Life filming as a means of participatory approach together with older community-dwelling persons regarding their local environment

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\section*{ABSTRACT}

\textbf{Background:} The potential to influence the design of one’s local environment is especially important to older people since age-related problems, in combination with a less supportive environment, can prevent the performance of meaningful activities. It is unclear how best to tailor a participatory approach to support the task of collaborating with older persons about their local environment. Life filming was used in such a project.

\textbf{Objective:} To describe Life filming as a means of participatory approach in relation to older community-dwelling persons and the design of their local environment.

\textbf{Material and method:} A descriptive single case study. Data were generated through field notes and memos, and analyzed utilizing thematic analysis. Participants have validated the findings.

\textbf{Findings:} Five themes describe central aspects of Life filming in the given context: Anchoring the concept of participation, Practical application of Life filming, The film as a product, Making a real difference, and An identity as a capable older person.

\textbf{Conclusion:} Life filming supported participation, both as a process and an outcome. It had benefits on multiple levels: for the individual person, for older persons as a group, and for the municipality. Life filming could constitute a useful digital tool for practice when a participatory approach is desired.

\section*{Introduction}

The potential to influence the design of our local environment is important to all of us. If the local environment is well designed and functional, we can perform the activities we need, must, and want to do. For older persons, how the local environment is designed can be particularly important; since age-related problems (e.g. impaired vision and reduced mobility) combined with a less supportive environment can prevent the performance of meaningful activities. Participatory approaches can be a relevant way to include older persons in the design of the local environment.

\section*{Background}

The project Age-friendly Gothenburg has been a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities [1] since 2015. The network consists of a growing number of cities from all over the world (541 in March 2018), which have entered into a formal commitment to systematically improve the urban environment for older people. The network is guided by WHO’s policy framework for Active aging, where older adults are seen as resources for their families, communities and economies [2]. An Age-friendly city is defined as that which adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities [3]. As a basis for the allied cities assignment, WHO has developed a guide which outlines eight target areas where older people’s health and well-being are affected [3]. These areas consist of: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services. As part of the commitment, each city is obligated to establish an action
plan for making their urban environment age-friendly. It is the older people’s own assessment of their city’s age-friendliness which should constitute the foundation of the action plan, thus creating a starting point in which areas in need of improvement are identified. The involvement of older people as collaborators in the formation of the action plan is strongly emphasized by WHO, although ultimately each city determines how its own participatory approach is planned and implemented.

Participation is a concept which is ascribed a variety of meanings, e.g. the act of taking part or sharing in something [4]. A frequently used definition is ‘involvement in a life situation’, which is formulated by the WHO in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) [5]. WHO also states that meaningful participation entails that people are able to participate in decisions which affect them directly [6], which may, for instance, be decisions regarding the design of the local environment. On a micro level, participation is about a person’s own engagement, while on a macro level, participation can be viewed as part of democracy, equality and having an impact on society. In practice, a participatory approach may take on diverse forms, including consulting the local community to receive feedback from a targeted population; or collaborating by partnering with communities in each aspect of decision-making, including the development of alternatives and identification of solutions [6].

From an occupational science perspective, participation is viewed as a human right [7]. The identification and elimination of societal barriers to activities, participation, and health among vulnerable groups (e.g. due to constructed age-related norms and technological development), constitutes an important mission [8]. The Participatory Occupational Justice Framework (POJF) [9] forms a theoretical and practical basis for such a mission. The POJF consists of six phases. The initial three—to increase consciousness about occupational injustice, to engage with partners, and to work out a plan for agreement—share similarities with the aims of the Age-friendly Gothenburg project. The last three phases in the framework consist of strategies for sourcing funding, to support implementation and continuous evaluation of the plan, and to inspire advocacy for sustainability or closure. The POJF aims to promote occupational justice, described as a vision of societies in which all populations have the opportunities, recourses, privilege, and rights to participate to their potential in their desired occupations. This should be achieved by empowering vulnerable groups and generating change by influencing policy and political decisions [9].

Empowerment entails strengthening a person to take control over his or her own situation [10], a concept which to some extent overlaps with the concept of participation. Since empowerment also aims to strengthen vulnerable groups such as older persons, it is an essential part of a participatory approach.

