

Planners' views on age-friendly environment in urban planning

A perspectiva dos profissionais acerca do ambiente amigo dos idosos no planeamento urbano

Miguel Padeiro *¹

¹Universidade de Coimbra, CEGOT, Faculdade de Letras

Abstract

Urban planning plays a key role in delivering age-friendly environments (AFE). This paper centres on seventeen semi-structured interviews with territorial professionals and planners. We explore their views and understandings of the AFE agenda, as well as their perspectives about the barriers to implementation of age-friendly measures in urban environments. Qualitative data were analysed through thematic content analysis. Findings show that while professionals recognise the needs and expectations of older adults, they do not fully embrace the age-friendly environment paradigm due to several barriers. Further research is needed to understand how professionals incorporate age-friendliness into their daily practice.

Keywords: Age-friendly environment. Urban planning. Older adults. Barriers. Content analysis.

Resumo

O planeamento urbano desempenha um papel crucial na criação de ambientes amigos dos idosos (AFE). Este artigo foca-se em dezassete entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas junto de profissionais e urbanistas. Procuramos compreender os seus pontos de vista e a sua perceção relativamente à agenda AFE, bem como a sua sensibilidade quanto às dificuldades decorrentes da implementação de tais medidas. Os dados qualitativos foram sujeitos a uma análise de conteúdos temática. Os resultados evidenciam que, embora os profissionais reconheçam as necessidades e as expectativas dos idosos, não confirmam a existência de um paradigma ambiental favorável a essa faixa etária, por existirem barreiras diversas. É necessária investigação suplementar para compreender de que forma os profissionais incorporam na sua prática quotidiana medidas favoráveis aos idosos.

Palavras-chave: Ambiente amigo dos idosos. Planeamento urbano. Idosos. Barreiras. Análise de conteúdos.

1. Introduction

People are living far longer than before due to medical advances, economic growth and the adoption of healthier lifestyles. Europe and Northern America won 10 years of life expectancy between 1960 and 2015, and developing countries won nearly 20 years (United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2019). Resulting from this unprecedented trend, the global proportion of people aged 65 or over will increase from 9.1% to 16% in the next 30 years (United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2019). With the emergence of the age-friendly environment (AFE) concept (World Health Organization, 2007), the idea of ageing place and of helping individuals maintain their autonomy, independence, and personal aspirations has become a key aspect of the active and healthy ageing paradigm. Ageing active and healthy and/or coping with the multiple (physical, social, psychological and affective, economical) losses associated to the ageing process (Freeman, 1984), can be positively influenced by better conditions for daily mobility, access to resources and opportunities, and neighbourhood enjoyment.

By acting on the design and materiality of space, urban planning has a major role to play in this context. As urbanisation continues to expand, more than 80% of the European and Northern American population will live in urban areas by 2050, while 68% will live in metropolitan areas at the global scale (United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2018). Accordingly, ageing

in urban environments has become a relevant scientific and political challenge, particularly since the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched the Global Age-Friendly Cities Network emphasising the roles of the social and physical environment in the lives of older adults (World Health Organization, 2007). An extensive body of literature has suggested that neighbourhood environments contribute to shape older adults' experiences and behaviours (Barnett et al., 2017; Cerin et al., 2017). As older adults spend more time than other age groups in their neighbourhood (Buffel et al., 2012), they rely more on their vicinity for socialising and accessing resources and opportunities. In many cases local environment and urban dynamics can provide a consistent support that can help delaying ageing-related decline or compensating for functional and cognitive limitations (Golant, 2015).

Meanwhile, research efforts to better inform planning practice have been growing on three main directions. The first approach addresses how neighbourhood environments affect older adults' life, with particular emphasis on well-being, quality of life, health, behaviour, and social capital and inclusion (Barnett et al., 2017; Cerin et al., 2017; Padeiro et al., 2021). Overall, mixed-use, safe and peaceful neighbourhoods, with few or no density-derived externalities (such as congestion, noise, litter) are markers of good places to grow old. A sense of social cohesion and of access to routinely used services is sometimes even more important to older adults (Miao et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). A second line of research relates to the metrics and assessment methods aiming to measure the age-friendliness of cities and neighbourhoods. These are directed towards an evaluation of walkability and usability of public space or to a larger pre-determined set of features considered as age-friendly. They can be based on externally assessed street audit techniques (Bader et al., 2017; Curl et al., 2015), on scales of neighbourhood scores based on objective or self-reported measures (Lee & Kim, 2019; Menec et al., 2015). The third approach is concerned with governance and empowerment issues in the planning process. The absence of older adults from the public debate on local communities has been frequently noted (Buffel et al., 2012) and can be related to a number of reasons ranging from the inadequacy of participatory methods and top-down approaches to the real or perceived inability of a frequently low-skilled, illiterate audience to discuss plans and strategies. The predominance of private sector in the housing market and the trend towards neoliberal urbanism (Peck et al., 2009) may also be an explanation, as older adults are not the focus of private housing provision in urban areas, despite some exceptions such as retirement villages (Choi, 2004).

