



THE MANY FORMS OF “GOOD AGEING”

Noticing alignments
and frictions in
digital innovation
initiatives

Carla Greubel, Hanna Stalenhoef,
Susan van Hees, Ellen H. M. Moors, Daniel López Gómez, Alexander Peine

Abstract

Digital health and social care innovations for older people embody specific ideas about “good ageing.” But what does good ageing mean to older adults themselves? And how do their ideas and practices relate to the ideas of good ageing that have informed the design of those digital tools that they are invited to engage with? Our research comic explores these questions by drawing on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in three innovation initiatives that trial and implement health and social care innovations for older people in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Presenting our research in the format of a research comic is an explicit attempt at sharing everyday experiences of ageing and technology with a broader audience including researchers but also older adults, city and community councils, social workers, and technology developers with whom we collaborated in the field. The drawings, fieldwork quotes, and accompanying reflections illustrate the diverse and sometimes conflicting forms of good ageing that shape users’ engagement with proposed technologies. As such, the research comic invites the reader to question dominant perceptions of technologies as simple tools that facilitate good ageing. It highlights the importance and value of geographical, cultural, and affective closeness to the everyday lives of those for and with whom these technologies are designed. Such closeness, we argue, is a first step in being able to notice conflicts between different forms of good ageing and to adjust digital tools and services in such a way that they facilitate forms of good ageing that older adults themselves find relevant.

Keywords: research comic; good ageing; digital innovations; ethnography; the arts of noticing

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THE MANY FORMS OF “GOOD AGEING”

*Noticing alignments and frictions in
digital innovation initiatives*

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Susan van Hees¹, Ellen H. M. Moors¹, Daniel López Gómez³, Alexander Peine⁴

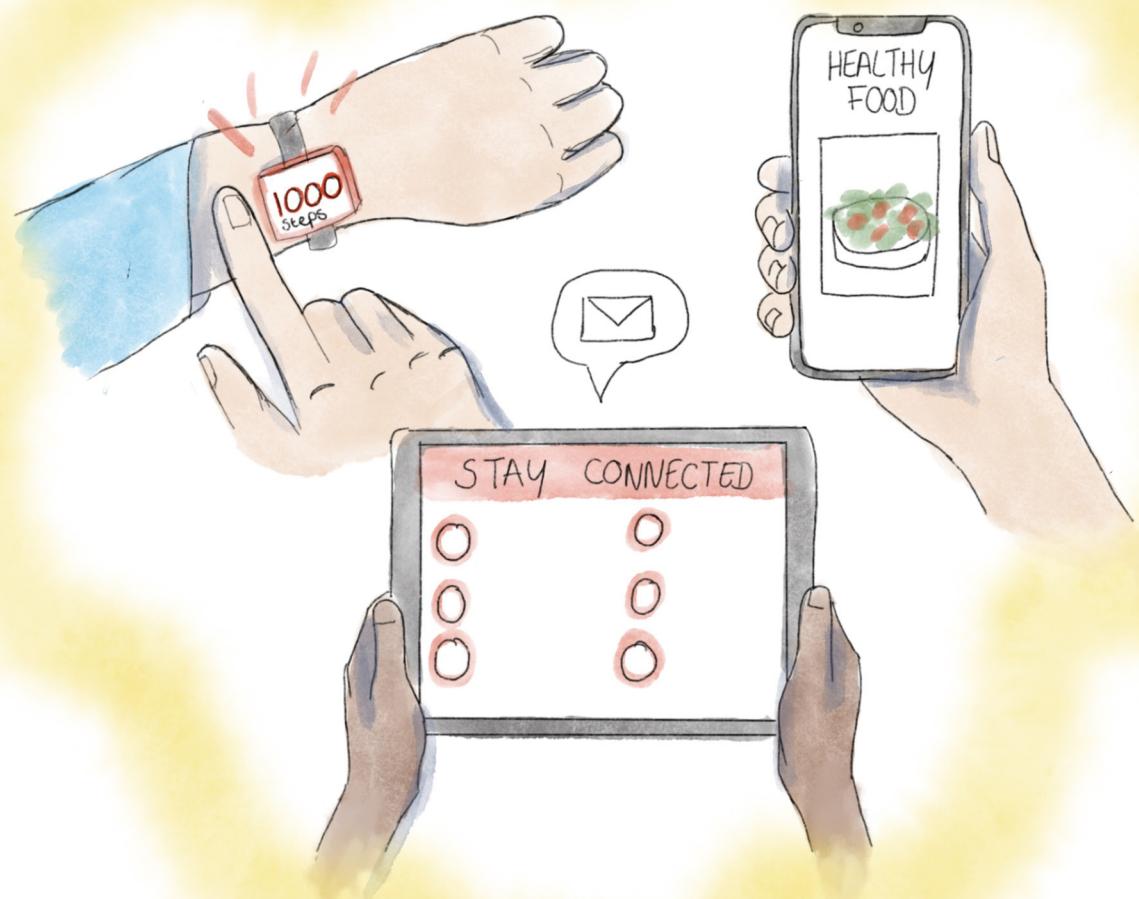
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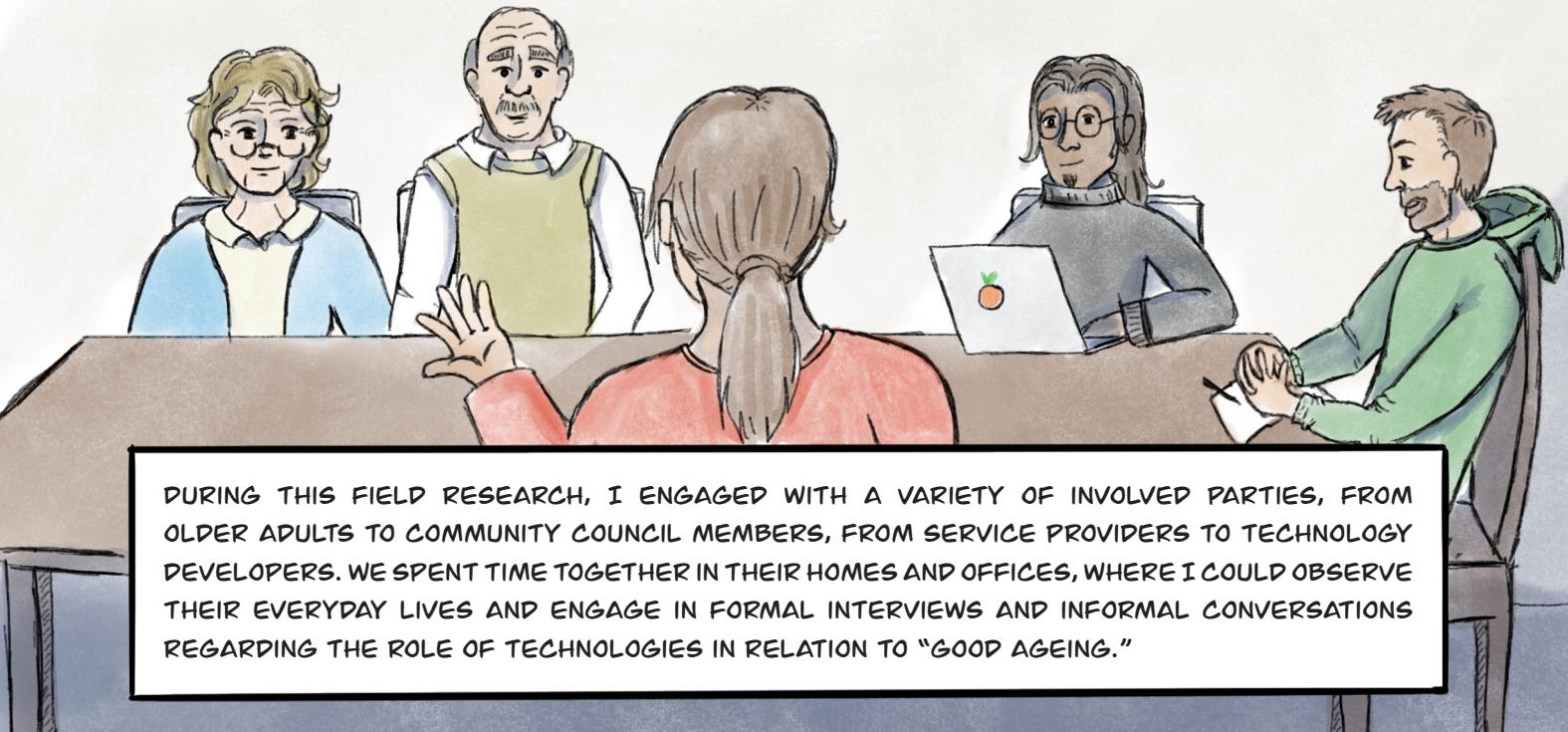
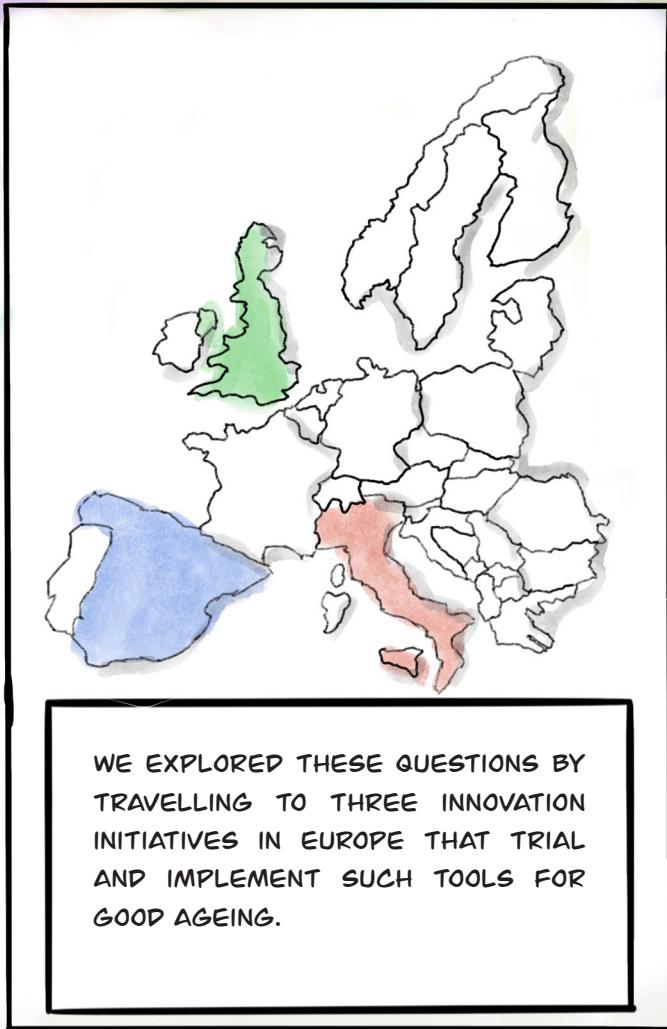
ACROSS EUROPE, TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPERS AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS COLLABORATE TO CREATE DIGITAL TOOLS THAT AIM TO HELP OLDER PEOPLE TO AGE WELL.



TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPERS AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS BUILD THESE TOOLS WITH CERTAIN IDEAS OF "GOOD AGEING" IN MIND.

BUT WHAT DOES "GOOD AGEING" MEAN TO THE OLDER ADULTS THEMSELVES?

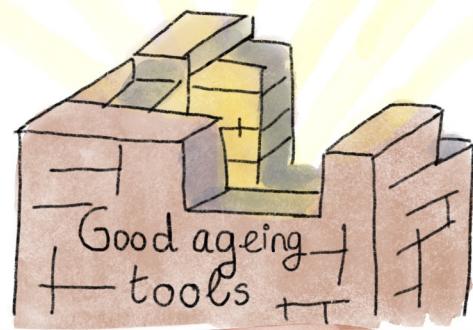
AND HOW DO THEIR IDEAS AND PRACTICES RELATE TO THE IDEAS OF GOOD AGEING THAT HAVE INFORMED THE DESIGN OF THE DIGITAL TOOLS?