One participatory approach, applied in order to influence policy and political decisions in the context of people’s local environment, is ‘Citizen dialogues’ [11]. A Citizen dialog is described as a democratic process involving public representatives and citizens, typically taking place between elections. In practice, for many Swedish municipalities, the ‘ladder of citizen participation’ (Delaktighetsstegen) forms a graphical model to enhance participation in Citizen dialogs [12]. The five steps in the ladder—information, consultation, dialog, influence, and co-decision—illustrate a scale of citizen participation from low to high. The goal of Citizen dialogs is to achieve co-decision. A similar democratic process, involving researchers and end users in relation to research and development, is ‘User participation’ (Brukarmedverkan) [13]. Benefits of User participation are described by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working life, and Welfare (FORTE) as increased understanding of the research field and increased confidence in and dissemination of research results. There is also a narrower concept: ‘Design driven dialogues’ [14], which is defined as a learning process through conversations on architecture and community building. Within this collective design work, visual tools such as maps, drawings, and building permit applications are used.

It may be concluded that several theoretical perspectives emphasize the importance of a participatory approach in different contexts such as research [13] and urban development [15]. They stipulate a variation of goals exemplified by guiding research design [13] and the promotion of occupational justice [9]. However, few present concrete ‘hands-on methods’ or tools to be utilized in practice, although some examples exist such as walking tours with older people [16]. Additionally, it is unclear how to tailor a participatory approach to fit the task of collaborating with older persons about their local environment. Welfare techniques already in use or under development are believed to contribute to active and healthy aging [17], and may therefore be suitable for realizing a participatory approach. Digital tools such as mobile phones, tablets, and apps could promote participation. A recent systematic review [18], reported evidence of digital tools as a means of increasing participation.
among older people with or at risk of mental illness. In addition, a digital tool (e.g. GoPro video camera) has successfully been applied in ethnographical research, together with older persons, when studying how they experience moving in public spaces [19]. To use digital tools as a methodological approach to support participation is in line with the Swedish governments’ goal that Sweden, in 2025, will be the leading country in the world for seizing opportunities within digitization to create equal health and well-being for the population [20]. One method, which makes use of digital technology, is Life filming.

Life filming is a narrative approach using the media of film. A person is encouraged to explore certain themes or topics based on their personal life experiences, in order to define and communicate their life situation [21]. This method has parallels to Life writing, a research focus that uses life stories (e.g. autobiography, memoirs, letters, diaries) [22]. In addition, Life filming shows similarities to Photovoice, a visual method that has been applied in occupational therapy research [23,24]. In Photovoice, persons can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique [25]. Life filming was originally developed as a pedagogical method for children (Barnfilmskolan) by Forum för Visuell Praktik in collaboration with the Academy Valand at Gothenburg University, Sweden. For more information on the original work, please see https://visuellpraktik.se/projektet. In 2015, Life filming was piloted as a means of facilitating generational meetings in a project concerning Gothenburg’s urban environment [26]. The results showed that older participants were more positive to the method compared to the younger participants, and that their knowledge about filming increased. Furthermore, the participants’ attention to their environment was strengthened and the meetings were perceived as positive. However, participants also expressed doubts as to whether the project had an impact on their ability to influence their urban district [26].

Overall Life filming appeared promising and, in search of a participatory approach, it was used in the Age-friendly Gothenburg project during the formation of its action plan. Consequently, we decided to study the realization of Life filming in this project. By describing a case where Life filming is used as a participatory approach, our goal was to generate understanding from the perspective of those involved. And so, the aim of this paper was to describe Life filming as a means of participatory approach among older community-dwelling persons regarding their local environment.

Method

The method was a descriptive single case study [27]. A case study is argued to be a suitable method for studying a phenomenon such as a complex intervention or process in a real-life context. A group activity at the community center where older persons used Life filming to assess their local environment, as part of the Age-friendly Gothenburg project, formed the case. The case was selected on the basis of expectations about its information content [28], and took place in the fall of 2016. In this paper, we describe how Life filming was realized and experienced by those involved. In addition, we discuss what we learnt from implementing Life filming as a participatory approach. We did not seek formal ethical approval for this study because the form for evaluating the group activity was not decided from the beginning. Nevertheless, we had continuous discussions in the research group and together with the participants about ethics during the project’s implementation in order to maintain an ethical stance. The study was conducted according to the ethics guidance developed by the Swedish Research Council [29]. All involved were informed of and voluntarily participated in both group and evaluative activities, and written consent was obtained from participants regarding public dissemination of the produced films.