As many local, regional and national AFE-related initiatives have been launched in the last years, policies have become targeted at keeping older adults active so that they can live independently in their homes for as long as possible. One key question lies in how planning practice actually implements and takes care of the concept of age-friendliness, and how professionals engage with ageing-related planning measures. This is relevant because territorial professionals and planners are not mere neutral performers of plans and policies designed by others. Empirical evidence shows that their role frequently vary between negotiators, neutral technical advisers and activists and that they may deliberately advocate for a position (Perlstein & Ortolano, 2015). This may result more often than not in a significant influence on the overall planning process and on the decisions (Sehested, 2009). The actual implementation of plans and strategies downstream also depends in part on their expertise and workload, which may change the level of priority given to the different agendas and aspects of urban planning. Their perspectives of the ageing trends and challenges must therefore be taken into consideration if the AFE paradigm is to be increasingly adopted and implemented locally.

However, despite an extensive literature on the perspectives of territorial professionals and planners about different aspects of urban planning (Eliasson, 2000; Lake et al., 2017; Liao et al., 2019), there is still a paucity of research focusing on the views of professionals regarding the AFE paradigm. Some authors provide a descriptive account of AFE-related planning processes that highlight the importance of participatory approaches and advocacy (Greenfield et al., 2015). Others have explored the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in AFE programmes on the implementation phase (Xiang et al., 2020).

Here we explore the understandings and perspectives of urban planners on (i) the relevance of population ageing and (ii) of the AFE paradigm for urban planning and management, and (iii) on the barriers to the implementation of age-friendly measures within planning practice. If the AFE paradigm

is to be applied in urban planning practice, it is indeed critical that professionals working on the territory internalise the concepts, agree with its dimensions and implications, recognise older adults' needs and aspirations and how neighbourhoods environments may affect them, and identify barriers and ways to go beyond discourse and overcome implementation issues.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study area

Portugal provides an interesting study case. With 1.5 million individuals aged 65 or over (four times higher than in 1970) out of its 10.3 million inhabitants, the country currently holds the EU-27 4th highest old-age dependency ratio and proportion of people aged 65 or over (European Commission, 2018). Current demographic projections indicate the country will be Europe's second oldest by 2060 (European Commission, 2018). While ageing in Portugal has traditionally been associated to inland rural areas, characterised by abandonment and decline, urban areas are currently undergoing a rapid ageing process: the greatest recorded increases in percentage of aged people between 2001 and 2017 range from +30 to +105% and concern urban and suburban municipalities of the Lisbon and Oporto Metropolitan Areas. This has raised concerns on the age-friendliness of Portuguese urban areas, all the more so in a context in which no legal framework ensures the adoption of the AFE agenda: the National Strategy for Active and Healthy Ageing, prepared in 2017, is still to be approved. Age-friendliness is to a large extent left to public and private stakeholders at the local level.

2.2. Sample

This exploratory study is based on the analysis of 17 semi-structured interviews with a purposive non-random sample of planning professionals with different academic backgrounds (Table 1). The choice of interviewees was criteria-based. Operating areas (urban planning, planning consulting, social care, transports and mobility, as these are the areas AFE-related local policies in Portugal are normally dispersed across), type of institutions and urban settings (metro area centre, suburban areas, regional cities) were considered when deciding the sample, with a purposive overrepresentation of urban planning (as operating areas) and municipalities (as types of institutions), due to their higher level of proximity with urban design. Prior experience of age-friendly environment planning was not a requirement. Seventeen of 35 professionals approached to take part in the study agreed to be interviewed. Such a low rate of acceptance is mainly related to bureaucracy reasons, as many municipalities have long communication and decision circuits even for the purpose of responding to interviews. For instance, several interviewees took more than two months to indicate their availability and had to obtain approval from hierarchy or, in some cases, from the municipal councillor.