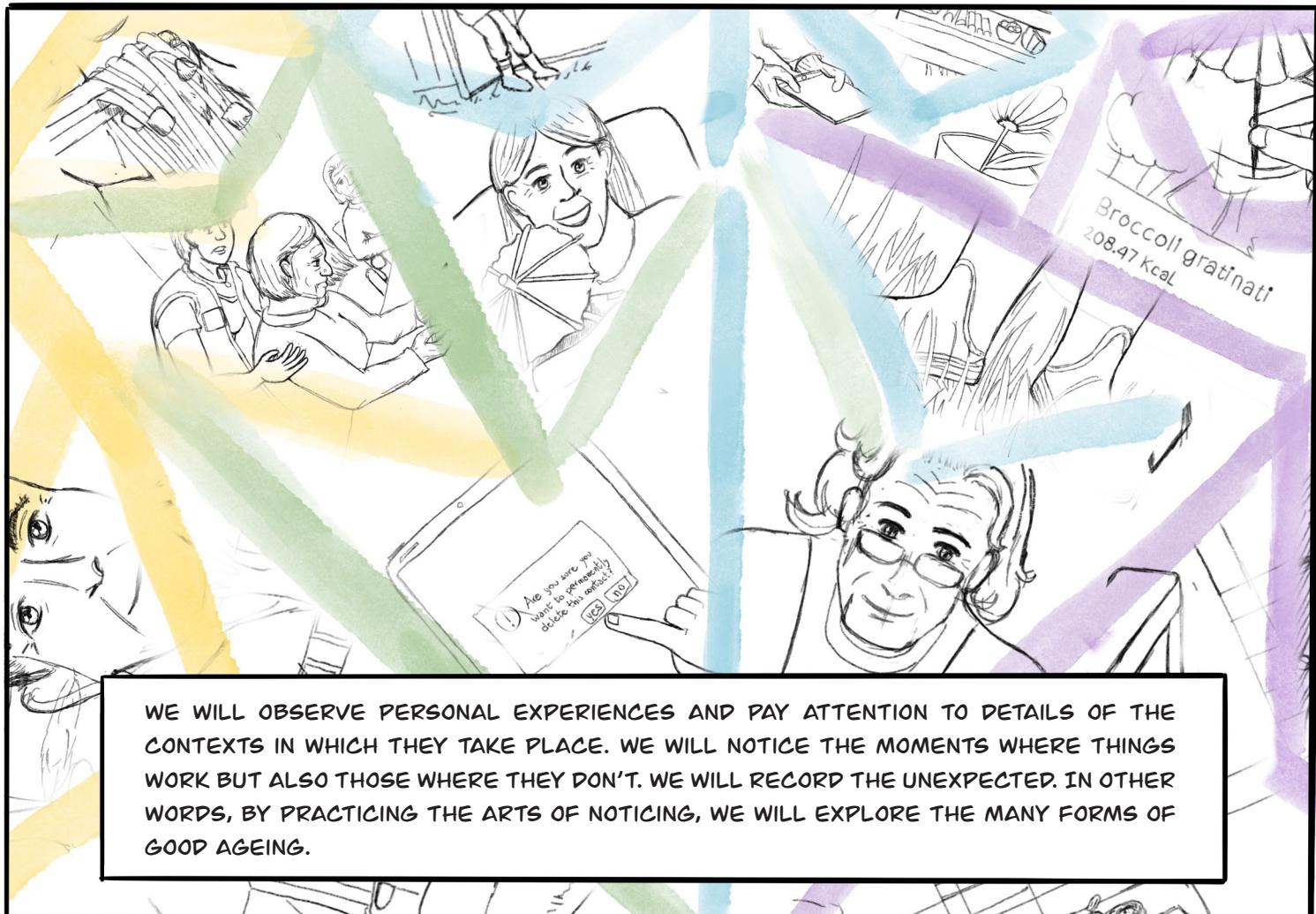
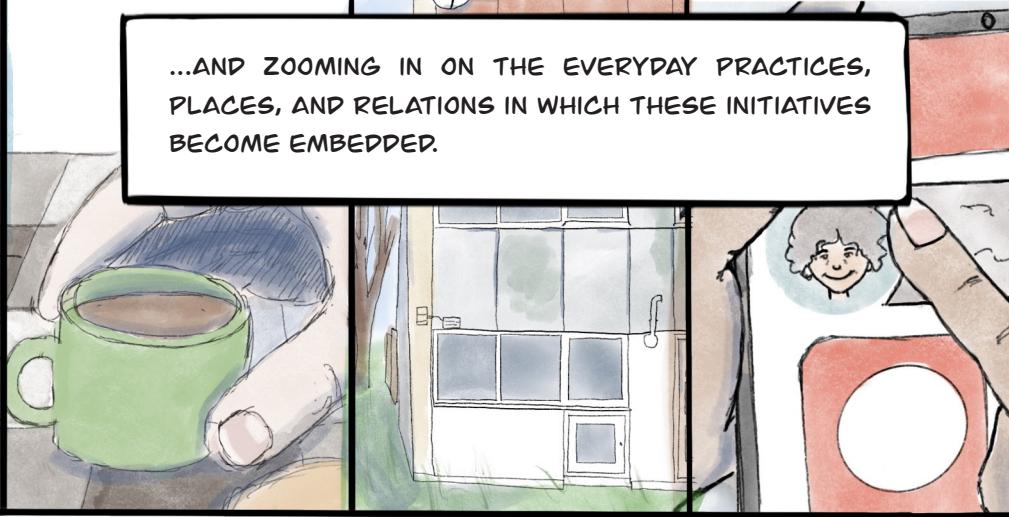
AS WE LOOK BACK TOGETHER AT FIELDWORK EXCERPTS IN THIS RESEARCH COMIC, I INVITE YOU TO ENGAGE WITH ME IN WHAT ANTHROPOLOGIST ANNA LOWENHAUPT TSING (2015) CALLS:



THIS INVOLVES US ZOOMING OUT OF THE MAIN IDEA OF GOOD AGEING THAT EACH INNOVATION INITIATIVE SEEKS TO REALISE...



...AND ZOOMING IN ON THE EVERYDAY PRACTICES, PLACES, AND RELATIONS IN WHICH THESE INITIATIVES BECOME EMBEDDED.



WE WILL OBSERVE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS OF THE CONTEXTS IN WHICH THEY TAKE PLACE. WE WILL NOTICE THE MOMENTS WHERE THINGS WORK BUT ALSO THOSE WHERE THEY DON'T. WE WILL RECORD THE UNEXPECTED. IN OTHER WORDS, BY PRACTICING THE ARTS OF NOTICING, WE WILL EXPLORE THE MANY FORMS OF GOOD AGEING.



PUGLIA, ITALY.
FEBRUARY-MARCH & SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2022



ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

AS PART OF A LARGE-SCALE EUROPEAN PILOT PROJECT ON THE PREVENTION AND MONITORING OF CHRONIC DISEASES IN OLDER ADULTS, CALLED GATEKEEPER,¹ RESIDENTS OF THE PUGLIA REGION (AGE 55+) WERE INVITED TO DOWNLOAD AN APP ON THEIR PHONE.

THROUGH THIS APP, THEY RECEIVED E-COACHING MESSAGES (ON THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET, ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, AND ON SOCIALISATION). IN ADDITION, THEY RECEIVED PERSONALISED RECIPE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BREAKFAST, LUNCH, AND DINNER GENERATED BY AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) ALGORITHM.

THE E-COACHING MESSAGES WERE WRITTEN BY THE ITALIAN PILOT PARTNERS (THE REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY, A LOCAL HOSPITAL, AND AN ITALIAN MEDICAL ENGINEERING COMPANY), WHILE THE RECIPE RECOMMENDATION ALGORITHM HAD BEEN DEVELOPED BY A MULTINATIONAL TECHNOLOGY COMPANY.

THE BROADER IDEA BEHIND THIS INITIATIVE WAS TO PROMOTE "HEALTHY AGEING."

¹See: <https://www.gatekeeper-project.eu/region/puglia-italy/>



DURING MY FIELDWORK IN PUGLIA I MET SIXTEEN OLDER ADULTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PILOT PROJECT.

ONE OF THE FIRST PEOPLE I VISITED IS FIORELLA, AGED 75. SHE LIVES BY HERSELF IN A SMALL VILLAGE IN THE SOUTH OF PUGLIA.

FIORELLA DOWNLOADED THE PILOT APP WITH THE RECIPES AND IS EAGER TO SHARE WHAT SHE OBSERVED.

THE RECIPES ARE QUITE RICH, NOT LIGHT ONES LIKE I USUALLY EAT.





BREAKFAST RECIPES



Carciofi al vapore con
pesto

340.66 Kcal



Broccoli gratinati

208.47 Kcal



Scones - ricetta base

173.73 Kcal

IT'S A DIFFERENT CUISINE. AND IT'S SALTY. I USUALLY HAVE A SWEET BREAKFAST, WHILE HERE IT INCLUDES EVERYTHING. MANY SALTY THINGS.



MANY OF THE PEOPLE I INTERVIEWED COMMENTED ON THE MISMATCH BETWEEN THE BREAKFAST RECIPE SUGGESTIONS PROPOSED BY THE APP AND WHAT THEY USUALLY EAT OR CONSIDER TO BE HEALTHY.



GIAMPIERO (AGE 66) AND MARIA (AGE 60)

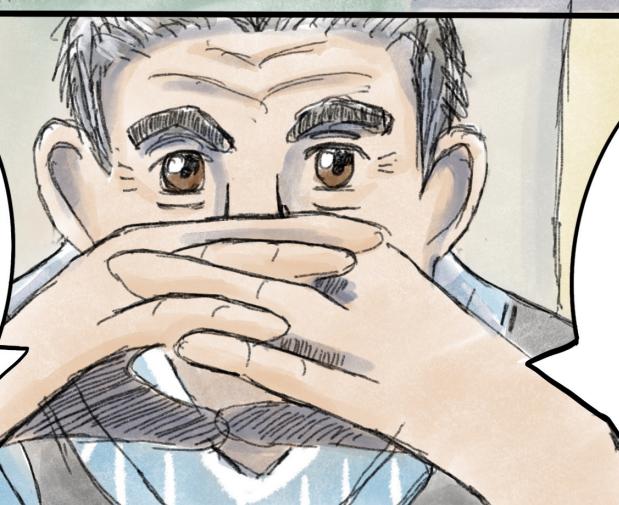
BECAUSE
A CAREFUL PERSON,
SEEING THESE
SUGGESTIONS, WOULD
ASK "WHAT AM I
READING, WHAT AM
I FOLLOWING,"
NO?

ALSO, THE
E-COACHING
MESSAGES AND
THE RECIPES ARE
NOT CONNECTED TO
EACH OTHER. IN THE
MESSAGES, THERE IS A
LOT OF TALK ABOUT, FOR
EXAMPLE, OUR FISH,
THE FISH FROM OUR
REGION, BUT THEN
IT'S NOT IN THE
RECIPES.



THOSE
WHO MAKE THE
RECIPES ARE ONE
WORKING GROUP, NO?
AND THOSE TALKING
ABOUT THE QUALITY
OF THE FISH, THAT IS
ANOTHER WORKING
GROUP.

BUT THEY
SHOULD TALK
TO EACH OTHER.
THEY HAVE TO
GIVE INTEGRATED
SOLUTIONS,
OTHERWISE IT
MAKES NO SENSE,
NO?





AGATA (AGE 77), WHO LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND AND SON.

WE ARE USED TO FOLLOWING THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET, USING A LOT OF PRODUCTS FROM OUR OWN LAND.

THAT'S WHY I DO LIKE THE E-COACHING MESSAGES: THEY GIVE THOSE SUGGESTIONS THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET.

