# Athens:
# A city for all ages

Experiential mapping with elderly people
in the Kipseli neighborhood

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# The idea behind the project

Elderly people are the **most marginalized age group in the city's public space.** According to research, some of the main problems they face daily include the high speed of cars, the short duration of traffic light intervals, the lack of crosswalks, and the lack or deterioration of green spaces and rest areas (Alalhesabi & Rafiee, 2013). Indeed, according to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2020), 50% of pedestrian fatalities in road traffic accidents concern people aged 65 and over.

All the above affect the **autonomous mobility** of the elderly in the city, as well as their mental health. What we are observing is that, very often, senior citizens – women in particular – have a generalized feeling of insecurity and fear, a sense of threat, when they move around the city, especially at night. There is a strong fear for a potential accident ("I'm afraid not to stumble and fall on the pavement…" says a participant of the workshop) or some form of unwanted harassment ("I'm suspicious… people on the street want to help me, but I'm afraid of being tricked…" says another participant). Gradually, many elderly people prefer to confine themselves to their homes (where they feel safer), reducing their outdoor activities to a minimum. As a result, they lose independence in their daily lives in the city, as they end up relying on other family or community members for their outdoor chores, losing touch with public affairs along the way.

URBANA's main objective is ensuring the rights of all people in the city, placing particular emphasis on social groups that, historically, were absent or less involved in designing modern cities (women, children, teenagers, seniors, people with disabilities, etc.). We believe that cities are alive, and that they can and should evolve in order to **adapt to the needs and desires of all citizens.**

We also believe that the (re)designing process of the city, **focusing on the daily needs of the elderly** (one of the most vulnerable social groups) will result in more friendly and secure cities for everyone.
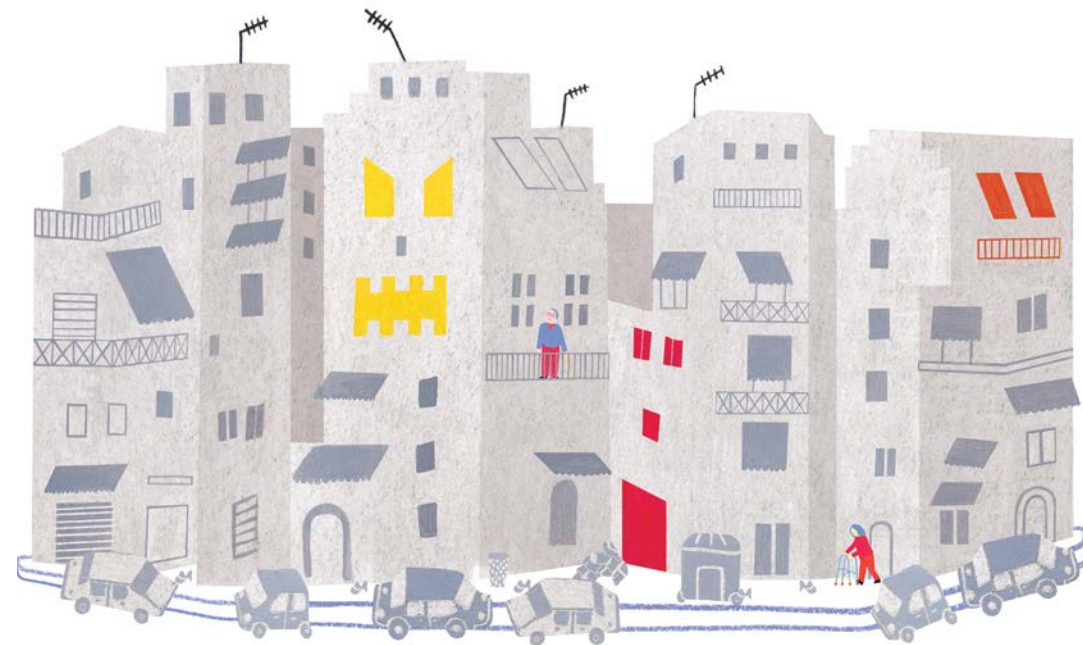
## Goals of the project

The immediate goals of the '**Athens: A city for all ages'** program are the following: **recording the experiences, needs, and desires** of the elderly – **highlighting women's needs** – in the city's public space, and having these people develop some proposals for a city that's friendly regardless of one's age.

