term “seniors” is a convenient one to describe as a whole a group of individuals associated with the idea of advanced age, being retired is not in itself a social identity. The lifestyle of a sixties-something couple in good health cannot be compared in any way with that of a 92-year-old woman living alone.

A consensus has built up around three typical profiles that define the mobility of a population group that is highly disparate not only in terms of age, but also in terms of its mobility patterns, its demand for transport services and indeed its degree of autonomy.

“Young active retirees”

Freed of all constraints, they are doing what they were unable to do before and indulging in a multitude of activities away from home. As active retirees in good health, their mobility patterns are different from people in work but they do not travel less and they seek com-

fort plus efficiency. The car is the tool that permits that freedom. They are very attached to it. To abandon the car is a sign of physical decline, almost of “social death”. Public collective transport is seen as restrictive.

“Retirees in decline”

These retirees are in less good health and on the way to losing their physical independence. Their mobility is in decline. For them, collective public transport is an alternative to the car, which they see as hazardous, allowing them to preserve their links with society. Comfort and security play a key role at every stage of their journeys. They have trouble envisaging the use of a special transport service such as Transport on Demand (ToD), which they see as stigmatising and associated with major disablement.

“Dependent retirees”

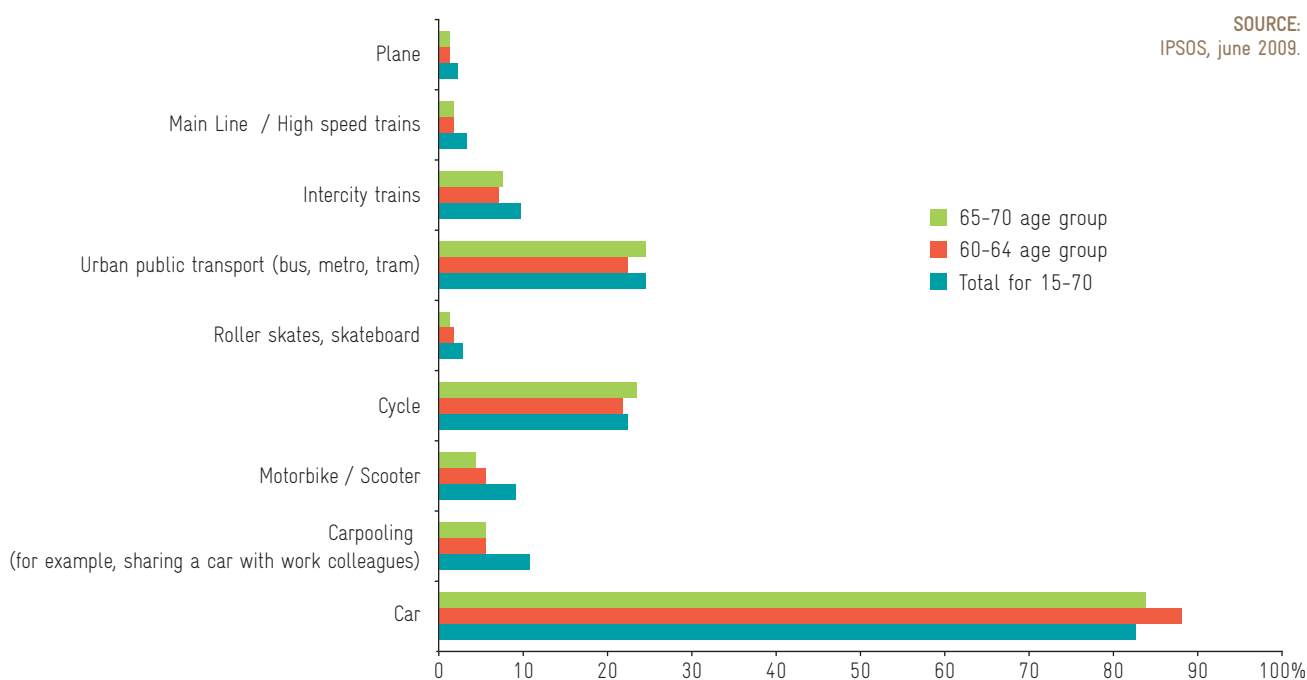
These retirees are very elderly, not in good health and have limited capacity for mobility. Collective public transport is their last resource for independence but they are unable or afraid to travel alone. They may not be in a position to decipher or decode all the signs and symbols in an environment that is overly technical for them. As potential victims of antisocial behaviour or a lack of public-spiritedness on the part of some transport users, they need to be reassured and to get special attention in light of their physical difficulties.