Setting and participants

The setting was one of ten urban districts in the city of Gothenburg, Sweden. This particular urban district is situated in the city center with dense buildings, busy streets, parks, and various forms of public transport. Compared to the city of Gothenburg as a whole, the income and education levels of residents in this urban district are higher than the city average [30]. The community center, named ‘Mötesplats-Kulturhus för seniorer i centrum’ (Meeting place-Cultural center for seniors in the center), was selected because it had experience of Life filming due to the previously described pilot project [26]. The center is part of the city’s health-promotion and preventive strategy for seniors. Its main purpose is to offer the opportunity to build social networks and to take advantage of the knowledge and ability of the attendees. The community center is well established in the urban district and offers a variety of activities such as language courses, dance, and amateur theater.

The target group, according to the focus of the Age-friendly Gothenburg project, was community-dwelling persons, aged 65 years and older. They lived
in the urban district where the selected community center is located. There were no formally established inclusion or exclusion criteria. However, there was a preference for finding participants with an interest in learning how to make films using tablets as well as an interest in their local environment.

The authors of this paper were all involved in the realization and evaluation of Life filming at the community center. They had various roles and professions: an occupational therapist, a nurse assistant with the title ‘Coordinator of older persons’ (Åldresamordnare), a second nurse assistant with a bachelor’s degree in psychology, a process manager for urban planning and a psychologist. The first and fourth authors (SG + LH), were project leaders of Age-friendly Gothenburg. The second author (CF) led the group activity at the community center, where the third author (ST) also worked as a consultant for older people (Åldrekonulent). The last author (LL) was the researcher who evaluated the preceding pilot study [26], and held the role of mentor.

The assignment

The community center’s assignment was to address and form a group of older persons who wanted to collaborate with the Age-friendly Gothenburg project in establishing an action plan. The task was to assess and describe their local environment and highlight areas in need of improvement with the use of Life filming. The assessment of the local environment was focused on outdoor spaces, buildings, streets, parks, transportation, and information/communication.

Collection and analysis of data

All authors jointly performed the data collection, which, in line with case methodology [27], was collected by various sources. Data was obtained from observations, conversations, and experiences while participating in the group activity, as well as discussions among those involved after the group activity was completed. Hence, data consisted of memos about reflections on action and outcome, and field notes from various group meetings and dialogs. The films and the participants’ own written descriptions of what they wanted to capture on film also constituted data. The first author transcribed the memos and field notes, and made additional reflective summative notes based on the films. The text, which consisted of 25 A4 pages, was then read several times to capture the meaning according to the study aim. In the next step, the text was divided into units with a specific meaning. In the third step, the units were coded, and in the last step, the content of the codes was condensed and grouped into narrative themes using of manifest thematic analysis [31]. Thereafter, all authors discussed the findings in rounds of consensus driven communication in which alterations and revisions were made. During the fall of 2017, communication took place in different ways; through face-to-face discussions or phone calls between two or more authors and by email, until a conclusive result was agreed upon. In a final step, the findings were validated by representatives of the older persons who participated in the group activity.

Findings

The findings were compiled in five themes that describe central aspects of Life filming in the given context, namely: Anchoring the concept of participation, Practical application of Life filming, The film as a product, Making a real difference, and An identity as a capable older person.

Anchoring the concept of participation

In order to realize Life filming as a means of participatory approach in the Age-friendly Gothenburg project, a dialog between the project leaders and the community center was established. Life filming was the obvious means, but the assignment’s focus on the local environment had to be clarified and resources guaranteed. The community center provided a group leader with previous experience in Life filming, as well as a fully furnished technically equipped room with coffee making facilities. In order to facilitate participation, it was important that no charges were levied on participants and that tablet computers could be borrowed. This was ensured by the community center which owned previously purchased tablets.