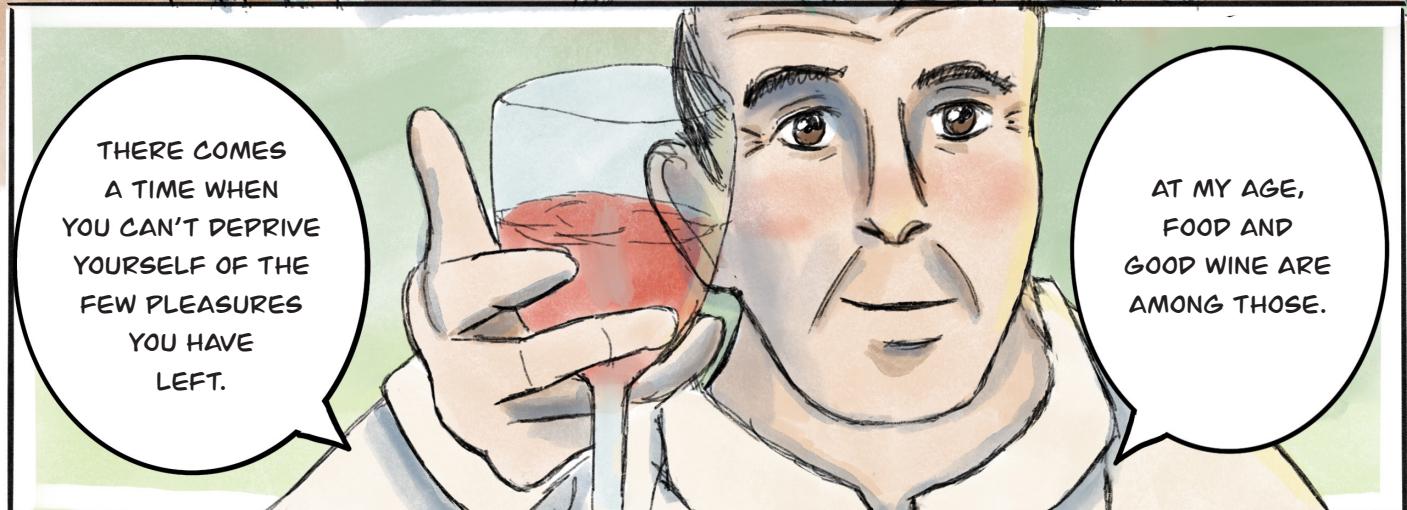
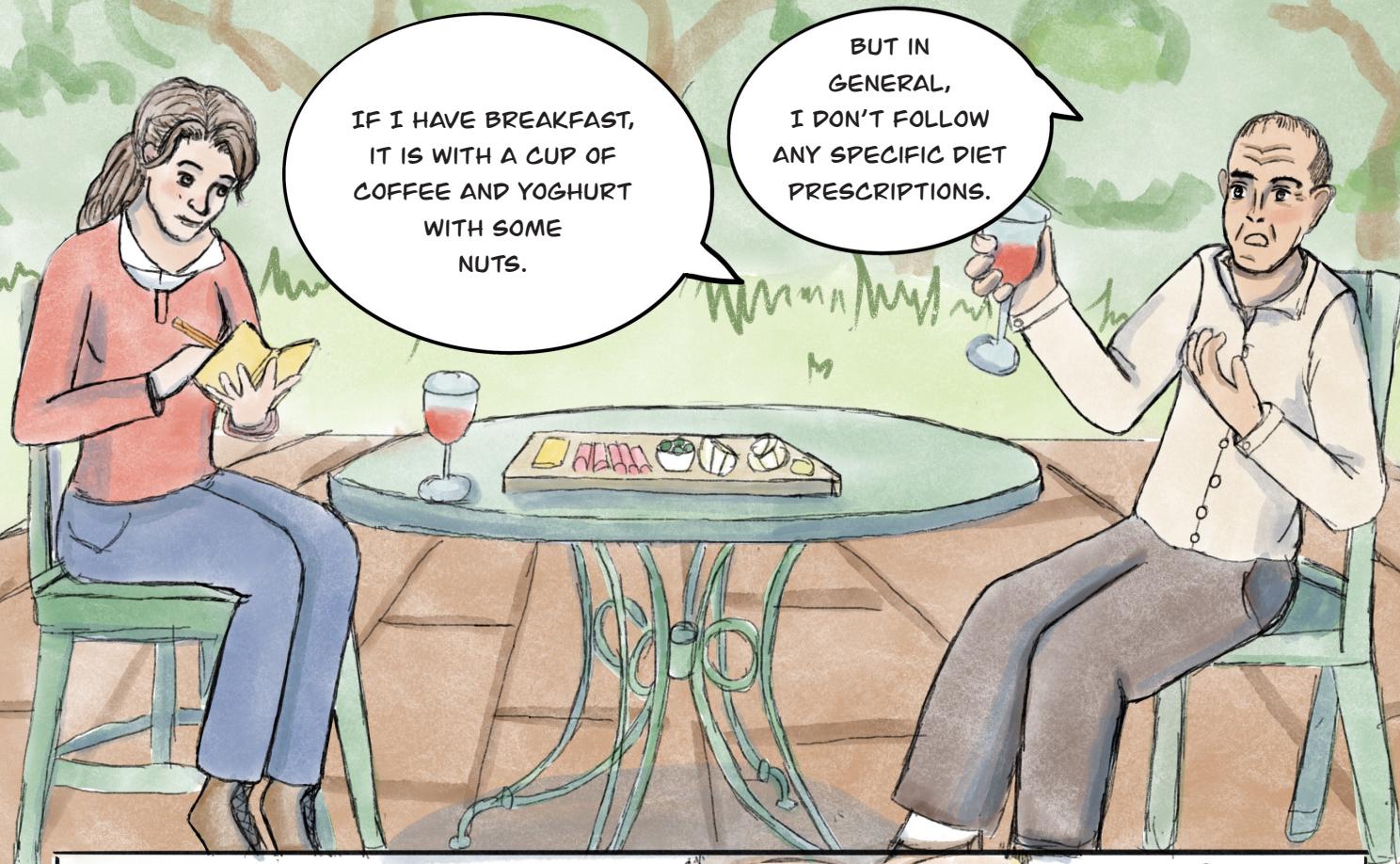


THE SUGGESTION TO EAT WHITE MEAT, FOR EXAMPLE.

THESE THINGS ARE FAMILIAR TO US.



DANIELE, THE BLUES MAN (AGE 67)



ONE AFTERNOON, FIORELLA INVITES HER FRIEND ROSA AND ME FOR AN ICE CREAM.



WHEN WE GET BACK, SHE NOTES IT DOWN IN HER DIARY AS A GOOD MOMENT OF THE DAY.

LUNEDI²⁷

EATING AS A COLLECTIVE AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY

EATING AS A CELEBRATION OF ONE'S CULTURE

EATING AS ONE OF THE LAST PLEASURES IN LIFE

Calories 751 kcal



FOR THE PEOPLE I MET IN PUGLIA, THE ROLE FOOD PLAYS IN GOOD AGEING INVOLVES MUCH MORE THAN THE ACT OF EATING HEALTHY NUTRIENTS.



THESE WERE ALL EQUALLY IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF GOOD AGEING.

Field Notes

When zooming out of the pilot's focus on healthy eating and attending to the everyday lives of those who receive the recipe suggestions, I noticed several things:

First, healthy eating interacts with many other notions of what is good and important for the older adults. This inevitably influences whether and how digital innovations, such as the recipe recommendation app, are actually used.

Second, healthy eating in itself can have many meanings, and there is a significant difference between what the app suggests and what the older adults in Puglia are used to or consider to be good and healthy.

This difference is related to other divergences that I could observe in the specific set-up of this pilot. For instance, there is the misalignment between the recipe recommendations and the e-coaching messages, as Giampiero rightly pointed out. There is also a relevant geographical and cultural distance between those who develop and those who receive the recipe recommendations.

These divergences influence how the pilot initiative knows (or does not know) its participants, and thereby also shape the observed conflicts between different forms of good ageing.

Do innovation initiatives which have left the pilot stage encounter similar frictions between different forms of good ageing?

With this question in mind I continued travelling to Barcelona...





ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

THE SERVICE VINCLESBCN² IS A SOCIAL CARE SERVICE LAUNCHED BY THE CITY OF BARCELONA SEVERAL YEARS AGO WITH THE AIM OF PREVENTING AND COMBATING LONELINESS AMONG OLDER ADULTS (AGE 65+) LIVING IN THE CITY. THE SERVICE COMBINES A DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND A TEAM OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKERS WHO ANIMATE THE INTERACTIONS AMONG USERS BOTH ONLINE AND THROUGH PHYSICAL EVENTS. THE PLATFORM CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH AN APP THAT, FOR THE MAJORITY OF USERS, IS INSTALLED ON A TABLET THAT THE CITY COUNCIL PROVIDES FOR FREE.

EVERY OLDER PERSON PARTICIPATING IN THE SERVICE IS PART OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP, WHERE THEY CAN INTERACT DAILY WITH EACH OTHER ONLINE. SOMETIMES THE GROUP ALSO MEETS IN PERSON FOR A COFFEE (ABOUT ONCE A MONTH). THE IDEA IS TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN A LOCAL NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS THAT CONNECTS OLDER ADULTS TO EACH OTHER AND TO ACTIVITIES, EVENTS, AND CARE INFRASTRUCTURE IN THEIR OWN NEIGHBOURHOOD.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE IDEA BEHIND THIS SERVICE IS TO PROMOTE "CONNECTED AGEING" AS A WAY OF PREVENTING AND MITIGATING LONELINESS.

² See: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/vinclesbcn/en/vincles-bcn>



IN BARCELONA, I ATTENDED SEVERAL VINCLESBCN GROUP ACTIVITIES, PARTICIPATED IN A TRAINING SESSION FOR USERS, AND CONDUCTED FORMAL INTERVIEWS AND INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS WITH THREE SOCIAL WORKERS AND ELEVEN OLDER ADULTS.

MANY SERVICE PARTICIPANTS SHARED THE IDEA THAT BEING PART OF A NETWORK OF SOCIAL RELATIONS IS IMPORTANT FOR GOOD AGEING. CARMELA (AGE 73) WAS ONE OF THEM.

THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF LONELINESS. THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE ALONE, AND THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO LIVE ALONE. BUT LIVING ALONE DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN BEING ALONE.



THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO LIVE ALONE, BUT HAVE THEIR CHILDREN AND THEIR GRANDCHILDREN WHO COME TO SEE THEM.

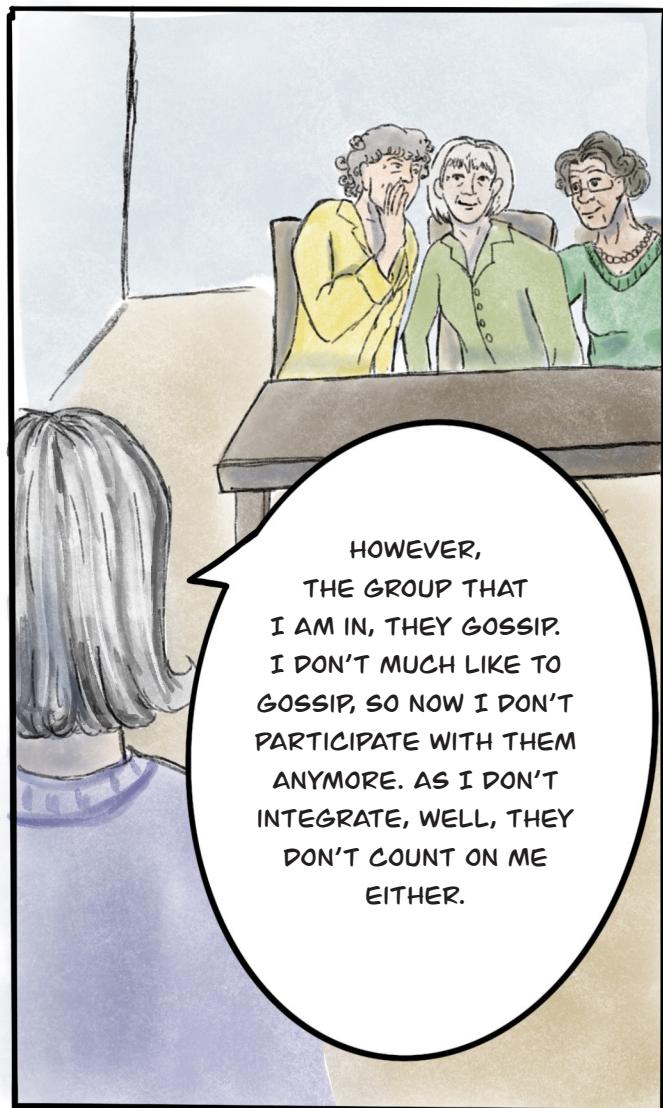


AND THEN THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE LONELY. WE LIVE ALONE, WE ENDURE ALONE, AND WE CONTINUE ALONE. WE DON'T HAVE ANYONE COMING TO SEE US.





ALTHOUGH FOR SOME PEOPLE IT WAS EASY TO FIND GOOD FRIENDS AND BUILD CONNECTIONS THROUGH THE SERVICE, FOR OTHERS, CREATING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONS THROUGH THE PLATFORM IS DIFFICULT. AS THE EXAMPLE OF CARMELA ILLUSTRATES, THE IDEA THAT CONNECTED AGEING SHOULD BE PART OF GOOD AGEING INEVITABLY COMES WITH THE QUESTION, "RELATIONS OF WHAT KIND?".



ON A WARM DAY I MEET ALBA (AGE 67). SHE JOINED THE SERVICE A WHILE AGO.

HI! HOW ARE YOU TODAY?

FINE, FINE.
THE WEATHER HAS CHANGED SO QUICKLY. I AM AFFECTED BY THE CHANGES IN THE WEATHER.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT HAPPENS TO EVERYONE IN THE SAME WAY, BUT IT DOES TO ME.

I ALWAYS NOTICE IT. I GET A HEADACHE, OR PAIN IN THE LEG.

BUT, WELL, I'M USED TO THIS PAIN. YOU HAVE TO LOOK FOR THE POSITIVE SIDE OF LIFE.

THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT ARE NEGATIVE, BUT LOOK AT THE POSITIVE SIDE, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMETHING TO BRIGHTEN YOU UP.