Table 1. Participants to the study

Respondent id.	Sex	Type of institution	Settings	Operating area	Initial formation
HA	M	Private consulting firm	Metro centre	Real estate and planning consulting	Law
IC	F	Private consulting firm	Metro centre	Urban planning consulting	Geography
FB	F	Municipality	Suburban	Urban planning	Architecture
FC	M	Municipality	Suburban	Social Care	Sociology
JC	M	Municipality	Suburban	Urban planning	Architecture
AO	F	Municipality	Suburban	Transports and mobility	Civil Engineering
CO	F	Municipality	Suburban	Urban planning	Planning
JP	M	Municipality	Metro centre	Urban planning	Architecture
NP	M	Municipality	Regional city	Transports and mobility	Civil Engineering
SP	F	Municipality	Regional city	Urban planning	Planning
FP	F	Municipality	Regional city	Social Care	Sociology
RP	M	Municipality	Regional city	Urban planning	Architecture
ED	F	National planning agency	Metro centre	Urban planning	Architecture
PM	F	Private consulting firm	Metro centre	Architecture and planning consulting	Architecture
MF	M	Municipality	Regional city	Urban planning	Civil Engineering
JL	M	Regional planning authority	Metro area	Urban planning	Architecture
PG	M	Private consulting firm	Metro area	Urban planning consulting	Architecture

2.3. Instrument

Following a pilot interview, semi-structured interviews were conducted at the interviewees' offices. Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed *verbatim*. Privacy and confidentiality were entirely guaranteed with an informed consent, and identifying information was removed. Interviews ranged from 35 to 86 minutes (average 52 minutes). Interviews continued until data saturation (Bowen, 2009). Open-ended questions were organised around four topics using a responsive interviewing model: (i) the relevance of population ageing for urban planning; (ii) the awareness and understanding of the AFE paradigm; (iii) the incorporation of the AFE concept into planning practice; (iv) the barriers to the implementation of age-friendly measures within planning practice and the possible strategies to overcome them (Appendix 2).

2.4. Data analysis

The analysis of the collected data was performed through a thematic content analysis approach supported by NVivo 12 software. Thematic content analysis is a systematic technique based on the compression of communication content into a manageable number of categories, allowing for analysing and making valid inferences from textual data (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). It has been widely used in the context of social sciences as a reliable approach to identify recurring themes and gain insights on people's perspectives. It has, however, been used less frequently in the planning context, although several authors have based their work on interviews of planners and/or developers (Lake et al., 2017; Yli-Pelkonen et al., 2006). The use of thematic content analysis was considered appropriate given the objective of capturing the views, perspectives and experiences of urban planners in relation to the topic of AFE.

A classical three-stage process was undertaken, based on line-by-line coding, grouping into categories and subcategories, and generation of themes and subthemes. First, an open-coding process allowed to generate free codes in each interview, based on meaning units that can be defined as portions of language-based data. In this stage, simultaneous coding was used when needed, meaning that passages of text could be related to more than one code simultaneously (Saldaña, 2015). In the second stage, codes were grouped into categories that were, if needed, divided into sub-categories. For example, the initial codes denoting 'ageism' were grouped into a category called 'cultural barriers'. In the third stage, we abstracted data further, from category to theme level directly relating to the research questions. For example, the category 'cultural barriers' was integrated into the subtheme 'attitudinal environment', which in turn was incorporated into the theme 'barriers to the adoption of age-friendly measures'.

3. Results

Two main themes emerged from our analysis of the data (Appendix 3): 'attitudes towards ageing and AFE agenda'; 'barriers to the adoption of age-friendly measures'.

3.1. Attitudes towards ageing and AFE agenda

Participants' attitudes towards ageing and the AFE agenda can be grouped into three main themes: awareness on AFE, judgement of the concept, and evaluation of Portuguese cities age-friendliness.

3.1.1. Awareness regarding the AFE agenda

As expected, all interviewees were well aware of the demographic ageing process and the growing AFE agenda. Almost half of them even mentioned at least one personal experience, generally involving a family member, to illustrate their understanding and empathy on the subject. Two interviewees showed, however, some hesitation when using the expression "age-friendly environment", denoting a reduced use of the concept in their practice. Indeed, thirteen interviewees declared having no experience of working in an AFE framework.