From planning to completion, all involved continuously discussed the purpose of the assignment and its underlying assumptions regarding participation and the right to an age-friendly city. These discussions strengthened the group’s awareness and commitment, which was experienced to be high, and led to a sense of belonging. However, the high level of engagement became overwhelming to one participant. She chose to drop out after the third group meeting when participants, of their own initiative, started to meet outside the community center in their spare time to discuss the assignment.
Practical application of Life filming

To invite participants, posters were displayed at the community center and an advertisement was published twice in the urban districts’ local newspaper at the expense of the Age-friendly Gothenburg project. The group’s size was determined to be seven participants based on experiences from the previous pilot project. A small group was preferred so that everyone would receive the appropriate support according to their prior knowledge of technology. Interested persons were invited to call and sign up. The places were quickly filled, and a queue had to be formed. The final group consisted of two men and five women between 69 and 78 years old (mean 75 years), of whom all but one had responded to the advertisement in the newspaper. Five participants had never attended activities at the community center before, no one had used a tablet to make films before, and five of them needed to borrow a tablet.

The goal of the group activity was for participants to produce one film each about their local environment. The setup consisted of seven group meetings, lasting one and a half to two hours, over a period of three months. The first meeting was an information session, followed by workshops and ending with a finale session. In addition, during the three-month period, there was the possibility to book individual sessions for technical support, and a resource session was available after the completion of the group meetings if additional help with Vimeo publishing was desired. A booklet [32], the tablets, and the iMovie application were used as material for the group meetings. Coffee was available, but no coffee breaks were scheduled. For details about each group meeting and its content, please see Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of Life filming as a group activity.

| Meeting number | Main content | Detailed content of the meeting |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| 1              | Information  | • Purpose of Life filming        |
|                |              |  • The target image, the film    |
|                |              |  • Age-friendly Gothenburg, the assignment |
|                |              |  • Structure of group activity and workshops |
|                |              |  • Administration                |
|                | Workshop     |  • Loan arrangement and distribution of tablets |
|                |              |  • Concessionary agreement, the right to publicize the films |
| 2              | Workshop     | • Portrait                       |
|                |              |  • Task: Photograph another participant and view theirs and your own portrait |
|                |              |  • To save and publish an image   |
|                |              |  • To proceed with images and portraits, laws and group agreement about material |
|                |              | • Triangles                      |
|                |              |  • Task: Photograph three triangles |
|                |              |  • To collect material, an important part of film making |
|                |              |  • To choose a picture out of many |
|                |              |  • Show your pictures in a ‘vernissage’, group discussions |
| 3              | Workshop     | • Homework: What makes me happy? Three pictures or short film sequences or a mix of both |
|                |              | • Discussion of homework assignment |
|                |              | • Distance                       |
|                |              |  • Task: Photograph three different distances on specific objects, do not change angle |
|                |              | • Introduction to iMovie          |
|                |              |  • Task: Work with photographs/films in iMovie, experiment with the order etc. |
|                |              |  • Homework: What makes me angry in my urban environment? Three pictures or short film sequences or a mix of both |
| 4              | Workshop     | • Discussion of homework assignment |
|                |              | • The moment                      |
|                |              |  • Task: Photograph what symbolizes ‘summer meets autumn’ |
|                |              |  • Task: Work with iMovie         |
|                |              | • Homework: Was this ‘really the case’? Obstacles in urban planning |
| 5              | Workshop     | • Discussion of homework assignment |
|                |              | • The film                        |
|                |              |  • Task: Choose a film project    |
|                |              |  • Task: Plan, create a storyboard |
|                |              | • Homework: Work with own film project |
| 6              | Workshop     | • Task: Work on the film project  |
|                |              |  • Discuss tips and thoughts      |
| 7              | Final group  | • Homework: Complete the film project |
| meeting/ending |              | • Completion of film projects     |
|                |              |  • Film show                      |
|                |              |  • Representatives of Age-friendly Gothenburg present |
|                |              |  • Group discussions              |
|                |              |  • Life filming and the group activity |
|                |              |  • Benefits, difficulties, opportuniies, and thoughts |
|                |              |  • The films and their messages    |
|                |              |  • How the films will be used, potential influence on the local environment |
| 8              | Extra time/resource | • Adjustment of films for publication at Vimeo |
The general approach to the group activity was to learn from and help each other. Thus, the interaction between the participants was an essential part of the activity. Life filming involved a learning process with recurring reflections on the films. This meant that the participants’ own thoughts and opinions were met with others in a shared reflection, which helped to understand each other’s needs and perspectives (e.g. in the local environment). Such a reflective learning process could, in the long run, lead to increased knowledge of one’s society and solidarity.