Seniors are therefore far from forming a homogeneous group. It is imperative to bear in mind the diversity of their needs and profiles in order to avoid treating them as a minority apart or solely from the point of view of dependency.

> FAR FROM THE CITY AS CENTRE

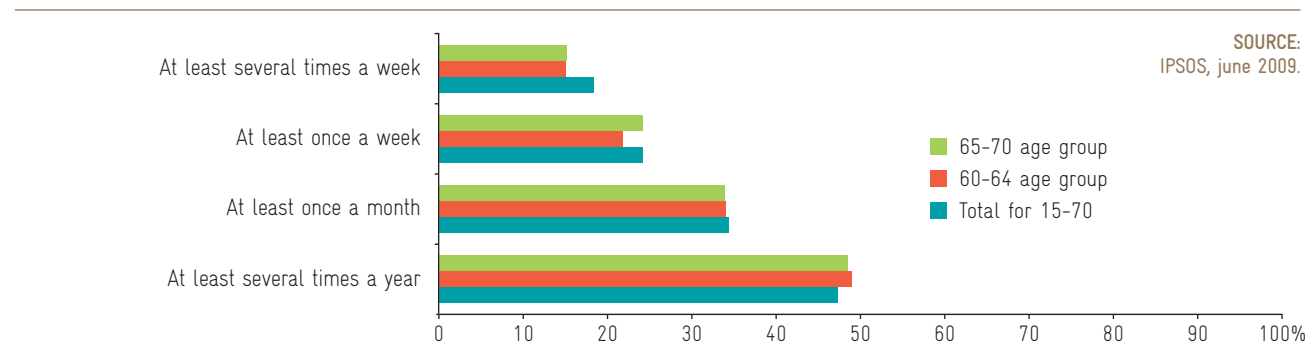
By 2030, the over-65s will be more numerous in outlying districts than in the congested city itself. This is a reversal of the trend assessed in 2009 by the town planning agency in Lyon² (France) which could come about in very many European cities. This prospective overview points up the required adjustments in terms of housing and services.

² The town planning agency for the development of the Lyon conurbation (*Agence d'Urbanisme pour le Développement de l'Agglomération Lyonnaise*) is a non-profit umbrella association for 25 public-sector partners (local government, federations of municipal bodies, chambers of commerce, etc.). Its role is to assist in the harmonisation of public policies. It contributes to planning, definition of urban master plans, and observation; it produces analytical reports and makes proposals to provide leadership in technical working groups and to keep elected representatives informed.



SOURCE: IPSOS, june 2009.

FIGURE 2. Means of transport used once a week at least by age.



SOURCE: IPSOS, june 2009.

FIGURE 3. Use rate of public transport by age (buses, underground, tramways)

/ Seniors in public transport

The mobility patterns of seniors largely reflect those of the population as a whole.

It will be noted that the youngest of the seniors use the car a great deal and the older 65-70 age group use bicycle more than those who are younger.

Seniors are proportionately more numerous than the rest of the population in using public transport, but they use it less frequently.

It is however difficult to define what seniors actually want. The heterogeneous character of this population group makes problematic any overall characterisation. This is notably true because resistance to the ageing process blocks attempts at segmentation.