Indirect goals of the project include the **empowerment** of these same elderly people in order to **boost civic participation** and increase involvement in **(re)designing their neighborhoods**, the strengthening of the sense of 'belonging' at the neighborhood level, and the creative re-appropriation of public space from senior citizens themselves.

## Identity of the project

The project 'Athens: A city for all ages' was included in the 5th financing cycle of the 'Points of Support' program, coordinated by the Bodossaki Foundation and co-financed by 8 charitable foundations. The proposal received a positive evaluation and was supported during its implementation by the TIMA charitable foundation.

This pilot program took place between **September 2022 and February 2023**, in cooperation with members of the **Friendship Club at Kiou Street in Kipseli**. Our collaboration with this particular friendship club gave us the opportunity to approach the wider Kipseli area, a neighborhood that faces many social challenges. The coordination and smooth running of the project was also actively facilitated by the **Department of Social Solidarity & Civil Society of the Municipality of Athens.**

During the program we undertook the following:

- We adapted/developed a methodology of participatory mapping for the needs of the elderly.

- We carried out a cycle of 6 experiential workshops with the participation of members of the Friendship Club.

- We created a collective map with the problems that were pointed out by the participants, in the Kipseli neighborhood, including proposals and strategies for solving them.

- We wrote this guidebook containing the applied methodology and the conclusions drawn from this pilot run.

# The guidebook

This guidebook presents the pilot run of the 'Athens: A city for all ages' project featuring members of the Kipseli Friendship Club (Kiou street). The aim of the guide is, through presenting the research and conclusions, to compile the proposed methodology for experiential mapping actions with elderly people in urban public spaces, so that it may be used for similar projects in other neighborhoods of Greek cities.

# Project methodology

## Participatory mapping

We consider the people who live in a given neighborhood to be in the best position to talk to us about the problems they are facing daily, and also come up with solutions.

Through **tools and methods of participatory research and mapping,** such as exploratory walks, participants in the program become investigators and actively partake in the highlighting and mapping of their neighborhood's problems, as well as in the first formulation of solutions and solving strategies.

## Exploratory walks

**Exploratory walks** are a bottom-up method of participatory research and mapping. For developing the method, we drew inspiration from previous research/programs [Femmes et Ville (Paquin, 2002), Matrix (1984), Women's Design Service (Cavanagh, 1990 and 1998)], which are an international benchmark **for promoting the design of public spaces while applying a gender lens.**

During these exploratory walks, the participants move around the neighborhood and write down their daily hardships and experiences. We are using certain urban quality indicators – more details on these later - as additional observation tools. Through discussion and cooperation, participants write down the problems they experience on the maps. At the end, they transfer all these remarks on a larger/**collective map of the area** under study.

## Urban quality indicators

During the exploratory walks we call upon the participants to evaluate their experience based on the following indicators:



### 1. SENSE OF SAFETY

How safe do we feel in urban public spaces?

This indicator is as much about **physical** safety as it is about **psychological** safety. Are there suitable crosswalks for example? And if so, do incoming cars have sufficient visibility or is there danger of an accident? Is there someone nearby to help out in case of an emergency? Will I be heard if I call for help?

## 2. ACCESSIBILITY

To what extent are public spaces easily accessible to everyone? And under what conditions?

Firstly, this indicator relates to **physical accessibility**; meaning the existence of obstacles hindering the access for specific groups, or of infrastructures that facilitate said access, such as ramps. For example, are traffic light intervals long enough for individuals on foot to cross the street?

Secondly, it relates to **social accessibility**. Do different social groups coexist in that space or is it dominated by one group, who is obstructing access to others?

Lastly, it relates to **financial accessibility**. Some spaces may not be accessible free of charge and require some form of payment, or be accessible with a private vehicle only. These spaces include private parks, playgrounds or pay car parks.



## 3. URBAN INFRASTUCTURE

Are public spaces properly equipped? Do they have the necessary infrastructures for basic, daily, human needs?