The film as a product

In total, nine films were produced. Seven of them had the aim of assessing the local environment. These seven films are available on Vimeo (Table 2), and vary in length between 1.03 and 5.38 minutes (mean 2.78 minutes). All participants produced at least one film; one participant produced two films and another participant three. One participant, whose partner had impaired vision, contacted a representative, he filmed obstacles in the local environment which posed a danger to persons with visual impairments. Two participants focused on hazardous traffic situations and the lack of or incorrect weather protection at tram stations. Other films were about difficulties handling the digitalized society, barriers to a wheelchair user accessing buildings, and thoughts about future housing opportunities. Two participants chose themes unconnected to the local environment, and explained that their primary focus was to learn how to film.

The power and potential for film to convey a message, compared to other media was widely discussed during the group activity. The general opinion was that film constituted a powerful way of communicating a message. The arrangement of moving images, still pictures, and music composed a different narrative, better enabling empathy to be evoked in the receiver when compared to an ordinary oral or written message. That is, the films offered the possibility to understand why something like a bench, a distinctive design setting in the outdoor environment, is important to someone. Opinions that film facilitates the ability to be noticed, and thereby to influence, were expressed. Hence, the use of Life filming was considered to boost the experience of participation among the users.

Making a real difference

All those involved agreed that a central aspect of Life filming was the assurance that the films would be viewed by the relevant municipal departments and contributed to the improvement of decision-making in the municipality. In short, participants felt they could make and, therefore, make ‘a real difference’. To produce a high level of participation, it was vital that the participants understood how the project leaders of Age-Friendly Gothenburg would use the films and to whom the films were intended to be shown to. Furthermore, participants expressed wishes for feedback on what improvements to the local environment their films resulted in. In our case, when the action plan in the Age-friendly Gothenburg project is officially adopted, it will be shared with the participants. Any improvements in the local environment due to the action plan will also be reported. Since the films are public and freely accessed on Vimeo, they have been shown to a council of politicians (Åldreberedningen), who gather information regarding seniors for the municipal government. In addition, the films were included in a national conference on city planning with a senior perspective in November 2016, hosted by the city of Gothenburg in cooperation with the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm. They have also been used for educational purposes in the occupational therapy program at Gothenburg University. At the final group meeting, participants were encouraged to send their films to a function of the city’s website called ‘submit comments’ (Lämna synpunkter), and they were informed of an application linked to the municipality whereby citizens can report so-called ‘easily remediated obstacles’ (Anmäl enkelt avhjälpta hinder).

An identity as a capable older person

The certainty that the films would be published on the Internet (Vimeo) was imperative to the participants. It made them feel that they were part of the technology era, and that they would make a lasting imprint which is available to anyone. The participants’ self-images were strengthened by the idea of

Table 2. List of produced films and vimeo links.

| Film number | Title               | Vimeo link        |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1           | Visual impairment   | https://vimeo.com/190522771 |
| 2           | Stenpiren           | https://vimeo.com/190523242 |
| 3           | How did you think about this? | https://vimeo.com/190523601 |
| 4           | Brunnsparken        | https://vimeo.com/190522767 |
| 5           | At the same time    | https://vimeo.com/190523240 |
| 6           | It makes me mad     | https://vimeo.com/191973477 |
| 7           | The future          | https://vimeo.com/191973478 |
producing something to be published on the Internet, 'like everybody else, like the youth', and in so doing, having the opportunity to make an impact.

To learn about new technology, and to become 'one who can master technology' was highlighted as being of equal importance to influencing the local environment, when it came to attending the group activity. Several participants bought their own tablets and continued to develop their skills and make use of them in other contexts, for instance in associations and political activity. Some have also taken on the mission of teaching others about how to produce films using tablets and see themselves as obligated to support others in the management of technology. To be able to identify oneself as a capable older person, in line with, and not overtaken by, the technical development of society was seen as a valuable result of participating in Life filming.