It is nevertheless the case that their expectations vary: more freedom, more flexibility, more possibilities for some, more comfort, safety and human contact for others, or a personalised service, or even personal assistance, for the most fragile. Seniors are also asking for clear information, punctual, reliable services, but possibly no more than other categories of passenger.

Seniors form an electorate that politicians generally work hard to please. But their increasing percentage in the total population might lead to a questioning of certain facilities that have been granted to them, notably where fares are concerned.

ANALYSIS:**“Seniors no longer want to be shut away”**

Dominique Argoud is a consultant for the Fondation de France³, specialising in the demedicalisation of old age as an issue and care for seniors in society.

› **How generally do you see the future development of the situation of seniors in French society?**

The general trend of history is towards a combat against segregation after decades in which seniors were kept away from society, supposedly for their own good. Retirement homes were built far from the centres of urban life and were difficult for family members to get to. But there has been a gradual change in attitudes towards greater awareness of the negative and counterproductive effects of stigmatising seniors, including from the medical standpoint.

› **What is it that seniors now want?**

These are just trends that are still developing and generalised changes in direction do not always occur at the same speed as do for the avant-garde, but those trends are sufficiently strong for them to be very clear, especially where young retirees and the well-off are concerned. The elderly no longer want to be shut away, they want access to social and cultural life, to be subject to the same requirements as everyone else and to benefit from public services. What is fundamental from their point of view is to be able to choose and not to be captive. The works council of the French electricity board Électricité de France (EDF) conducted a survey a few years ago to find out why those retiring from the company used their social services and benefits so little. The response was “We have spent our entire working lives inside the company and now we want to be outside of it”.

› **Do they apply that same imperative to their mobility?**

The question of mobility does not stand apart as such and seniors see it also in terms of their priorities: safety, freedom, reliability. At root, they want to be the freest possible consumers of transport, but that means that they are also the most demanding because they do not like to be let down, and they especially dislike it when services malfunction. For this reason they are a good yardstick for measuring the quality of the service being provided.

/ Avenues to innovation

The main problem for operators and Transit Authorities is how to take needs into account as far as possible without falling into the trap of building a hyper-segmented market offer. Increasing numbers of innovations seem to be the best response to specific demands from seniors in terms of quality of service and information.

Fare schedules: prioritising flexibility

Should seniors necessarily pay less to travel on buses? On what grounds is age a relevant criterion for granting concessionary fares? Especially when it is remembered that on average retirees have a standard of living equivalent to that of those still in work ... So offering tickets at a reduced rate of 50%, or even free travel to the elderly, is not necessarily THE best and only solution, especially for attracting young retirees to public transport. Those who have always used their car will not be won over by price as the sole argument and those who used the bus to go to work will, once in retirement, be very pleased to escape such daily constraints. The solution might be to look more closely at flexible fare offers that are personalised and involve no commitment.

Some networks such as Belfort-Montbéliard in France or Bremen in Germany have adopted a post-payment scheme. This means that passengers must have a chip card and payment is made by direct debit at the end of the month. The passenger therefore pays only for his or her actual use and the monthly bill may even be subject to a maximum cap.

Dedicated transport: industrial-scale and flexible

Transport on demand, or dedicated transport services, seem in principle to be the ideal solution in rural areas or outlying districts around cities, or to meet the specific needs of certain categories of the population. However, in both these cases, the service satisfies neither the customer nor the Transit Authorities. Lacking information, the target customer base is all too often ignorant of the very existence of the service or how it is used. The cost of such services for the community is often dissuasive for any continuation or extension of them. The positive experience of Connexion in the Netherlands demonstrates that provision of ToD on what is virtually an industrial basis, with very flexible book-

³ The *Fondation de France*, which was set up in 1969, supports concrete, innovative projects that meet the needs of people confronted with problems arising from rapid changes in society. It is active in three areas: assistance for vulnerable individuals, knowledge development, and the environment.

ing procedures up to an hour ahead of departure can guarantee the volume of activity required for the system to be viable over time. At smaller scales than this the system's flaws become apparent: with little awareness of them on the part of the majority of the population, they provide no incentive for those funding them to continue. As for dedicated transport services, they suffer all too often from disorganised operation (failures in quality of assistance to users, poor punctuality).