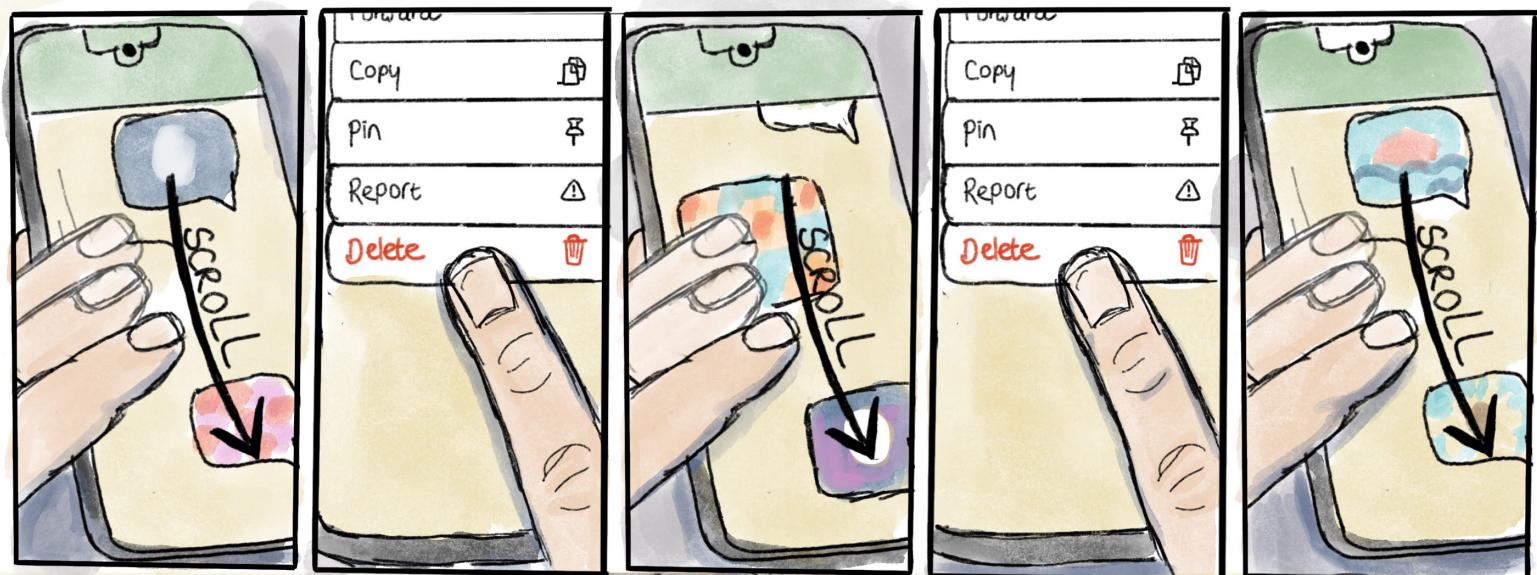
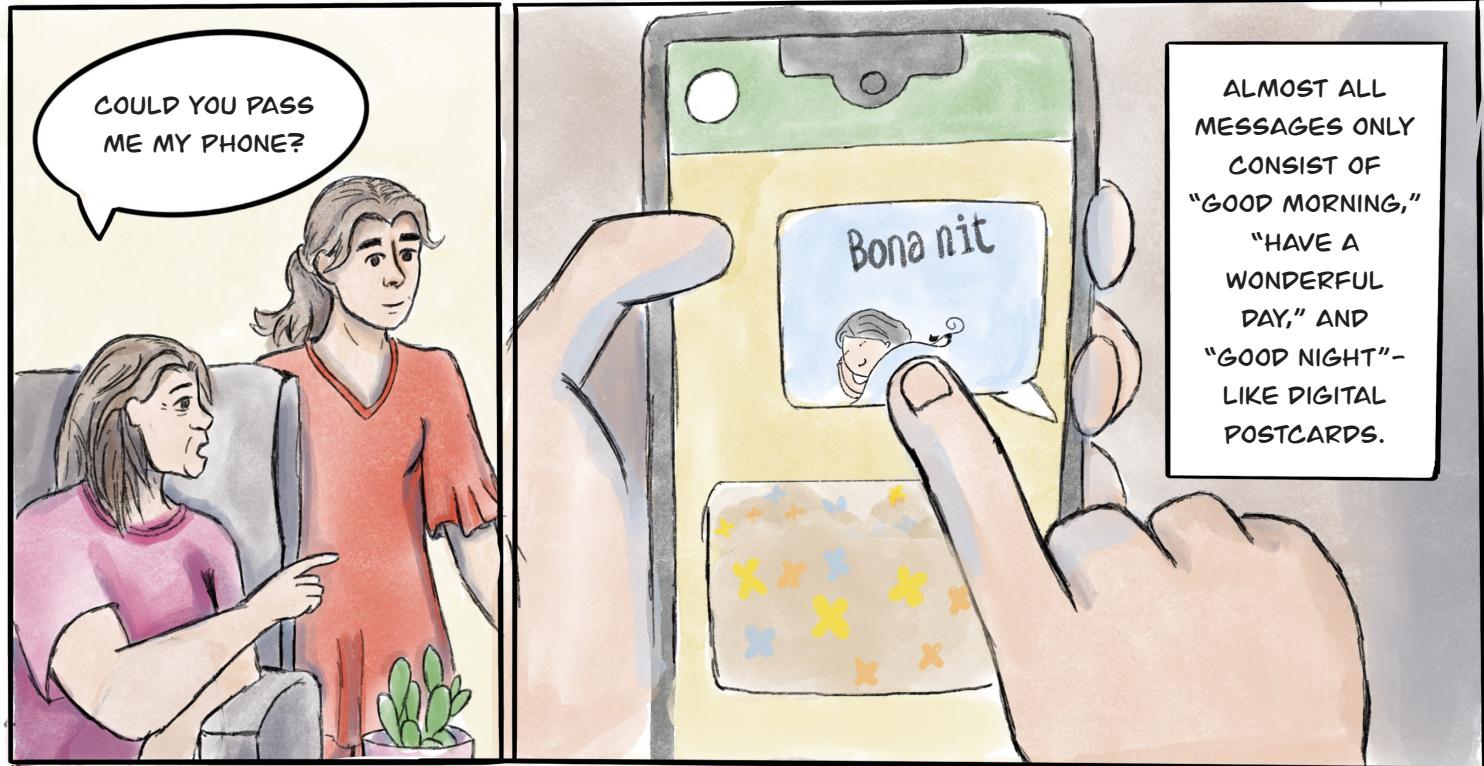
OR, IF NOT, YOU IMAGINE IT.

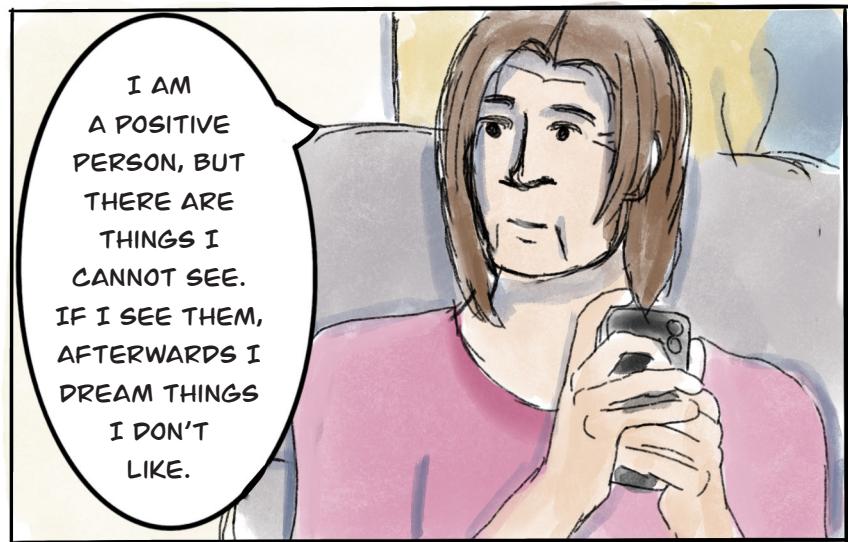
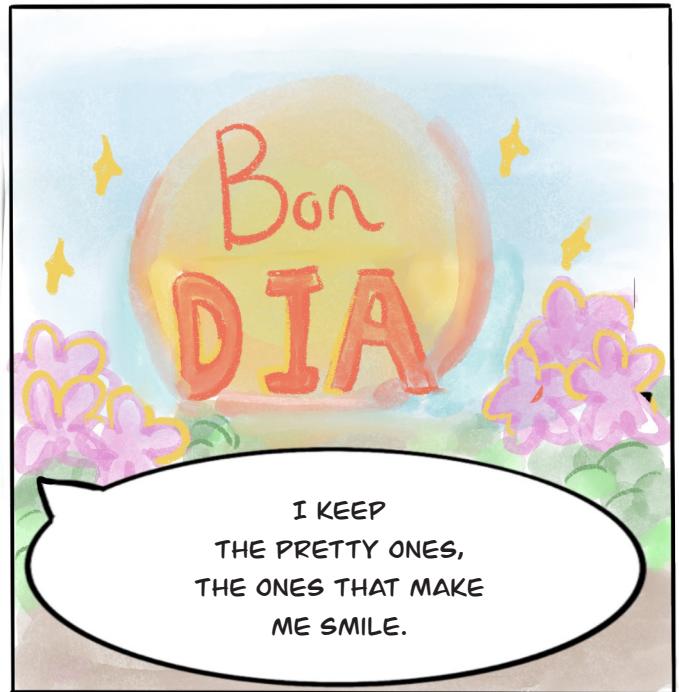
ON GREY DAYS WITH NO SUN, PUT COLOURFUL UMBRELLAS.

WITH COLOURS THAT MAKE YOU HAPPY, SO THAT YOU GIVE JOY TO LIFE.

FOR ALBA, FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE IS A WAY TO MANAGE LIVING WITH HER CHRONIC BODY PAIN.

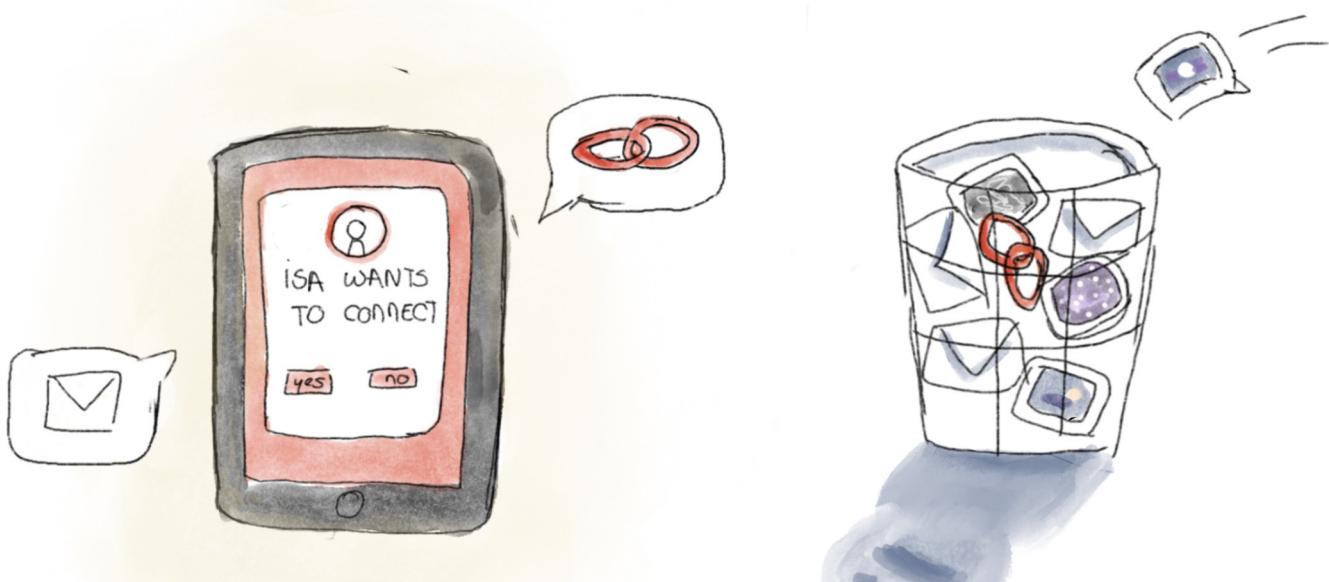
SOME TIME LATER, SHE WANTS TO SHOW ME SOMETHING IN A WHATSAPP CHAT THAT SHE HAS WITH SOMEONE SHE MET THROUGH VINCLESBCN.





THE STORY OF ALBA SHOWS THAT IN EVERYDAY LIFE SOCIAL RELATIONS ARE NOT ONLY CREATED AND MAINTAINED:

SOMETIMES, GOOD AGEING ALSO REQUIRES DELETING PARTS OF RELATIONS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY HURT.



I OBSERVED SOMETHING SIMILAR DURING A TRAINING SESSION FOR VINICLESBCN PARTICIPANTS.

ANDREA, A SOCIAL WORKER FROM THE SERVICE, LEADS THE TRAINING SESSION ATTENDED BY EIGHT WOMEN FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.

TODAY WE WILL PRACTICE THE USE OF THE VINCLES APP...

CAN EVERYONE MANAGE TO LOG IN?