**Discussion**

This case study demonstrates that Life filming, as a means of participatory approach in collaboration with older persons regarding their local environment, constituted an operative way of gaining knowledge and supported participation, both as a process and an outcome. Life filming had benefits on multiple levels: for the individual person, for older persons as a group, and for the municipality. On a micro level, it seems like Life filming facilitated personal engagement, practical skills, and feelings of mastering technology. On a meso level, community-dwelling older persons experienced real possibilities to influence their local environment. At the macro level, the municipality received valuable knowledge with opinions on the city's age-friendliness and gained insights for improvement. In addition, the municipality received confirmation that Life filming can constitute an operative means to support participation in Citizen dialogs.

When an older person becomes involved and participates in a process which enables their voice to be heard, it can contribute to the experience of a higher degree of influence: the empowerment of that person [10,33]. Life filming appears to have supported the emergence of empowerment in the present context since participants described engagement, enhanced technical abilities, and a sense of mastering technology. To accomplish empowerment in democratic processes is in line with the goals of User participation [13], Citizen dialogs [11], Design driven dialogs [14], and the POJF [9]. It is also reported to lead to increased trust in the social institutions within a democracy [34]. Accordingly, we propose that Life filming entails a promising digital tool for practice when a participatory approach and empowerment are desired.

Even though health-related aspects were not a primary focus of our study, the self-image of participants seems to have been positively influenced by Life filming. This was evident in participants describing a sense of belonging, and viewing themselves as capable persons. These findings correlate to reports stating that digital tools can have beneficial effects on social interaction and quality of life [18], and that film-making can result in higher levels of self-awareness [35]. Learning new skills like the making and editing of films also seem to contribute to pride and boost self-confidence, the feeling of being able to learn new things despite an older age. That an older person’s self-confidence can be boosted by information and communication technique interventions has been identified in previous research [36], and was concluded in a report into older persons in Sweden learning how to use tablets [37].

Learning and different learning processes are reflected in several themes in the result of this study. The participants in the group activity interacted with and learned from each other in a way that can be recognized as 'Peer learning'. Peer learning is defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions [38]. This fits well with the pedagogical approach in the group activity at the community center as an arena for the exchange of knowledge. The participants learned how to handle technology and gained knowledge of which channels are available to influence their municipality. They learned in a social context (i.e. the community center in the urban district) by the use of tablets (i.e. artifact), which indicate that Life filming, as realized in our case, can be theoretically anchored in socio-cultural learning theory [39]. These theoretical assumptions reinforce the use of Life filming as also being a means in a learning perspective.

Today’s world and modern popular culture is highly visual; we are surrounded by pictures and films. The importance of being able to take pictures and read images in a conscious way, is comparable to being able to read and write. It is about literacy in its broadest sense [40], and being able to learn new things about the world through digital media [41]. One way to improve citizens’ critical thinking is to teach them how a tablet computer can create pictures and films. When you can handle that, you can also
describe, highlight, question, visualize, and identify different perspectives of the world you live in [21]. Thus, using Life filming together with older persons is not only a joyful leisure activity, but may also comprise an important means for participation in a democratic society. Even so, we should remember that there are inevitably different views on any given welfare technique. These can be based on experience from usage, preferences for certain likes and tastes, choice of interests, activities or other things in life [42]. Ultimately, the technique that suits one older person does not necessarily need to interest another older person. Moreover, because one participant chose to drop out due to high engagement in the group activity, different commitment level preferences must be considered when planning similar group activities. However, it is important to offer feasible tools to those who want to participate by creating a story. This stresses the importance of having no financial charge as a requisite to participation as well as being able to borrow a tablet. In applying such an approach, digital exclusion is counteracted. Another incentive to battle digital exclusion is an up-to-date report [43] stating that the age-related digital divide regarding Internet usage still exists. Although 92% of persons 66 to 75 years old and 56% of persons 76 years or older, now use the Internet, it is far from the hundred percent use in the age group 16–25 years. If increasing the technical skills of older people strengthens their self-esteem, they may also be less afraid to learn new things in general. In addition, increased technical skills among older persons can be used for other purposes, for instance, to counter stereotyped images of older people in the media, and thus counteract ageism.