3.1.2. Judgement on AFE agenda

While a slight majority regarded as timely the AFE agenda, seven interviewees criticised it, stating that cities should instead be planned and built for all, and that if an urban environment is conceived as good for all, it will logically be fine to elderly people:

O idoso não precisa de especificidades para além daquelas que todos os outros precisam, para o desenho do espaço público. [FB]

They also considered that AFE has no real interest *per se*, being essentially a fashionable concept linked to a political correctness they view as undesirable:

Isto para mim parece-me sempre aquela questão do politicamente correto, ou seja, como está na moda, efetivamente é... há uma série de temas que, às vezes, até se ganha prémios... [FC]

3.1.3. Evaluation of Portuguese cities age-friendliness

Almost half of the participants reported that Portuguese cities were generally improving, having both positive and negative comments to add. Two other participants positively evaluated the age-friendliness of urban areas, three had only negative comments, and one stated that age-friendliness was declining. The morphology of central areas, characterised by old, narrow buildings, and by the existence of many public places, was seen as a positive feature providing comfort and a sense of permanence and memory attached to the urban environment. Participants reinforced that a sense of proximity and strong social ties are associated to the small size and human scale of cities. On the other side, negative assessments primarily related to urban sprawl and the deconcentration of services that have reduced access of older adults to services. In central areas, the trend towards touristification and gentrification was seen only by two participants as a major threat to the permanence and comfort of older adults, potentially causing real or symbolic displacements. Contrasting with this view, another participant considered that tourism was actually an opportunity to improve older adults' lives through investment in public space regeneration. This subcategory was not mentioned by other participants.

3.2. Barriers to the adoption of age-friendly measures

Despite some interviewees having a critical attitude towards the AFE paradigm, all identify a wide array of barriers to its adoption in their professional practices. Categories of barriers were integrated into three different subthemes defining the environment in which planning practice occurs: (i) formal environment, defined as the apparatus of rules, financial resources and institutions within which policy makers and planners operate; (ii) attitudinal environment, which designates the framework of norms, beliefs and behaviours present in the society as well as political acting and responses to societal attitudes; (iii) practical environment, as the field where and tools with which any policy implementation is facilitated or hampered.

3.2.1. Formal environment

Three categories emerged: financial, legal, and organisational/institutional barriers. The first ones were essentially related to the general trend of diminishing financial resources and to the lack of supportive legislative framework where current legislation is viewed as either too complex or lacking a binding AFE agenda with sufficient oversight. Organisational and institutional barriers were more diverse, with 10 subcategories identified. Among these, the lack of professionals dedicated to ageing-related issues was particularly apparent as only one of them referred that there was one person in the department working specifically on older adults' issues. More generally, the lack of human resources in the administration was seen as great issue that was reinforced by the 2008 financial crisis, as many departments were reduced and merged to minimise costs. Participants also noted that the demographic ageing process within local administrations affects the renewal of ideas, concepts, and practical solutions. This sense of relative stagnation was accentuated by the high turnover of municipal executive boards due to term limit requirement.

Esta questão da limitação dos mandatos levou à quebra de muitos projetos que... teriam todas as condições de se perpetuar no tempo se algumas pessoas tivessem mantido. Porque normalmente quem entra é sempre a destruir [riso] quem ficou atrás (RP).

3.2.2. Attitudinal environment

This subtheme included two categories: cultural and political barriers. Cultural barriers were the most frequent among all categories identified across subthemes. Most interviewees referred human resistance to change as an important factor. Resistance was frequently considered as a lack of awareness from politicians, citizens, and even older adults themselves, and was one of professionals' struggles in their activity: one participant stated that a key everyday task for him was to convince the town councillors that a given operation was relevant, another one admitted having sometimes to lie and declare that a given feature or material was mandatory by law to get it accepted by citizens. Difficulties arising from a lack of tradition of participating processes were also mentioned. For some professionals, this is since older adults are generally neglected in consultation procedures:

os idosos eu acho que... idosos fala-se muito em orçamentos participativos, em participação... mas às vezes direciona-se muito para a população mais jovem (CO).