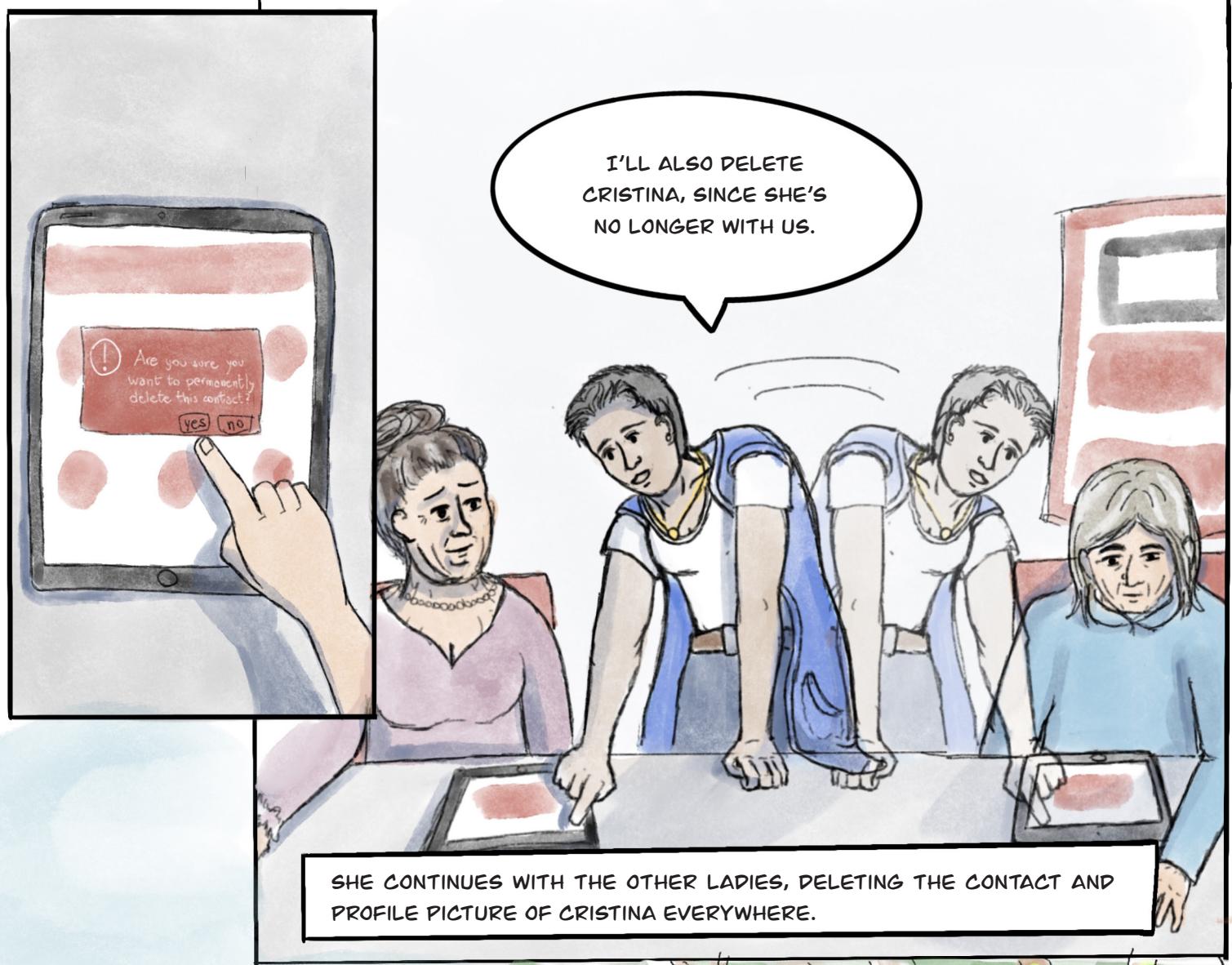
THE FIRST CONTACT IS MY SISTER...

SHE PASSED AWAY IN JANUARY.

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO DELETE THE CONTACT?

YES.

OTHERWISE, IT HURTS.



IN CONTEXTS WHERE SOCIAL RELATIONS ARE DIGITALLY MEDIATED - AND, THEREFORE, STORED - DEATH CAN MAINTAIN A CONCRETE PRESENCE IN A SOCIAL NETWORK. DELETING DIGITAL TRACES OF RELATIONS THEN BECOMES AN IMPORTANT PRACTICE FOR MANAGING PAIN IN RELATION TO GOOD AGEING.



Field Notes

In my encounters with participants of VinclesBCN, I noticed that the idea of good ageing as creating and maintaining social relations goes hand in hand with ending and even deleting (parts of) relations when digital content hurts, whether it is the pain of loneliness, chronic body pain, or the pain that comes with death and dying.

What I also noticed is that, similar to "healthy eating" in the Puglia pilot, the idea of good ageing as "connected ageing" can in itself take many forms. As the stories of Carmela and Alba illustrate, it inevitably comes with the question, "connections of what kind?" What counts as good relations can be different from one person to the other depending also on the specific situation in which they find themselves (loneliness, living with body pain...).

It seems important that service providers attend closely to these details of the kinds of relations that the service provides and the kinds of relations that different older adults look for. This might help to identify the struggles that some older adults experience when trying to realise the idea about good ageing as "connected ageing" that VinclesBCN promotes.

After almost three months in Barcelona, it was time to move on again, this time to a small parish next to Milton Keynes in the UK...





ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

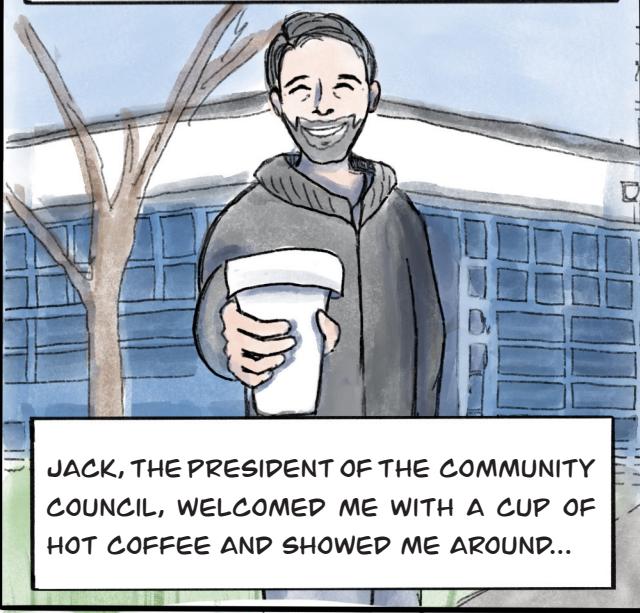
THIS INITIATIVE IS PART OF THE GATEKEEPER PROJECT, THE SAME BROADER EUROPEAN PILOT PROJECT AS THE HEALTHY AGEING INITIATIVE IN PUGLIA. THE MANAGER OF THE UK PILOT STUDY, TOGETHER WITH THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF THIS PARISH AND A HUNGARIAN TECHNOLOGY COMPANY, IS WORKING TOWARDS A MUTUAL SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR RESIDENTS OF THE COMMUNITY (INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO OLDER PEOPLE).³

AT THE TIME OF MY FIELDWORK, THE PILOT HAS NOT YET BEEN LAUNCHED, BUT PREPARATIONS ARE ONGOING. ACCORDING TO THE PLAN, COMMUNITY RESIDENTS COULD USE AN APP TO ASK FOR AND OFFER HELP WITH ALL KINDS OF SMALL TASKS. THESE TASKS ARE TYPICALLY NOT COVERED BY EXISTING COMMUNITY SERVICES BUT CAN BE A SOURCE OF STRESS WHEN LEFT UNADDRESSED. THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL WOULD COORDINATE THE INITIATIVE AND OVERSEE WHAT HAPPENS ON THE APP.

THE BROADER IDEA BEHIND THIS INITIATIVE IS TO STRENGTHEN THE RESILIENCE OF THE COMMUNITY BY FACILITATING CONNECTIONS AND TASK SHARING AMONG PEOPLE AND MAKING THEM ACTIVELY CO-CONSTRUCT WAYS OF LIVING AS WELL AS POSSIBLE IN THEIR SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS.

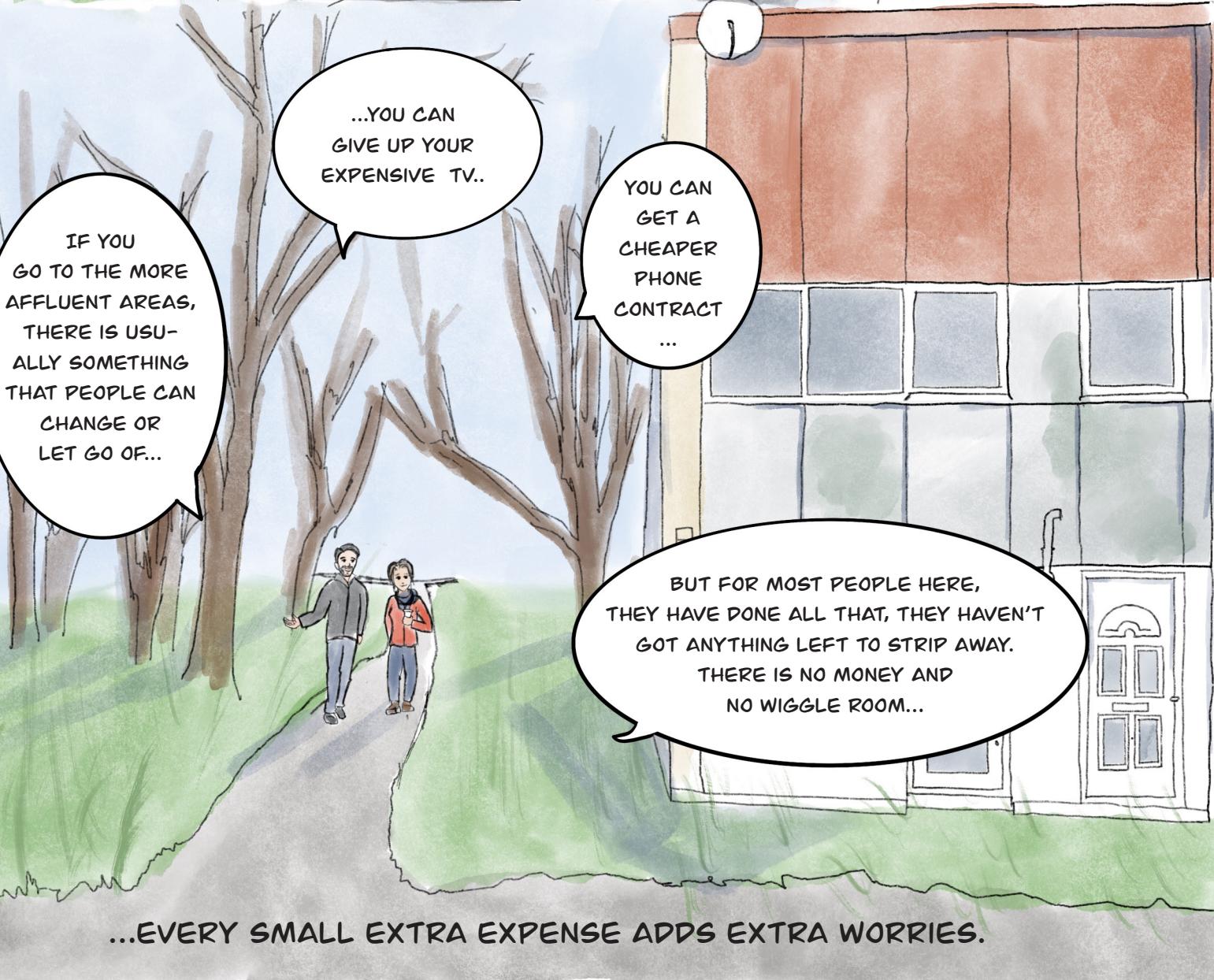
³See: <https://www.gatekeeper-project.eu/region/milton-keynes-uk/>