Urban equipment refers to the public, openly accessible city facilities, which are meant to serve our needs. These include but are not limited to the following: **benches, lighting, potable water (drinking fountains), public restrooms, and public transport stops.** The questions than can be raised here go beyond if these infrastructures exist or not. Are they adequate for the population's needs? What condition are they in? Is the quality good? Are they maintained regularly? Are they fully equipped?

A common example in Athens concerns bus stops. Often they do not have shelters, seats, or countdown indicators, and even if they do, they're in bad shape.

## 4. COMFORT & MOBILITY

To what extent do public spaces facilitate comfortable mobility for all people?

This indicator is particularly crucial for the elderly. Specifically, it concerns **protection against weather conditions.** Are there spaces for people to go to in case of intense sunlight exposure or rain? Kipseli, for example, appears to be lacking shelters, also due to the fact that balconies hang very low.

Furthermore, it refers to the **sense of comfort**. Intense uphill paths, as will be explained below, are a major problem for elderly people, hampering their mobility, combined with the lack of benches (cf. urban equipment indicator).

Lastly, it concerns the **public transport network.** Are there regular bus services? Are bus connections helpful?

Within the framework of experiential mapping, we use two different types of maps:

## NEIGHBORHOOD MAP

It is a large map (usually A0 paper size) of the neighborhood in question. The street names are listed, and some central spots/landmarks are also indicated. Same with the walk's starting point.

How to use it

The participants are asked to show on the map, using small stickers, where they live approximately, and with stickers of a different color, which are they places they visit for their needs on a day-to-day basis (supermarkets, pharmacies, bakeries, etc.), while also pointing out the routes and means of transport they use to reach those places.

Afterwards, taking into consideration their itineraries, we co-decide the routes we'll use for the exploratory walks.

Upon completion of the walks, together with the participants, we write down our remarks on post it notes and place them on the map, on the streets where each problem is identified.

# ROUTE MAPS

These are smaller maps (usually A4 paper size) with the individual routes we follow during the exploratory walks, featuring the reference-starting point of the walk, the proposed itinerary and the proposed stops for debate and self-reflection.

How to use them

During the walks, participants use these maps either individually or per two or three people, both as a guide and in order to write down the problems they identify in public spaces.

## Interviews

Alongside the experiential mapping, we propose privately conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants, if they so wish, in places that are familiar to them (for example a café they hang out at). Thusly, the opportunity arises for the voices of the people who participated in the endeavour to be heard, highlighting their unique experiences even more.

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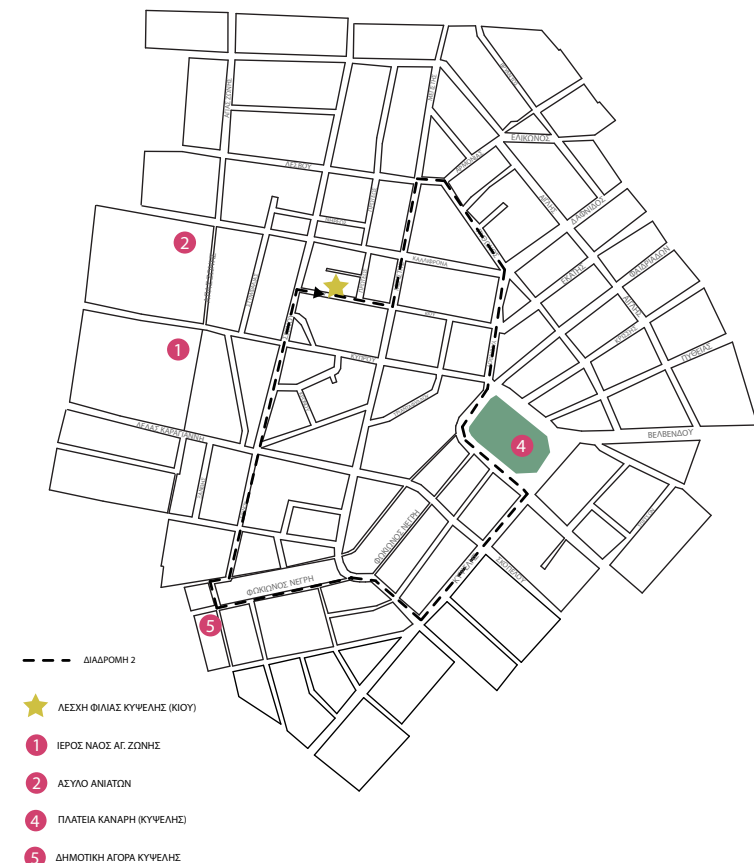
ΒΙΩΜΑΤΙΚΗ ΧΑΡΤΟΓΡΑΦΗΣΗ