Others stated that older adults are poorly represented in the planning process due to a lack of organisation:

o planeamento é sempre um confronto de interesses, não é? (...) Eu acho que qualquer outro tema, seja idoso ou não, para poder ter maior destaque em sede da mesa de conversações do planeamento e do urbanismo, tem que ter agentes do lado desse tema que venham para o palco das negociações também. Percebe? Tem de haver alguém, seja idoso não seja idoso que lance o assunto, que venha reclamar, que apresente uma proposta com a mesma intensidade e vontade com que fazem os empresários. (FB)

However, they also indicated that older adults themselves denote difficulty to express their opinion head on, emitting it as if it were a third party, and that they mainly comment afterwards:

Os impactos que tive... tive depois por trás [riso]. O outro disse isto, o outro disse aquilo, ou seja, as pessoas quando são chamadas a participar e a emitir uma opinião nunca o fazem livremente. (RP)

While some participants said that older adults are unlikely to raise complaints and make demands due to their lack of access to technological tools, others indicated that older adults are probably more accustomed to difficult life conditions and accept more easily than younger people.

As pessoas exigem muito pouco, quem não tem nada exige muito pouco. (NP)

Several interviewees mentioned that the tradition towards top-down approaches and assistentialism and directed to older adults of several decades ago, still guided a large part of urban policies:

As respostas sociais são ainda muito tradicionais e estão orientadas para... para aquele perfil convencional dos idosos: dependente, pouco instruído, por aí fora. (IC)

Among political barriers, participants referred to the lack of leadership and of political awareness. Several emphasised that older adults' issues are not tackled really seriously and reflect the quest for adequacy between the politician aims and the public opinion, as politicians seek to satisfy given groups they consider more important – which modifies the evaluation of what is publicly acceptable:

os desafios são muito a questão política, o político é uma pessoa que está muito treinada para... para satisfazer certos núcleos e certas... digamos, certos grupos que eles consideram mais importantes ou menos importantes, não é? (JC)

This was linked to the overvaluation of decorations and to the image municipalities are selling to promote themselves. Participants highlighted, for example, the impact of social media apps and of the communication. They criticised the fact that the AFE paradigm seems to be a fashionable cause and an instrument of political correctness with no real commitment.

Faz-se uma obra, tqtqtq [som a imitar o acto de tirar fotografias], tamos a fazer. mas não se percebe qual é a continuidade da obra. (RP)

3.2.3. Pratical environment

Territorial context and knowledge-based barriers are the two subthemes incorporated into the practical environment. Regarding the former, the hilly nature of many Portuguese cities first hampers the pedestrian mobility of people with disabilities in general. Second, the last decades have seen Portuguese urban areas increasingly dominated by car-oriented expansions, leading to spatial fragmentation of neighbourhoods and to the disconnection between residents and services. The lack of proximity services and amenities and the amount of public space dedicated to car parking were mentioned as two consequences of this evolution. More recently, gentrification and tourism has exerted pressure on older adults, pushing them away from the city centres or causing many cases of symbolic relocations and destroying their sense of neighbourliness and community:

Os cafés em Lisboa, que tinham aqueles idosos que depois do almoço ou lanche se reuniam, mas agora são ocupados por aqueles cafés que é para turista, que a pessoa também se sente... até eu própria há aquela fronteira que já não gosto, não é? Então eles estão a saltar, não é? Dá para pensar, não é? Isto é... as cidades são amigas dos idosos? (CO)

Besides this, knowledge-based barriers were frequently pointed out among participants. Some of them stated that lack of knowledge on older adults needs and expectations was among the main challenges. They almost all recognised that the profile of older adults is rapidly changing, due to different literacy levels and evolving consumption patterns, but indicated that their diversity is poorly understood:

eu acho que nós ainda não..., (...) a gente não percebe muito bem o que é que o... a pessoa idosa quer. (JC)

Poor assessment is another limitation of planning practice in Portugal. Participants stated that monitoring is frequently limited in practice to the assessment of general indicators that help demonstrate to the funding institution – frequently at the European level – that the money has been spent in what it was supposed to be. However, monitoring seldom involves analysing how public space is actually used, understood and lived by older adults themselves.

This may be related, in part, to the weak links between academia and planners and to the lack of training and education. While participants referred the need to get researchers' feedback and orientations on what is more effective in the promotion of AFE, the demographic ageing trend, as well as its consequences and implications for planning practice, is according to them completely absent from courses *syllabi*, and no continuing training is provided on this topic to planners. This has implications, according to some interviewees, on the inadequacy of technical solutions to improve public space.