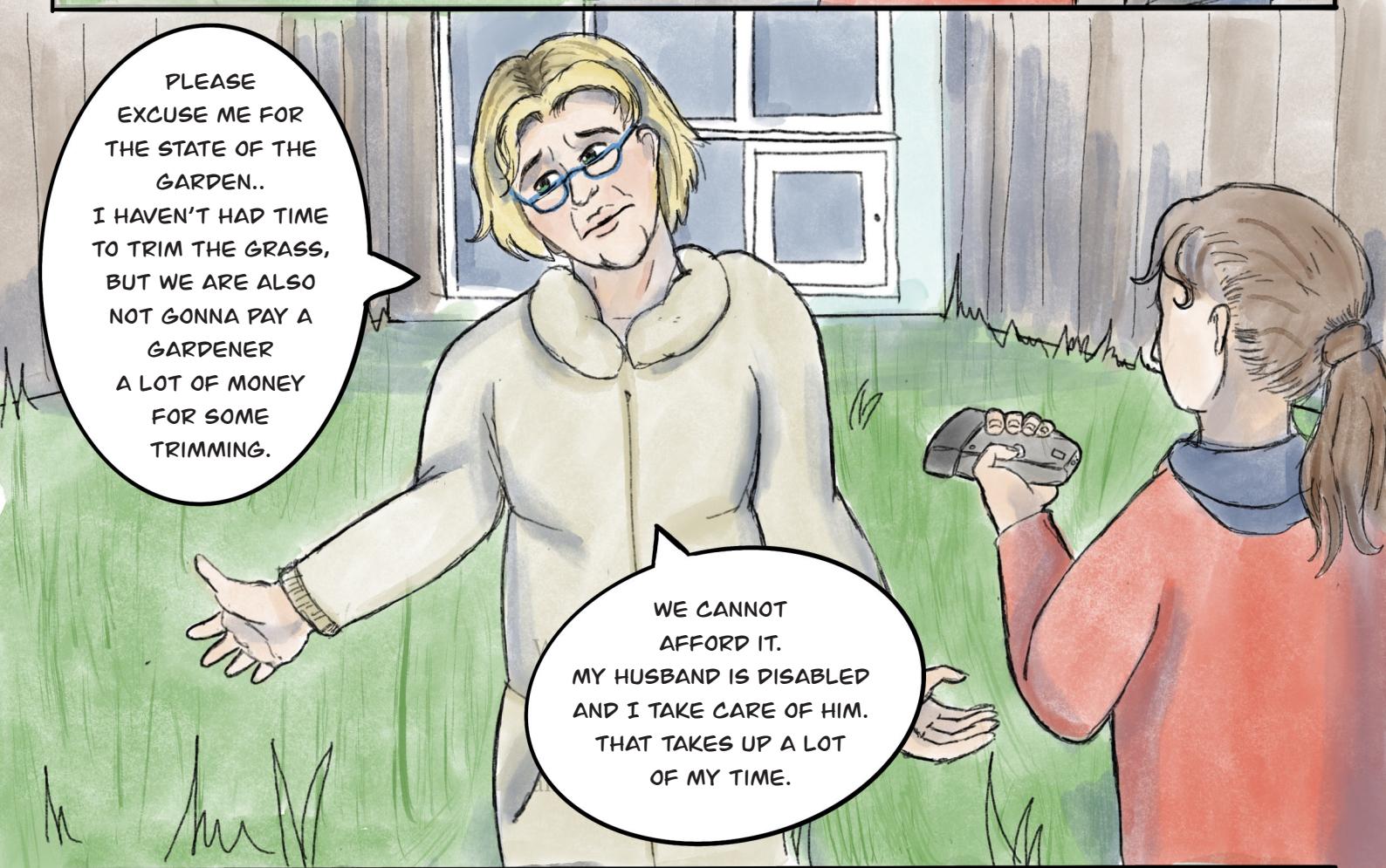
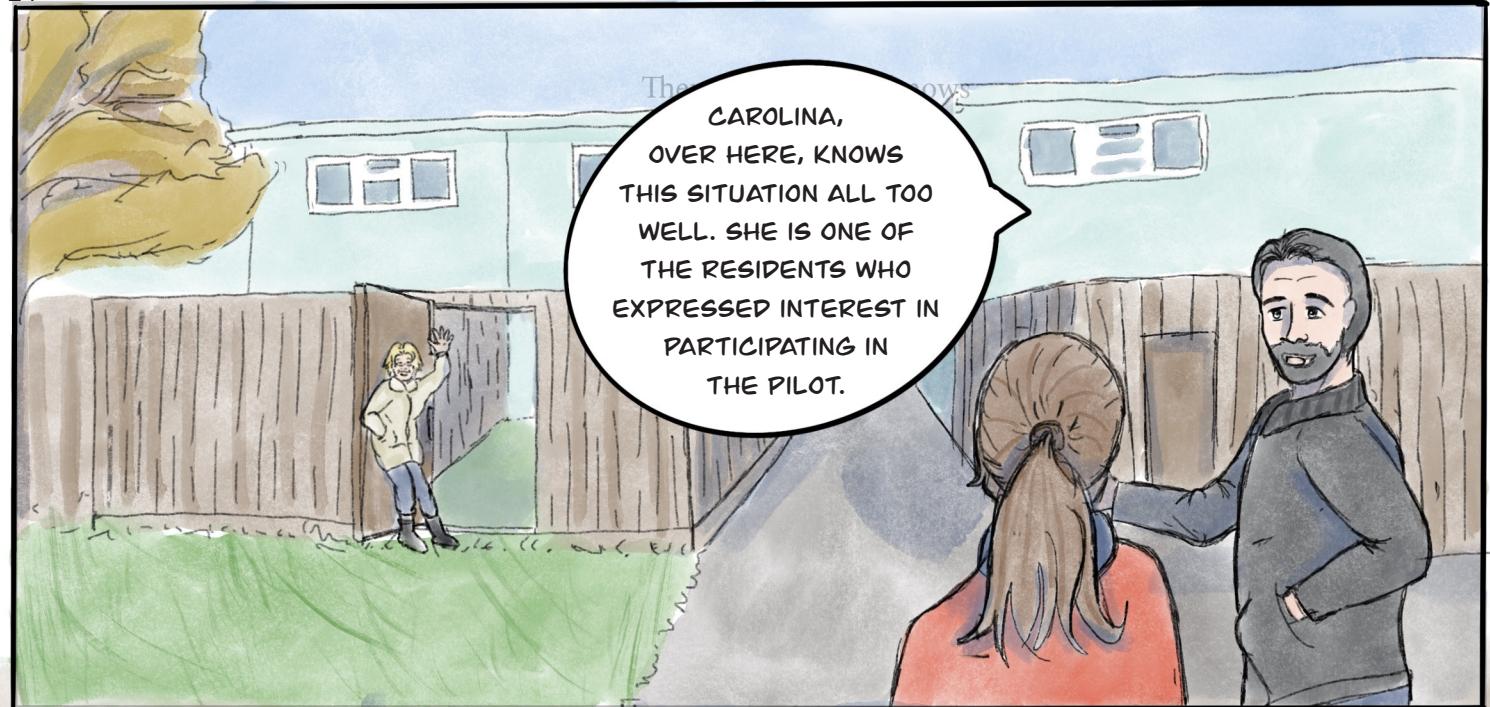
DURING MY FIELDWORK, I COLLABORATED WITH THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND INTERVIEWED TWO STAFF MEMBERS. I ALSO INTERVIEWED AND REPEATEDLY SPENT TIME WITH FOURTEEN OLDER ADULT RESIDENTS, INDIVIDUALLY AND IN GROUPS.

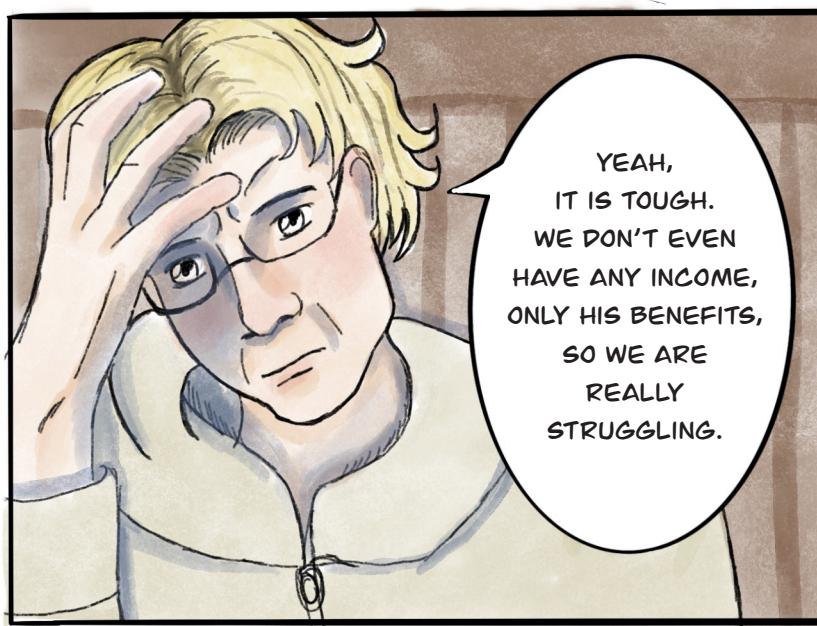


AT THE MOMENT WE ARE IN A SITUATION WHERE THE COST OF LIVING IS RISING.

OUR COMMUNITY TENDS TO FEEL THESE THINGS EARLIER THAN OTHER PLACES.

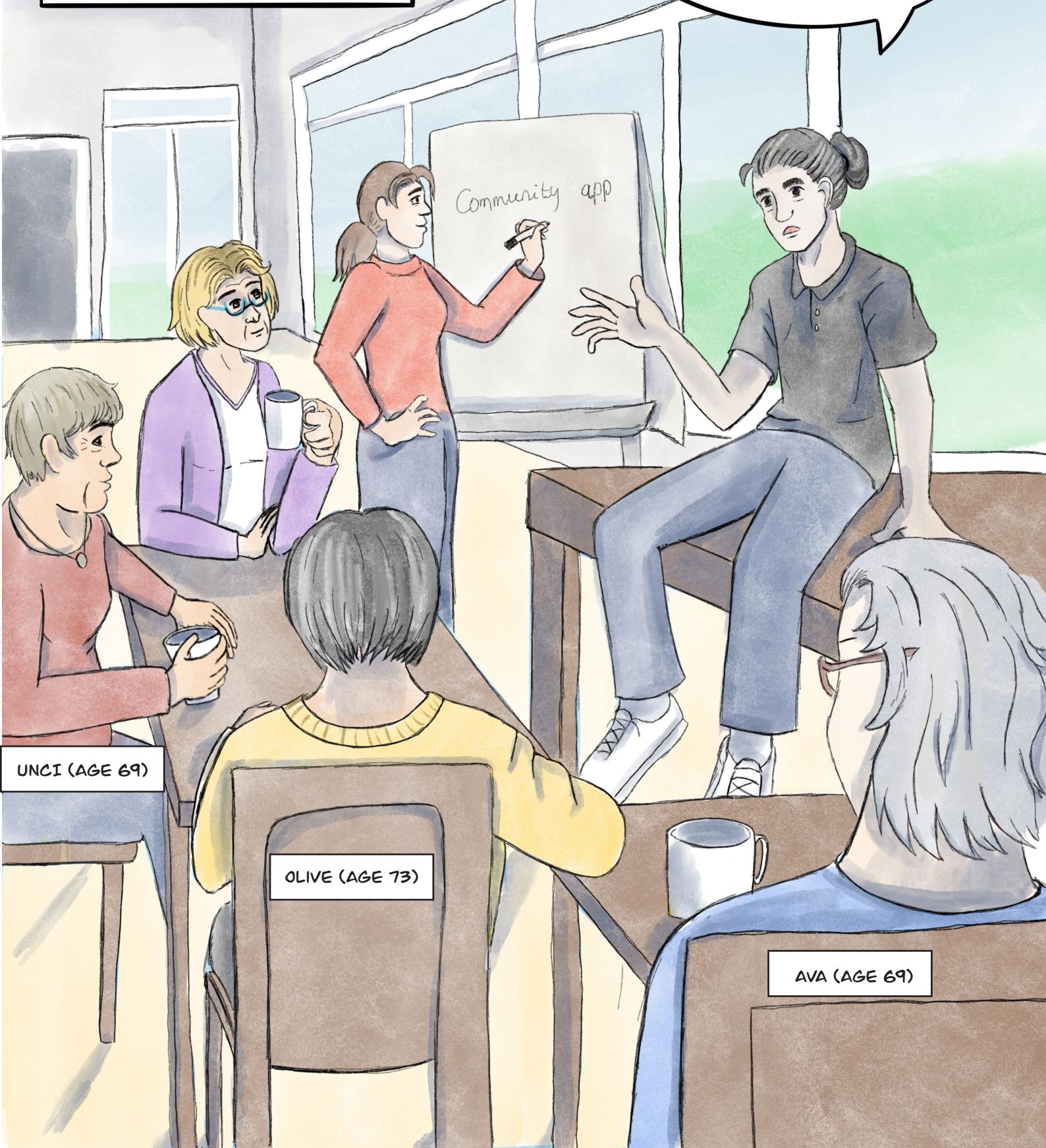


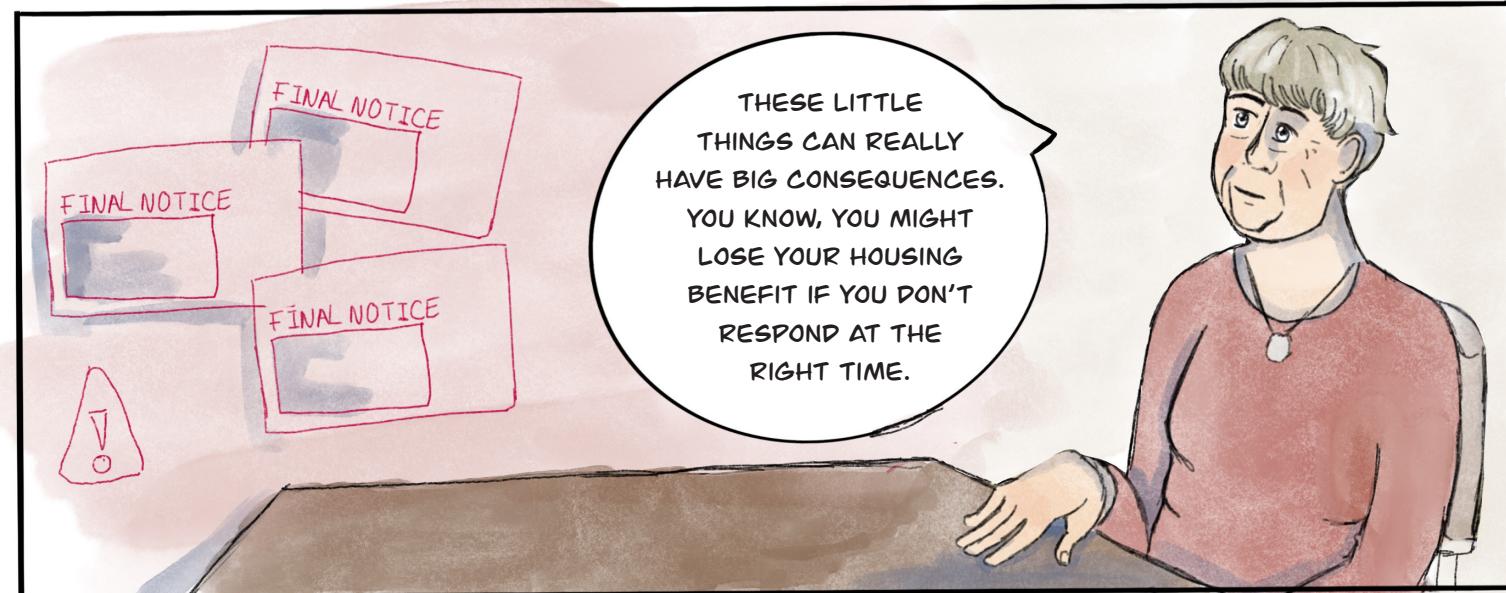
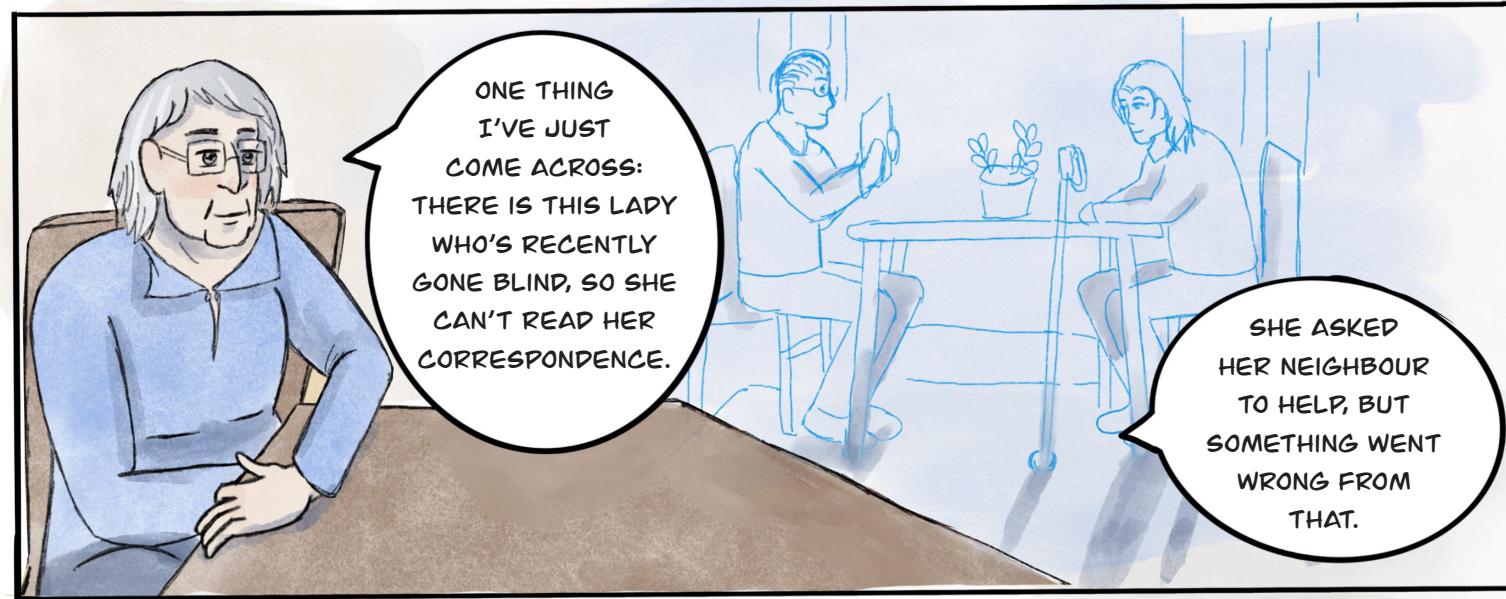