Assisted transport services fall into the category of personal services. They enable journeys to be made safe from beginning to end. The person accompanying the passenger remains with them throughout the journey and also helps them on return to their home. Partnerships between local authorities, retirement or mutual funds and service providers can allow reasonable prices to be charged.

An effective diagnosis of personalised mobility services is a useful tool in defining what is needed, and provides a source of detailed information invaluable to operators.

Comfort and ease of access. Safety first

This is the nightmare scenario for seniors in buses and trams: an overcrowded vehicle with a crush of passengers, sudden braking by the driver, a fall ... Networks are submerged in complaints of this kind. In fact, the success of small city-centre buses and special shuttle services (to markets for example) is that they reassure elderly passengers who also want escalators and lifts. European Directive 2001/85/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council⁴, the so-called "EU bus and coach directive", has made it imperative to ensure full ease of access to transport services by 2015. In some countries, like in England, vehicles are increasingly accessible ; it's not yet the case in France. And accessible vehicles don't mean accessible areas...

The "Diablins" in Aix-en-Provence, in the South of France, are electric city-centre shuttles that are highly appreciated by the elderly, who form half of the customer base for this service when travelling to doctor's appointments or doing the shopping. Generally speaking, these shuttles are found by senior citizens to offer great value-added (they are ecological, quiet and spacious) and to be reassuring (well-designed interior, seats, handrails, on-board passenger information).

> FRANCE AS AN EXAMPLE, THE LAW ON TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY: 2005, 2015,...

The accessibility statute⁵, which was passed in 2005, imposes on the various levels of local governments an obligation to make accessible the mobility chain within 10 years, i.e. by 2015.

The legislature did however include a precautionary caveat : "other than in cases of proven technical impossibility". Today, half way to the deadline, it is likely that 2015 will not be met, largely for financial reasons, not only because it is not specified by the law, but also because the decrees of enforcement have fallen behind.

It would be far below the expectations of those concerned on the one hand and, on the other, less advanced compared with other European countries which better respect their commitment.

Information and proximity

It is difficult to generalise on the relationship between seniors and travel information. In principle, all seniors want timetable displays that are easier to read along with greater presence of staff in stations and at stops. In fact, the complexity of fare offerings and increasing numbers of routes often require Transit Authorities or operator to clarify matters for their customers. While some of the latter are now experienced users of the Internet, all customers call unanimously for massively scaled-up assistance in circumstances where the network is not operating normally, this being a nightmare where seniors are concerned. Lastly, and once again this is not particularly specific to seniors, they manage quite easily if the information and the service are provided in a smooth and normal manner, but once a spanner is thrown into the works they demand suitable assistance.

Seniors like to ask advice of the driver, or just exchange greetings with him or her or get confirmation that they on the right bus. There is always this same need for reassurance, which may appear incompatible with certain methods for determining duty rosters. Hence the increasingly widespread practice, especially in local neighbourhood buses, of keeping drivers longer on the same route due to the fact that they are highly appre-

⁴ Directive 2001/85/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2001 relating to special provisions for vehicles used for the carriage of passengers comprising more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat, and amending Directives 70/156/EEC and 97/27/EC.

⁵ Law 2005-102 promoting equality of rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship for the disabled, 11 February 2005

ciated front-line contacts for customers. Operators are therefore seeking greater availability from their employees, going beyond the needs of the initial task asked of them, i.e. driving the vehicle.

/ Point of view: senior ambivalence

Free of constraints on their time, but wishing to keep up within society's rhythm; wishing to live differently, but among other members of society ...