**ΔΙΑΔΡΟΜΗ 2**
Μεγίστης - Πύθωνος
Υακίνθου - **Πλατεία Κανάρη (Κυψέλης)**
Κυψέλης - **Φωκίωνος Νέγρη** - Σικίνου



- - - - ΔΙΑΔΡΟΜΗ 2

⭐ ΛΕΣΧΗ ΦΙΛΙΑΣ ΚΥΨΕΛΗΣ (ΚΙΟΥ)

1 ΙΕΡΟΣ ΝΑΟΣ ΑΓ. ΖΩΝΗΣ

2 ΑΣΥΛΟ ΑΝΙΑΤΩΝ

4 ΠΛΑΤΕΙΑ ΚΑΝΑΡΗ (ΚΥΨΕΛΗΣ)

5 ΔΗΜΟΤΙΚΗ ΑΓΟΡΑ ΚΥΨΕΛΗΣ

# The pilot implementation in Kipseli

During the pilot run of the project 'Athens: A city for all ages', **6 meetings/experiential workshops** with elderly people, members of the Kipseli Friendship Club at Kiou street, took place.

The order and structure of the workshops are outlined below.

**1st Workshop – Introduction and presentation of the project**

**Duration:** 2 hours
**Location:** Events room on the ground floor of the Friendship Club
**Number of participants:** 15 (10 women)
**Materials:** Projector
**Methods:** Presentation, open debate

**The aim of the workshop** was to have a first meeting between our team and the club's members and present the 'Athens: A city for all ages' project.

More specifically, after introductions were made, we showed a PowerPoint presentation with some of the potential problems of public spaces in Kipseli, such as destroyed sidewalks or the lack of urban equipment, while the Friendship Club members shared some of their pertinent experiences. Then, we presented our project with regards to its goals and proposed activities and talked about organizing the workshops.

## 2nd Workshop – Routes selection

**Duration:** 2 hours
**Location:** Events room on the ground floor of the Friendship Club
**Number of participants:** 15 (10 women)
**Materials:** Projector, neighborhood map (A0), small stickers of 2 different colors, different colored markers.
**Methods:** Presentation, collective mapping

**The aim of the workshop** was to collectively choose the routes to be followed during the exploratory walks.

At the 2nd workshop, we talked with the participants about how, historically, urban planning depended exclusively on the decisions of some 'experts', who applied their own ideas, often ignoring the desires and needs of other social groups, like the elderly. This fact is reflected in the problems the latter are constantly facing in public spaces.

Then, they talked to us about their personal experiences and indicated on the neighbourhood map a) where they live, approximatively, using blue stickers, and b) using green stickers, the places they visit daily for their needs (supermarkets, pharmacies, bakeries, etc.), as well as the routes they take to reach those places. Afterwards, upon considering the majority's habits, we co-decided the routes we'd take during the next two workshops, starting off at the Friendship Club.

## 3rd Workshop – 1st Exploratory walk

**Duration:** 50-minute walk and 30-minute car tour (with a smaller group of participants)
**Location:** Agia Zoni area (Sikinou – Lesvou – Ag. Zonis – Kyprou – Porou – Kallifrona – Naxou – Amorgou – Ag. Zonis – Kallifrona – Sikinou – Kiou streets)
**Number of participants:** 5 (4 women and 1 man), 2 people in the car
**Materials:** Route maps (A4), photocopies (A4) with the urban quality indicators, pens
**Methods:** Exploratory walk

**The aim of the workshop** was to experientially map the Agia Zoni area, discussing and writing down the experiences of senior citizens.