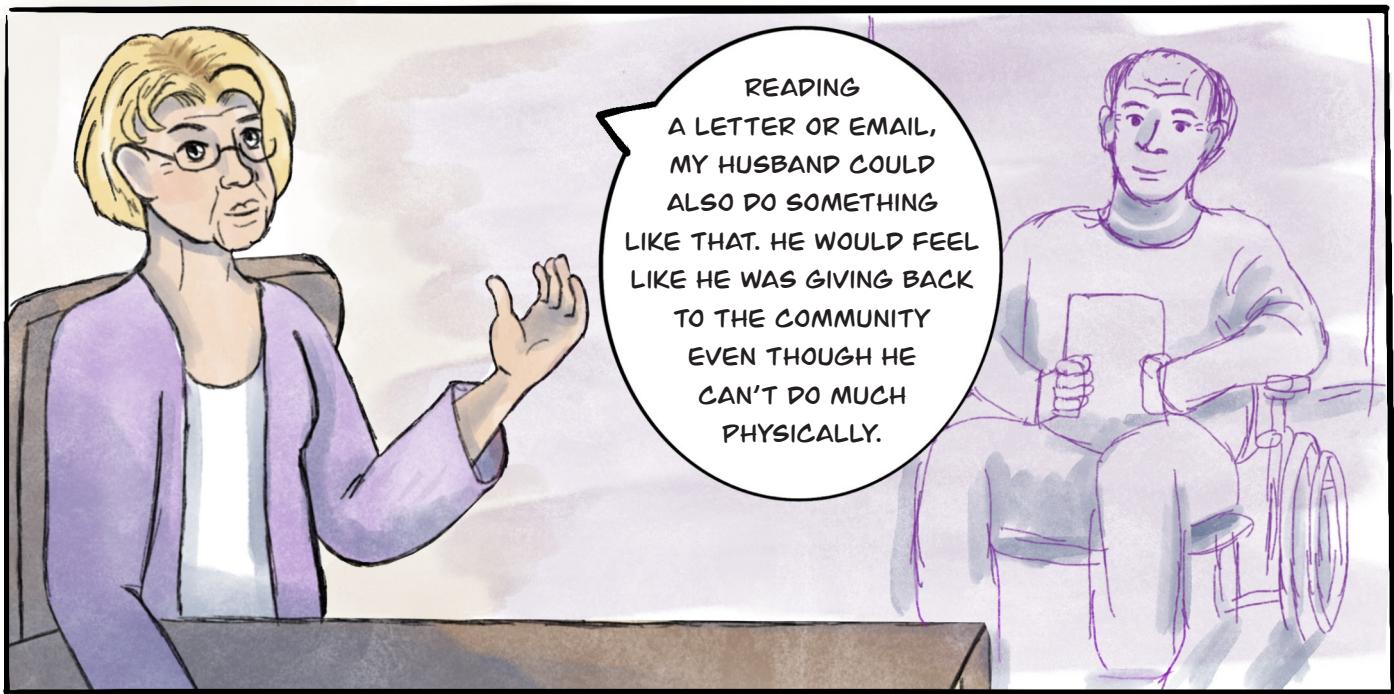


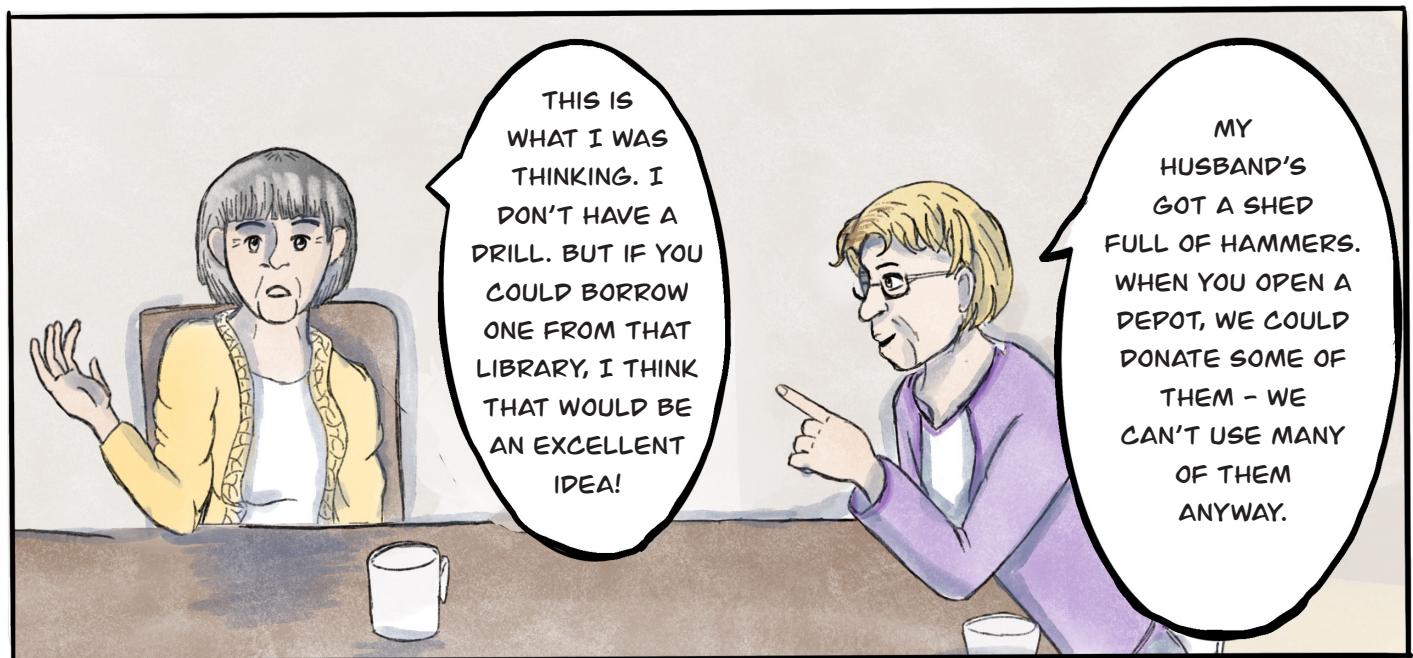
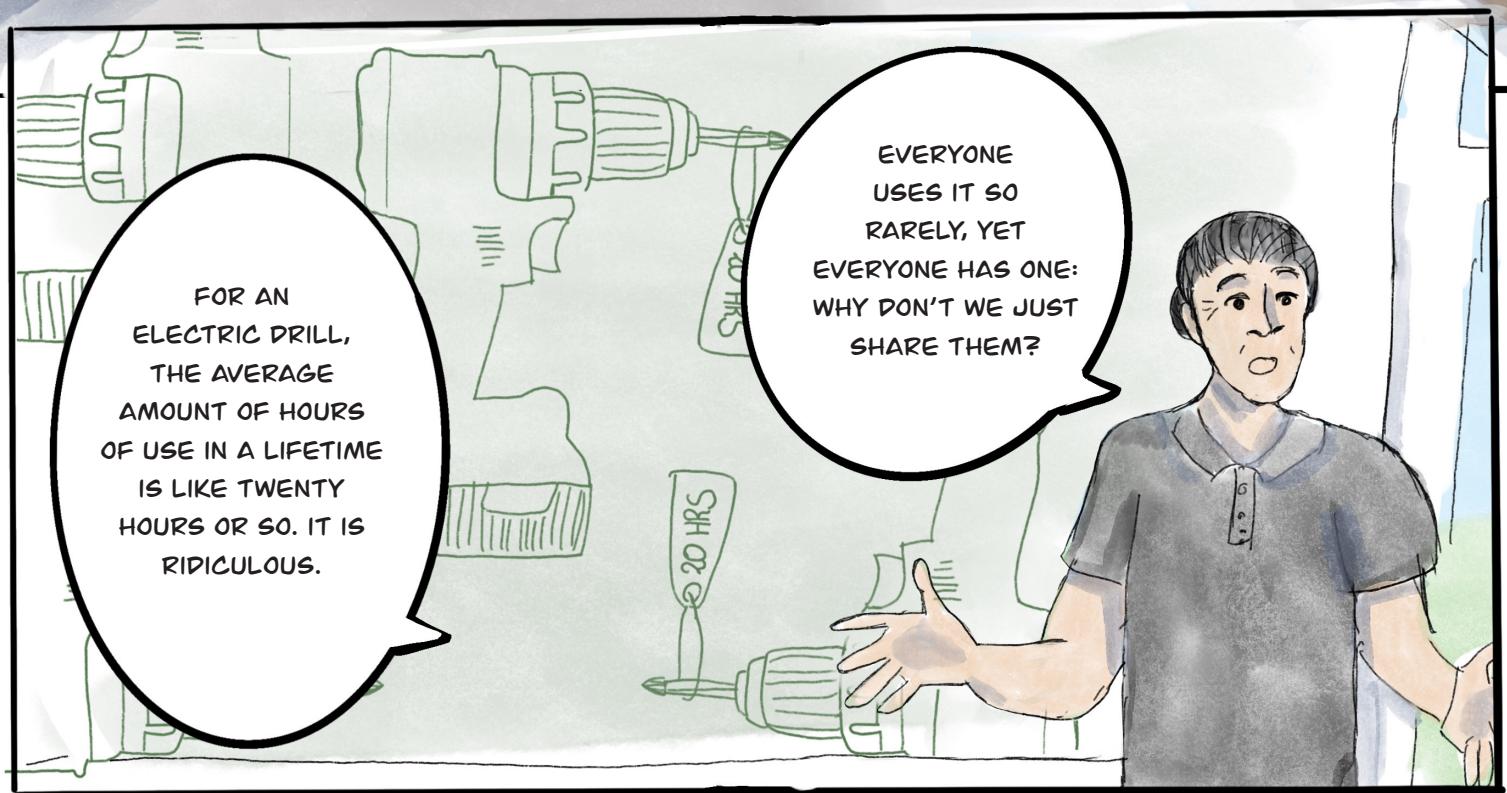
ON OTHER MORNINGS, I WENT TO THE COUNCIL HALL WITH LIAM, A SOCIAL WORKER FROM THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL. THERE, WE MET UP WITH SMALL GROUPS OF RESIDENTS TO TRY OUT THE CURRENT VERSION OF THE APP AND TOGETHER THINK THROUGH THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE INITIATIVE.

IN THE PAST MONTH, WHAT TYPE OF EXPERIENCES HAVE YOU HAD THAT YOU MIGHT WANT HELP WITH, OR THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP OTHERS WITH?









EXPLORING AND THINKING THROUGH ALL THESE DETAILS TOGETHER, THE RESIDENTS BECAME ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT TAKING THE INITIATIVE FURTHER AND STARTED PLANNING TO ORGANISE A SERIES OF COFFEE MEETINGS AT THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL.