4. Discussion

This study has centred the views and awareness of professionals on demographic ageing and age-friendly environments. Overall, the findings illustrate that the AFE paradigm still has a long way to go before it is effectively adopted and implemented in practice.

While recognising the importance of accommodating the needs of an ageing population, participating professionals tended to reject the AFE paradigm as a short-sighted concept, preferring to refer to a universal design. While this view echoes the multiple calls for inclusive and intergenerational public spaces (Gehl, 2013; Melville & Bernard, 2011) and reflects the ethical imperative of professionals dedicated to conciliate the demands of a wide audience with divergent interests, it raises, however,

questions on the real existence of an AFE-driven agenda. AFE should not be reduced to its micro-scale urban design nature. Planners' focus on public space suggests their inability to act on private buildings and, more widely, on market forces that drive the trends of urban areas. Adapting walkability conditions may be considered an age-friendly-driven measure that improves the life of older citizens, however it is in many cases embedded in a broader context of touristification or gentrification-related urban renewal from which older adults are easily erased (Crewe, 2017; Kelley et al., 2019). In this sense, one may question whether inclusive measures are indeed age-friendly ones. Second, this might be reflected on the low levels of participation of older adults in the planning process, as several interviewees highlighted. Difficulties arose in spite of genuine concerns expressed by the professionals and notwithstanding some examples they provided to demonstrate real attempts to hear older adults' voices. While low civic engagement from older adults has been observed in a considerable amount of research (Fang et al., 2016; Simpson, 2010), current models of participatory approaches remain fairly difficult to implement to all ages and levels of literacy (Lui et al., 2009). Barriers identified by interviewees are linked to a long-standing tradition of centralised top-down approaches, to unadapted methods regarding participatory processes, and in the Portuguese context to a tendentially greater acceptance by older adults in what regards lack of resources and/or difficulty of access to services. One possible explanation, at least in this study case, might lie in the lack of AFE and ageing-related training among territorial professionals. The frequent absence of the ageing issue in initial formations and in continuing education was stated by several interviewees as one motive underlying inadequate responses and unfamiliarity with the AFE paradigm. Far from being "innocent professionals" (Roy, 2006) circumscribed to the execution of blueprints decided at the upper level of decision making, territorial professionals occupy an influencing position in the territorial management and planning process (Sehested, 2009).

This study has some limitations. The generalisability of the study's findings has been limited by the small sample used and by the semi-structured interview approach. Even though several representatives of different departments and backgrounds were interviewed, their perspectives are socio-culturally embedded and other variables such as personal history and sensitivities can play an underlying role in shaping their views. Additionally, the Portuguese context is different from central or northern European countries or North-American contexts, as it is characterised by a more limited capacity of public authorities, by a high reliance on family-based solidarity that may compensate for environmental failures and make them less necessary in the perspective of professionals. The quick ongoing transition from an uneducated society to a highly-skilled one is probably not without consequences on the difficulty to manage the evolution of urban planning, due to the diversification of profiles, needs, expectations and ability to participate/contest. Nevertheless, the study can serve as a starting point for addressing the role of planners and professionals in the adoption and implementation of the AFE paradigm at the local level. Further research could develop cross-cultural comparisons across countries and deepen the understanding of how territorial professionals incorporate the AFE approach into their own day-to-day practice and how they overcome potential barriers.

5. Conclusion

While the model of 'age-friendly cities and communities' has become the subject of an extensive literature and of an increasing number of policy and planning initiatives, its adoption as a desirable and workable concept by those who routinely deal with the complex interplay of frequently divergent interests remains an overlooked and poorly understood issue. Due to their central role not only in the design and implementation of plans and policies, but also in influencing decision makers, territorial professionals and planners are in a privileged position to accompany the shift towards a wider adoption of the AFE paradigm. Their views are nevertheless not entirely convinced on the importance of an AFE approach in territorial management and planning, and the overvaluation of micro-scale approaches may reduce their ability to carry out efficiently an age-friendly agenda.