The route was chosen by the Kipseli (Kiou) Friendship Club members, during the 2nd workshop. Throughout the exploratory walk, the participants pointed out the problems they face in the neighbourhood on a daily basis, with the help of the indicators we'd already discussed.

Along the route we took, we chose to pass by the houses of some of the participants, as well as by some of the places they told us they often go to, in the previous workshop (for example: supermarkets, cafeterias, or the farmer's market).

Lastly, because one of the participants lives in Ano (upper) Kipseli and finds it hard to come to the club on foot, because of the steep uphills, we chose to do a car tour, allowing us to also record the difficulties of this specific route.

## 4th Workshop – 2nd Exploratory walk

**Duration:** 50 minutes
**Location:** Kipseli square area (Yakinthou – Kipseli square – Kastalias – Spetson – Paxon – Kefallinias – Kykladon – Syrou – Kipseli municipal market – F. Negri – Megistis – Kiou)
**Number of participants:** 5 (4 women and 1 man)
**Materials:** Route maps (A4), photocopies (A4) with the urban quality indicators, pens
**Methods:** Exploratory walk

**The aim of the workshop was** to experientially map the wider Kipseli square area.

Generally, the second walk followed the same reasoning as the first. In this second route, which was also chosen by members of the Friendship Club, we co-decided to pass by the houses of some participants, to better understand their daily neighborhood routes.

Throughout the exploratory walk, the participants pointed out the problems they face in the neighbourhood on a daily basis, with the help of the indicators we'd already discussed.

## 5th Workshop – Collective mapping

**Duration:** 1 hour
**Location:** Events room on the ground floor of the Friendship Club
**Number of participants:** Around 15 people (10 women)
**Materials:** Area map (A0), different colored post-its, pens
**Methods:** Collective mapping

**The aim of the workshop was** to collectively imprint on the large area map all the problems that were mentioned during the two walks, and then discuss solutions and/or solving strategies.

We worked at the Friendship Club, using different colored post-its, depending on the indicator, to write down our remarks from the two exploratory walks, and then glued them on the map, on the streets where each problem was identified.

## 6th Workshop - Interviews

**Duration:** 3 interviews, each about 1,5 to 2 hours long
**Location:** Cafeteria in Kipseli
**Number of participants:** 3 women
**Materials:** Tape recorder, consent forms, notebook, pens
**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews

**The aim of the workshop was** to highlight the personal experiences of the participants in the context of the problems they face daily in Kipseli's public spaces.

The 6th workshop took the form of face-to-face interviews with members of the Friendship Club that participated in the walks and wanted to share their experience with us. The interviews included discussions about the problems in Kipseli's public spaces, anchored around the urban quality indicators, the difficulties they face in the streets of Kipseli, as well as their impressions from the 'Athens: A city for all ages' project.

The main reason we chose to conduct private interviews was that we observed that some elderly people – mainly women – felt safer to express themselves privately rather than in a group setting. These interviews, beyond their utility as research tools, are intended to be used for further promotion of the program and as a source of feedback for the action.

Elderly people in public spaces are facing problems that may not be visible from the population's less vulnerable groups. Problems such as the lack of urban equipment, like benches, or the bad maintenance of sidewalks, affect some social groups more than others, and many times the consequences, as we saw, can be dramatic.

"I can't walk, I can't go strolling around. Why do I pause on the street so much, I don't even know…"
**Mrs Louisa**

"For me it's not just Fokionos street. All the surrounding roads are in very bad shape."
**Mrs Antonia**

"I do use the sidewalk, but most times I'm afraid to do so."

"… it's hard to constantly have to step on and off the sidewalks."
**Mrs Voula**

# Adapting the methodology to the elderly

The applied methodology was based upon previous URBANA projects with other vulnerable groups, which we adapted to suit the needs of the elderly. Below, we're offering some advice, on the basis of our own experience, that one could follow for experiential mapping activities with seniors.