Field Notes

The story of the community app initiative highlights the work it takes and the value it can bring to know the local context more closely and to involve the older adults in the process of designing and implementing digital health and social care initiatives. In the group meetings with residents, I noticed how this can help to anticipate and address together some of the potential challenges that may arise when trying to implement the initiative - challenges like the difficulty of asking for help or the organization of the material equipment that is needed.

As in the case of the recipe recommendation pilot, the company developing the community app is located far away in Hungary. However, community council workers with their close knowledge of the local context could bridge some of this distance through regular exchanges with the company and other pilot partners. From what I observed, this interaction was very important for avoiding strong mismatches between the kinds of good ageing that the app can support and those that are important to older adults, as happened in the recipe recommendation initiative.

Close collaboration with everyone involved, however, takes time. Now that the broader European pilot project and its funding are ending, the local pilot needs more time and effort to develop further. If this creates difficulties for the development and maintenance of the app, maybe the piece of paper that Liam mentioned in the group discussion will become the tool to still realise the mutual help initiative and strengthen the resilience of the community?



REFLECTIONS



In this short research comic, we travelled to three digital health and social care initiatives across Europe that each try to contribute to the well-being of older people by addressing one aspect of “good ageing” that they deem relevant.



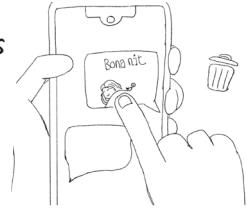
Our research comic highlights three distinct points that deserve more attention if we want to understand better the role of new technologies in the lives of older people and create tools that enable forms of good ageing that are relevant to them.

1. Interactions between different and sometimes conflicting forms of good ageing shape the engagement with proposed technologies or services.



Although eating healthily is, as many people we encountered during my fieldwork would agree, important to ageing well, it is not the only consideration when it comes to eating. Other considerations like eating as a moment of socialising, eating as a pleasure left in later life, or food as a collective rather than individual choice, also matter.

Similarly, building and maintaining close relations with others was important to many, but relations of what kind, where, and when? In situations like that of Alba, where the everyday is already filled with pain, positive and happy forms of relations are welcome while more negative or sad forms of relations are best avoided or deleted.

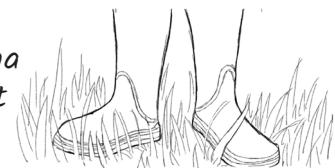


2. The arts of noticing can reveal the invisible, including those details that too often remain unnoticed but are crucial for understanding how technologies can become meaningful for people.



Consider the misalignment between the e-coaching messages and the recipe recommendations. This misalignment was invisible to technology developers and pilot site managers but important for understanding Giampiero's and Maria's non-use of the recipe recommendations.

Or think of the difficulty of asking for help that Carolina described. This reluctance to ask for help, and the subsequent silent coping, may render everyday worries of residents in the parish in Milton Keynes invisible to those who do not pay close attention.



If not noticed and attended to, these invisible and seemingly mundane details can make digital health and care initiatives meaningless for those for whom they are meant.

3. Technologies in health and ageing do more than just contribute to the idea of good ageing that they were envisioned for.



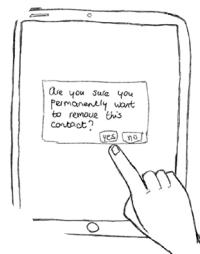
Sometimes, technologies contradict what they were meant to do. We saw this in the case of the algorithm that selected breakfast recipes that had little to do with the older people's habits or ideas of healthy eating.

Sometimes, technologies become very helpful but in ways completely different from what was expected. In the case of Carmela, for instance, the tablet became her lifeline although she could not find the friendship she was looking for through the tablet.



At the same time, technologies can contribute to rendering relevant concerns invisible. The tablet is a lifeline for Carmela, but it does not solve the concern of her experiencing loneliness, a concern that remains invisible and unresolved.

Or technologies can trigger completely new and initially unintended practices towards good ageing. One example is the case of deleting the profile picture and chat of a sister who passed away but whose traces were still digitally stored in the VinclesBCN app, causing pain to the older woman.



Or as in the case of the residents in the parish in Milton Keynes who initiated coffee mornings as a way of carrying the community project further and reaching out to those who were less easily included.





All in all, technologies are much more than just a neutral tool for good ageing. What they are will be different in different contexts, as they are also shaped by these contexts.

Methods, time, and resources for close and ongoing attention to these contexts are thus paramount to help (digital) health and social care initiatives facilitate forms of good ageing that older adults themselves find relevant.

If you want to know more, or engage in the arts of noticing yourself, we have added below some experiences and reflections on the process of noticing as well as on the format of the research comic. References to literature that inspired and informed our work are included throughout.

Some Reflections on the Arts of Noticing, What it Requires, and What it Affords

The Concept in More Detail

When Tsing (2015) describes her concept of the “arts of noticing,”⁴ she compares it to the act of listening to polyphonic music. In polyphonic music, various melodies and rhythms intertwine. As Tsing writes, polyphony made her learn to “pick out separate, simultaneous melodies and to listen for the moments of harmony and dissonance they created together” (2015, 24; emphasis in original). This listening or close attention to various things or ways of being and their relations is what the arts of noticing is about.

Tsing proposes the arts of noticing as a method that may help us move beyond ideas of “progress” that are so deeply embedded in our practices, thinking, and imagination. Progress works as “a forward march [that draws] other kinds of time into its rhythms” (2015, 21). To notice what else is going on, the multiple other rhythms and trajectories of world-making, Tsing calls for embracing the indeterminacy and precarity that are with us every day. Doing so, she argues, may help us move beyond narratives of progress as well as tales of ruination. It provides indication and imagination for collaborative survival in a world of promise and ruin.

In our research comic, we engaged in the arts of noticing by paying attention to the various forms of good ageing that coexist and interfere in the design, deployment, and use of digital health and social care initiatives and to the moments of harmony and friction that these interferences create. This goes beyond classical program evaluation work that formulates normative notions of good ageing that are then used as a yardstick to evaluate the lives of older people and the effectiveness or impact of technological interventions (e.g., Schulz et al. 2015). Instead, our noticing allows us to situate older people’s engagement with the proposed technologies in alignments and mismatches between tech developers’ ideas about good ageing and the lived experiences of older adults.

Our story does not end with rejection and abandoned investments, though. By noticing and articulating practices like deleting the profile of a loved one, or building a toolbox for sharing equipment, our research comic shows how digital innovations can be made functional and meaningful for those involved. Sharing Tsing’s aim of moving beyond narratives of progress as well as tales of ruination, the stories of our participants open the imagination for how to configure and reconfigure good ageing together in digital innovation initiatives and beyond.

Experiences on the Process of Noticing

Noticing is a relational and collaborative process. Our attempt at noticing the many forms of good ageing has been possible thanks to the shared moments of noticing together with the older adults, the community and city council workers, the technology developers, and the places, technologies, and relations in which they are embedded. This, in turn, shows that practicing the arts of noticing requires methods that allow close and affective relations with those present in the field. Without it, some of the diversity and complexity of the many forms of good ageing that we noticed in this piece would remain invisible. The daily pain Alba has to live with and how she tries to make it bearable by surrounding herself with positive things and deleting negative ones is one example. Sharing these experiences had been rendered possible, in part, by the attention that the older adults and Carla as researcher offered each other throughout the different moments spent together. In this sense, our research comic reiterates the relevance

⁴By speaking of the “arts of noticing” in plural, Tsing emphasizes that there are always multiple ways of noticing. The formulation highlights that the arts of noticing is not an abstract concept but a concrete practice with multiple forms.

that feminist studies of technoscience attributed to intimacy and affective relations for research and knowledge creation (for an overview, see Latimer and López Gómez 2019).

A second aspect that is worth pointing out is the role of frictions as a tool for noticing. Many of the fieldwork excerpts included in this research comic illustrate situations where something happened that the pilot or service organisers had not initially intended or expected. These situations show tensions, or frictions, between the forms of good ageing embedded in the technology or service and the everyday lives and values of older adults, often expressed in doubts, non-use, or other forms of resistance (for a similar use of the notion of frictions, see also López Gómez 2015): Carmela did not find a friend through VinclesBCN and stopped engaging in the service despite longing for social connections. Agata might make the sacrifice of following the recipes she receives in the pilot app, but does not because she knows that those who eat with her might not like the dishes. Olive might use the community app to ask for help with putting up her painting but is concerned because she does not have a hammer. Being aware of such frictions was productive for the noticing process. At the same time, we also use frictions as a tool to convey what has been noticed. For instance, by juxtaposing the various considerations that affect how pilot participants in Puglia engage or disengage with the recipe recommendations, we accentuate a friction that was hidden and distributed across field notes and interviews – that for them, food is not only a question of health but also a moment of socialising, of collective choice, or of enjoying one of the pleasures left in later life.

Finally, and in line with some of the aims of multimodal research (Collins et al. 2017), we approach noticing as an open-ended process. The open-endedness points to the ways in which, we hope, this research comic does not end here but will spark further moments of noticing and attending to the multiplicity of forms of good ageing. Designer and researcher Helena Cleeve (2023) beautifully illustrates how the process of drawing situations in a care home and engaging about these drawings with others can become a way of learning together through seeing and unseeing. As Cleeve writes, drawing and engaging about these drawings allowed her to see new things but also to unsee, that is, “abandon preconceived notions of what I was looking at” (2023, 752). The process of preparing our story, with its drawings, quotes, and accompanying reflections, has already triggered moments of seeing and unseeing in many ways. The format of the research comic is meant to allow this to continue in different places, in and beyond academia, together with those who participated in this research and with others.

Some Reflections on the Format of the Research Comic

Our research comic about the many forms of good ageing is connected to a rich body of theoretical and empirical work that illuminates in further detail the points that we have illustrated in this piece.⁵ The contribution of our work primarily lies in its format. We wanted to experiment with ways to share reflections on technology and ageing, which we and many other researchers engage with in our work, with a broader audience. Our aim was to share reflections with researchers but also with the older adults, city and community councils, social workers, and technology developers with whom we collaborated in the field. As digital health and social care initiatives proliferate, nuanced descriptions of everyday practices and experiences of ageing remain relevant and deserve to be shared and discussed outside of specialised academic fields.

⁵ Interested readers might, for example, look into the book Care in Practice (Mol et al. 2010), which vividly elucidates the complex relations between technology and care. The book Socio-gerontechnology (Peine et al. 2021) offers another rich collection of critical investigations specifically related to technology and ageing. Questions about ageing as a bodily and cultural process are, for instance, discussed in Ageing in Everyday Life (Katz 2019). For questions on affect and intimacy in ageing and technology relations, readers might look into Intimate Entanglements (Latimer and López Gómez 2019).

Following Lehtonen and Putkonen (2023), the graphic novel or research comic lends itself to this goal because it affords (1) expressing embodied experiences, (2) providing context, and (3) developing theoretical reflection by integrating multiple layers of analysis. As anthropologists Stacy Leigh Pigg and Shyam Kunwar add, the research comic does not seek to be an argument-driven intervention but rather invites an open-ended interpretation. It foregrounds the “dynamic relations amongst points of view and [invites readers] to think more nimbly about scale, context, relationality and perspective” (2021, 362).

Inspired by the work of these authors, we present our research in the form of drawings, fieldwork quotes, and accompanying reflections.⁶ Some drawings are informed by pictures taken of people and places during fieldwork but given a different touch to ensure anonymity. Quotes are taken from original interviews and informal conversations, conducted in Italian, Spanish (Castellano), and English. The first author, with help from friends who are native speakers, translated quotes from Italian and Spanish into English. We altered or shortened some quotes for readability, but always paid careful attention to not change the content of what had been said. The exception is the scene where Jack and Carla meet Carolina: we added the introductory sentences of Jack and Carolina, because originally the conversations with both happened in separate interviews. We invited our research participants to propose a name for the person that represents them in our story. Some wanted to be mentioned with their actual names, others proposed fictitious names, and for those who did not respond, we selected fictitious names ourselves.

In weaving the arts of noticing into this format of the research comic, our piece advocates for attending to differences and details and for geographic, cultural, and affective closeness to the everyday lives of those older adults for and with whom technology developers and community councils design tools and services for ageing well. Such closeness, we think, is paramount for exploring together the diversity of forms of good ageing that are present in a specific context. It is a first relevant step in being able to notice conflicts between different forms of good ageing and to adjust digital tools and services in such a way that they facilitate forms of good ageing that older adults themselves find relevant – or to stop investing time and resources in them when they do not.

Besides being published digitally in an academic journal, this research comic will also be printed in the three languages used during fieldwork (Italian, Castellano, and English). We will then share and discuss it with research participants. As such, we propose this research comic as one iteration in generating close and open-ended relations through which to explore the many forms of good ageing together with research participants.

⁶We also want to mention three graphic novels that particularly inspired our work on this piece: *Soledad*, by Tito, which sparked the idea for a research comic, and *Shadow Life*, by Goto and Xu, as well as *Sixty Years in Winter*, by Chabbert and de Jongh, which were important sources of inspiration during the development process.

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Art: By Hanna Stalenhoef and Alberico Sabbadini. *ethnoGRAFISCH* www.ethnografisch.nl
The research comic font (Jack Armstrong) has been downloaded from <http://www.onlinewebfonts.com>

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