Retirement. The word carries with it all the ambivalence of this period in life. Surely retirement is synonymous with retreat, retiring from the battlefield? Seniors have retired from the world of work and are free therefore of time constraints and of demands for productivity and efficiency. But that means that they stand outside the rhythms and social patterns common to all. Which in turn means they need to find their place in the scheme of things.

And they need also to find their place in the world of transport. The mobility of seniors is a faithful reflection of that same ambivalence that can be formalised by making a distinction between different "ages": the age of active retirement and the age of growing dependency as extreme old age is approached. But in reality that same ambivalence will be found in every senior in his or her relationship with the rest of society – society that can be experienced as a source of problems or as a source of mutual help – with technology, with space and with time.

Seniors live in a time that differs from the time of those in work; it is their own time. With the advent of old age, as Montaigne already pointed out in the 16th century, "tiresome toil" is at an end and the time has come for leisure and freedom; and whereas the man who works is beset constantly by impatience, the elderly man is conscious of the value of time. Time is of course that which degrades, erodes, transforms and corrupts, and this is the time that flows unstoppably, physicists' time. But there is also the time that is lived subjectively by all of us, in relation to ourselves, our moods and our activities. From this point of view, seniors can take their time. They take it, they hold it, they can "grasp" the moment. Seniors live in their present moment, which is why they can be patient. And that is an enormous advantage in a world of mobility where time spent waiting, for those in work, is experienced as powerlessness.

But despite this, seniors are uncomfortable with being in a time different from the time of those in work. Many of them nevertheless continue to travel on the same con-

gested bank holidays – perhaps they want to feel they are still "part of things"? Once the age of retirement has arrived, the senior feels increasingly estranged from the logics of stress, speed and efficiency that are so visible in the relationship between those in work and their means of transport. Once again, there is that same ambivalence: freed of time constraints, seniors know how to wait, to bide their time but still they suffer from the sense of being withdrawn, set apart from active social time.

People often make fun of the difficulties seniors have in changing their habits. But the same route travelled on foot or by tram, the same actions constantly repeated – the stamping of the ticket and a quick greeting to the driver – are for many seniors a necessary and beneficial ritual. Repetition creates the ritual, and rituals are a fundamental component of social interaction. The fear of change is the fear that the orderly structure of life is falling apart due to penetration by some outside force. If a ritual disappears and is not replaced by another ritual, the senior is quick to interpret and experience this as evidence of decline. Hence the crucial importance in circumstances of change that the senior should be accompanied by a family member or friend, or perhaps by a professional. Similarly, the rejection of technology, the mobile telephone and Internet is on the one hand a sign of incomprehension of progress, of the onward march of time, and, on the other hand, a form of resistance. That rejection expresses the desire to keep flesh and blood people instead of machines: other people can exchange words, looks, express benevolence or hostility, but always human feelings. A way of breaking down the solitude in which some seniors live. It is yet another expression of the need for social interaction, and is more than simple unthinking rejection of all technological progress.

At root, the fact that society acknowledges the special needs of seniors is, paradoxically, offensive to them. Systems put in place especially for seniors are perceived by them as a reference to their age, to the diminution of their life potential. Such systems force them to see themselves as getting old. And therefore to accept the possibility of loss of their faculties in the not-too-far-distant future, which is experienced as a loss of dignity. And beyond that will be the loosening grasp on the surrounding world, on their bodies, on their movements and on their personal choices. The stoic Seneca long ago urged the need to learn wisdom: "I try to ensure that I do not to want in my old age the same things that I wanted in my childhood". To want something else, to live differently, alongside other members of society and among them, that is the challenge. ■

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FOR SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE MOBILITY

The Mobility LAB observes and analyses trends relating to mobility in a large number of countries. As a locus for encounters and exchanges between research work and field experiences, it takes into account expectations of the public and local government authorities in order to build solutions to propose to them.

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