Concretely, we recommend the following:

## Build a trusting relationship.

Since our very first contact with the members of the Kipseli (Kiou) Friendship Club, we noticed a strong feeling of frustration. Many of them believed that since their voices and public space-related needs hadn't been heard so far, nothing would ever change, rendering their participation in the project meaningless. In view of this, we tried to build, with patience (constantly explaining the program's objectives) and consistency (we met regularly every week for approximatively 2 months), a trusting relationship, resulting in them gradually trusting us more and participating in the activities. The above, coupled with small changes we succeeded in bringing about during the project (for example, the immediate replacement of a damaged waste container, by the municipality, at a spot that was identified by one of the participants), helped reinforce trust towards our team and restore faith in the possibility of their voices being heard and counting for something.

## Follow a more interpersonal approach.

Many people found it hard to participate in working groups. Thus, we began talking with some of the participants individually or in smaller groups, and added the interview method, to better understand the needs and desires concerning public spaces in Athens, in the way that made them feel most comfortable.

## Take into account the physicality parameter.

Senior citizens present a wide range of kinetic abilities. Physical tiredness and the difficulty to cover long distances for the mapping were taken into account when we adapted the methodology. This is why we chose to map small routes around the Kipseli (Kiou) Friendship Club, pausing often during each exploratory walk and stopping by the participants' homes. Globally, the approach we took for the project was more personalized, letting the participants set the pace.

# Pilot implementation conclusions

Both the participatory research and the interviews highlighted the daily experiences of senior citizens. Here are some of the key points observed by the participants per each studied indicator.

## 1. SENSE OF SAFETY

### Physical safety

**Sidewalks:** The sidewalks in Kipseli are 'unsightly' (as the participants put it): dirty, broken, uneven. In many spots the manhole covers are at a lower height than the pavement, creating potholes that lead to many accidents. Also, oftentimes in the middle of the sidewalk there are stairs that lead to basements. This is very dangerous, particularly for senior citizens who can easily lose their balance and fall. Lastly, the sidewalks are too narrow. "There is not enough space on the sidewalks, which forces us to walk in the street, increasing the risk of getting hit by a car", said one of the participants. Oncoming cars often honk at them, because they're walking slowly in the middle of the road.

**Abandoned buildings:** These are usually detached houses that have been abandoned. Most of them are in in a greatly deteriorated state. Some repairs are made here and there, but they do not last, so pieces keep falling off. Abandoned buildings are often sources of garbage accumulation and infection.

**Public transport:** Many participants avoid using public transport. "I'm afraid of being pushed and falling down" says one lady, while others are afraid of becoming victims of theft. The pace of other passengers and of public transport's design and operating mode are not suited for the elderly and their greater need for security in any journey.

### Psychological safety

**Fear of the dark:** Kipseli has many narrow streets and dead ends. By nightfall, none of the women among our participants leave their homes. One says she's "locked inside" by 3pm. They told us that sometimes people follow them, offering to help them carry their groceries, but they refuse out of fear of being deceived.

**Abandoned buildings:** On top of the issues of physical safety and hygiene, these buildings give rise to a feeling of abandonment among the residents of Kipseli. This feeling becomes even stronger for the elderly, who still remember the same buildings when they were inhabited and full of life.

## 2. ACCESSIBILITY

### Physical accessibility

**Sidewalks:** Senior citizens encounter many obstacles on the city's sidewalks. More specifically, a woman told us that the sidewalks have many **wrongly placed trees** (that should have their own space). Furthermore, in many cases we saw **garbage** outside the containers, further impeding the movement of pedestrians. It is also quite common for cars to park on the sidewalks along their entire length, while we saw two **bins blocking ramps** meant for people with disabilities. The fact that one of the participants who brought a small grocery cart had to carry it in her arms to move along the route, says it all.

Still, there are physical obstacles around the sidewalks as well: **Street gutters** are either too narrow or clogged, causing water to pool near the pavement corners. It should be noted that it hadn't rained at all in the days before the walk, and yet there was water along the sidewalk, stagnating around the corners.

## 3. URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

**Benches:** Kipseli is full of uphill paths, but rest areas are few and far between. A participant told us that she looks for a ledge or step, clean enough to sit on, because of the lack of benches. Otherwise, she sits on the pavement to "catch her breath" and resumes her journey.