At the macro level, the municipality received valuable knowledge from the opinions given on the city’s age-friendliness. The information can be used both as an incentive for improving the existing environment, as well as in strategic city planning. One way to develop the use of future films in similar projects like ours, could be to edit them into category-films based on the focus areas outlined by the Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities [3]. Such a procedure could aggregate information and further enhance ‘the message’; clarifying priorities in city planning from the perspective of older persons. However, in our case, it was not the participants who produced the films that also made the city planning decisions. If the goal had been to reach a political co-decision according to the ‘ladder of citizen participation’ [12], the Life filming would have needed to be reinforced by additional methods. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the hierarchic model of the ‘ladder of citizen participation’ has been criticized for only focusing on power, while overlooking other gains such as the knowledge arising from the work process and individual achievements through participation [44].

Some methodological aspects need to be highlighted. First, the study design. It is important to take into consideration that the findings are based on a single case with a small number of participants and personal experiences, which may limit transferability. The study design could have been strengthened by applying a mixed method approach [45], or additional data sources (e.g. semi structured interviews or focus groups). Nevertheless, several benefits with Life filming in the given context were revealed, and the choice of study design contributed to the enabling of these findings. Rich data was collected since persons involved in the group activity also collected data. The experiential learning of those involved formed the findings and, hence, a knowledge base for practice. The case-study design maintained the integrity of the whole process; from the planning of the participatory approach through to completion and the publication of the films. Thus, the findings enable replication with customization of Life filming as a participatory approach in other contexts. Our case was what Stake [46] calls an ‘intrinsic case study’ because the case was ‘given’ and we felt ‘obligated to take it on as the object to study’. Finally, the study design enabled shared power among all involved, which, in itself, may have facilitated empowerment.

Another vital methodological aspect is the target group: community-dwelling persons, aged 65 years and older, living in the selected urban district. Although no assessment of participants’ health was made, we can suppose that they represented a group of ‘healthy older people’ with good socio-economic conditions. Consequently, this may have affected the findings. It is unknown whether Life filming would have worked in the same way if participants had had health-related problems or difficulties in understanding the language. It is important to generate knowledge based on a broad group of older persons regarding their local environment, and include, for instance, older immigrants. To achieve this, we would have needed to adapt the recruitment process. For example, posters and advertisements could have been translated into other languages, and interpretive resources for the group activity would needed to have been considered. To be able to include persons with
health-related problems, we would have also had to explore the possibility of participants bringing relatives or assistants to support them in the group meetings. A more heterogeneous group might also have required adaptations to the setup: the frequency and duration of each group meeting, as well as the nature of home assignments. A suggestion, with the aim of including opinions from a more heterogeneous group of older persons, would be for participants to film more than their own experiences, but also the opinions of others with a deviant life situation (e.g. living with the consequences of a stroke or dementia). When inviting others to participate in their films, different barriers that exist in the local environment are made clearer to the filmmaker. Life filming with more vulnerable groups of older persons is imperative to determining whether it can be a possible means of participatory approach for a broader group of older people.

We have not accounted for costs or health economical calculations in our study, which is a shortcoming. It is important to include costs since it affects the feasibility of any project. In the POJF [9], it is emphasized that the inclusion of costs is an essential part of projects aimed at enhancing occupational justice for vulnerable groups. The framework even contains a separate phase, ‘strategies for resource funding’ (i.e. the fourth phase), to stress the importance of economic aspects. In addition, it is particularly important to consider costs when realizing Life filming. This, to counter any possible economic injustice for older persons that might prevent participation, for example, dissimilar conditions within the different urban districts of a city. Consequently, we recommend that future studies involving Life filming should include economic aspects to facilitate feasibility.

Finally, the last phase in the POJF is ‘inspire advocacy for sustainability or closure’, which refers to the assignment of spreading positive examples of completed projects which have supported occupational justice [9]. Through the drafting of this paper, we hope to inspire others to try Life filming and to create projects aimed at highlighting important social issues, together with those persons who are affected by them.

Conclusion

Life filming is an interesting and promising means to support participation, both as a process and an outcome. It had benefits on multiple levels: for the individual person, for older persons as a group, and for the municipality. Life filming provides the possibility to define and communicate an older person’s own life situations and could form a useful digital tool for practice when a participatory approach is desired.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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