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Appendix 1 – Interview schedule

Table 2. Appendix 1 – Interview schedule

Questions used in semi-structured interviews
<i>Relevance of population ageing for urban planning</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From your point of view, what are the challenges, problems and opportunities brought by the ageing population for the future of urban areas? 2. In your opinion, what are the main problems and constraints perceived and experienced by the older persons in urban areas? 3. What opportunities and benefits can older people enjoy in urban areas? 4. What are (or what could be) the main reasons for designing and implementing an age-friendly environment project or policy? 5. To what extent do you consider Portuguese cities and urban areas to be age-friendly?
<i>Awareness and understanding of the AFE paradigm</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. What does the term “age-friendly city”, or “age-friendly environment” mean to you? What topics / aspects do you consider essential to define what is elderly friendly and what is not? 7. In your perspective, what aspects have the majority of the debate in Portugal focused on age-friendly cities, or more generally on the ageing population? 8. What aspects have been less developed in these debates and which deserve more attention? 9. What projects and / or policies related to the age-friendly dimension of the built environment and cities have been implemented and / or launched, that you are aware of?
<i>Incorporation of the AFE concept into planning practice</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Throughout your professional career, have you been involved in any way in urban policies or projects that relate to elderly-friendly environments? If so, in what way, to what extent? 11. Is there, in the organisation where you work, any division, team or specialist that is mainly dedicated to the issue of the age-friendly environment / environment friendly to the elderly, or, more generally, to the elderly population? 12. Who (which Institution / s, at what level of local / regional / national action) should lead the implementation of projects and policies for the implementation of age-friendly environments? 13. What role should be given to the sector it represents in terms of creating more age-friendly environments / age-friendly environments?
<i>Barriers to the implementation of age-friendly measures within planning practice and the possible strategies to overcome them</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. What constitutes, in your view, an ideal process for project implementation or an age-friendly city policy? 15. At the end of a process of implementing an elderly-friendly city project or policy, and how could you know if the process was successful? 16. What conditions are / would be necessary for the age-friendly environment (or the concept of an age-friendly city) to have / have a more important role in urban planning? 17. In cases where there is political will, what conditions would facilitate the effective implementation of projects and policies for elderly friendly cities / environments? 18. Likewise, in cases where there is political will, what conditions can constitute an obstacle to the effective implementation of age-friendly environments projects and policies?
<i>Miscellaneous</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Is there any aspect that I would like to address that has not been discussed so far?

Appendix 2 – Themes, subthemes and categories

Table 3. Appendix 2 – Themes, subthemes and categories

Theme	Subtheme	Category	Subcategories	
Attitudes towards ageing and AFE agenda	Awareness of the AFE agenda	Awareness of demographic trends	-	
		Prior professional experience		
	Judgement on AFE agenda	Personal experience	-	
		Empathy		
	Evaluation of Portuguese cities	Positive assessment	Narrow concept	-
Fashionable concept			-	
Negative assessment		Small-sized cities	Urban morphology Seeing older adults in the streets	
		Car-oriented cities		
	Urban sprawl	Gentrification trends Hilly cities		
	Gentrification trends			
Barriers to the adoption of age-friendly measures	Formal environment	Financial support	General financial issues National funds allocation	
		Lack of supportive legislative framework to introduce AFE	No direct binding laws or regulations	
			Complex legislation Lack of legislative framework against property speculation	
	Organisational and institutional system	Different levels of understandings – lack of agreement of concepts	Lack of professionals dedicated to AFE External human resources Bureaucracy Ageing administration professionals Professional and service segmentation Internal human resources Lack of information and promotion Loss of power of technicians vs elected Political cycle	
		Lack of professionals dedicated to AFE		
		External human resources		
		Bureaucracy		
		Ageing administration professionals		
	Attitudinal environment	Cultural barriers	Consultation procedures inimical to older adults	Tradition towards assistentialist policies Ageism Human resistance to change Lack of public awareness Unwillingness to take part in participative approaches
			Tradition towards assistentialist policies	
Political action		Ageism		
		Human resistance to change		
Practical environment	Territorial context	Lack of public awareness	Inherited urban morphology Hilly cities Trends towards touristification Loss of sense of community	
		Unwillingness to take part in participative approaches		
	Knowledge	Lack of leadership		
		Emphasis on the image and communication		
	Emphasis on what is publicly and politically acceptable	Poor assessment Weak academia/planners link Lack of knowledge of the field Lack of knowledge of older adults's needs and profile Lack of training and education Lack of experience regarding AFE		
	Lack of political awareness			