**Drinking fountains:** There are none. The participants said that having them would be helpful in their daily neighborhood routes.

**Waste containers:** Many cans are damaged. Specifically, at Naxou Street, the bin's foot lever was broken, and the participant claimed she couldn't lift the lid to throw in the garbage bags. As a result, she often left the bags next to the bin, which led to her neighbors complaining about it. Additionally, there's a need for more recycling bins. As some of the participants told us, the recycle bins are too far away from their homes.

**Toilettes:** Total lack of public sanitation facilities. "I don't drink water when I plan on leaving the house", said one of the women.

**Lighting:** Kipseli's roads are quite dark and women participants avoid walking around the neighborhood after the sun sets.

## 4. COMFORT AND MOBILITY

**Protection against weather conditions:** In Kipseli, many of the balconies of apartment buildings are built at a low height, making it impossible to use them as sun shelters. This situation, combined with the absence of large trees or other forms of shade, offers no protection from rain or intense sunlight.

**Sense of comfort:** Senior citizens find it very hard to walk up Kipseli's steep uphill roads and are forced to take many breaks, without however having access to the proper urban equipment (benches). This is an even greater problem for those coping with health problems and using a pacemaker.

**Public transport connections:** The public transport connection between Kipseli and Ano Kipseli is inadequate. People not using a car need to take the trolleybus from the Kipseli square (Terma station, line 036), reach the end of the line at Kafkasou Street (Ano Kipseli station), and still have to climb intense uphill roads on foot. After a certain point, in Ano Kipseli, there are no buses or stores that give life to the neighborhood. The intense uphill roads combined with the lack of public transport significantly affect people's quality of life.

# Collective map

## Impact & Next steps

Through the pilot run of the '**Athens: A city for all ages'** program, we sought out to hear and record the experiences of senior citizens, especially women, relating to Kipseli's public spaces. The message we tried to instill in our participants is that they have a say in (re)designing their neighborhood, which can be adapted to take into account their needs and desires.

Women participants, for most of their lives, carried out invisible domestic work and caring. Therefore, they were connected to their private home space, which meant limited access to the city's public space, widely considered to belong to men. Nevertheless, they played a pivotal role in highlighting Kipseli's urban problems and debating proposals for the neighborhood. Throughout the project, women's special relationship with the city was clearly demonstrated, and the role of the neighborhood as a place of care emerged.

Our next goal is to build upon the methodology that was produced and tested during the pilot run described above, aiming to carry out larger collective projects with elderly people, both in the City of Athens and in other Greek cities. It is our wish, through other such participatory research and designing activities, to connect communities with local stakeholders, so that decisions relating to the (re)designing of cities respond to a wider variety of their residents' needs and desires.

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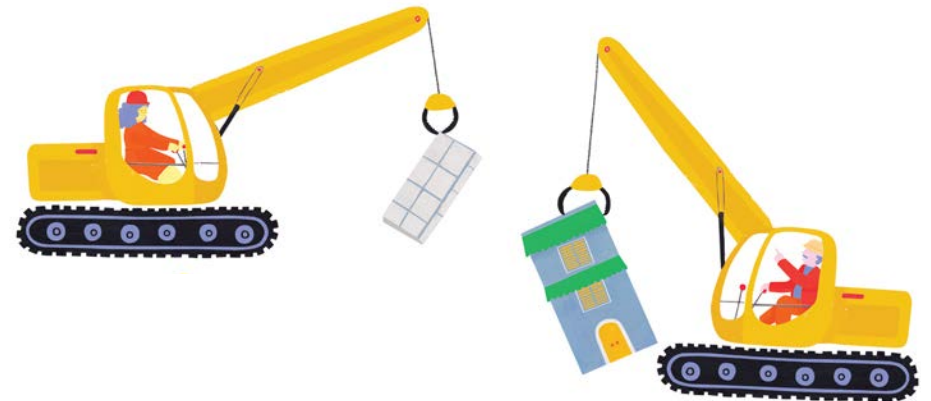Cavanagh, S. (1998). Making Safer Places: A Resource Book for Neighbourhood Safety Audits. Women's Design Service.

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