

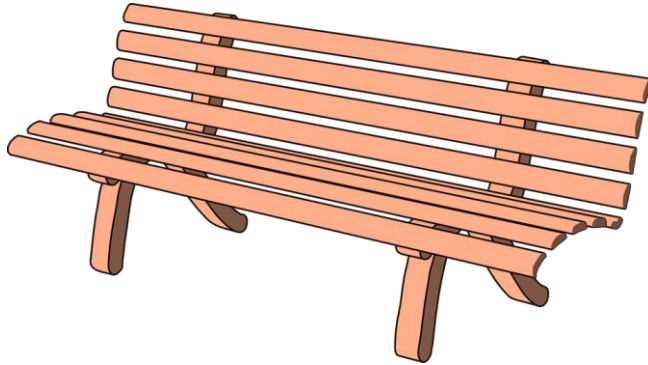


**Public bench –
service station
for public
space users**

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Swiss Geosciences,
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Object as research approach in sociology



Prejudices

- Much more than sitting
- Not only for elderly people
- Not only used by “one-person-units”
- Not only for persons (“augmented pedestrian”)
- But open for one person’s use
- Not only leisure

Bench-Domains

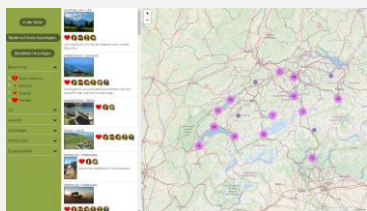


Tourisme

Cultural heritage



Hiking & Leisure



Citizen Science



Active mobility

Proximity & Neighbourhood



**Community building
– social cohesion
(analogue and digital)**

**Public & individual health
(physical and social well-being)**



Active mobility – public space

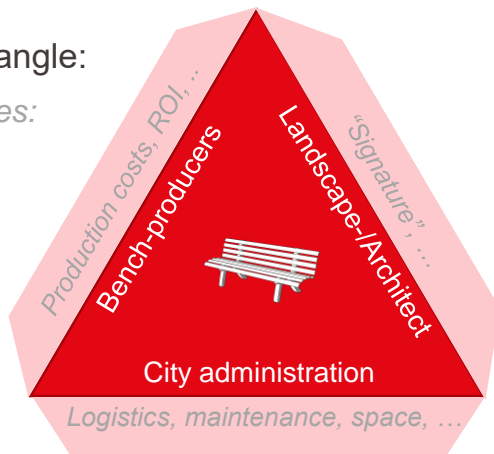
- Service stations for pedestrians (but also cyclists!)
 - Hospitality, invitation (appropriation of public space)
 - Increase options of how to use public space
→ number of options increases satisfaction
 - In all periods of life
- **Variety of needs and expectations**
- **Variety of obstacles for use**



Problem

- Decision-makers' triangle:

Constraints – examples:



- Bench-users needs & expectations are not known, therefore only partially taken into account
- Bench-users can rarely influence the decision-making process of city administration

→ Existing benches do (often) not meet user needs!



«The bench is an essential ingredient in the attractiveness of walking »

- Understand the diversity of users and uses, needs, preferences and obstacles for use
- Whether and how the bench is a key device in a sustainable mobility policy?
- How can cities know & meet these needs?

→ Establish the basis for a bench policy ("Seating concept")

Based on preliminary work & findings of « Verein Bankkultur », ongoing collaboration

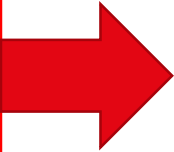
1. Mandates from/for Swiss Cities (Lausanne, Chêne-Bourg, Lancy, Canton GE)

Analyses, observations, commented tours, questionnaire for bench-users

2. EIT Urban Mobility – PI of 2 projects with international consortium

- A. Understand citizens seating needs → development of citizen engagement method
- B. Understand urban stakeholders' decision-making criteria → fill the knowledge gap

Data-collection

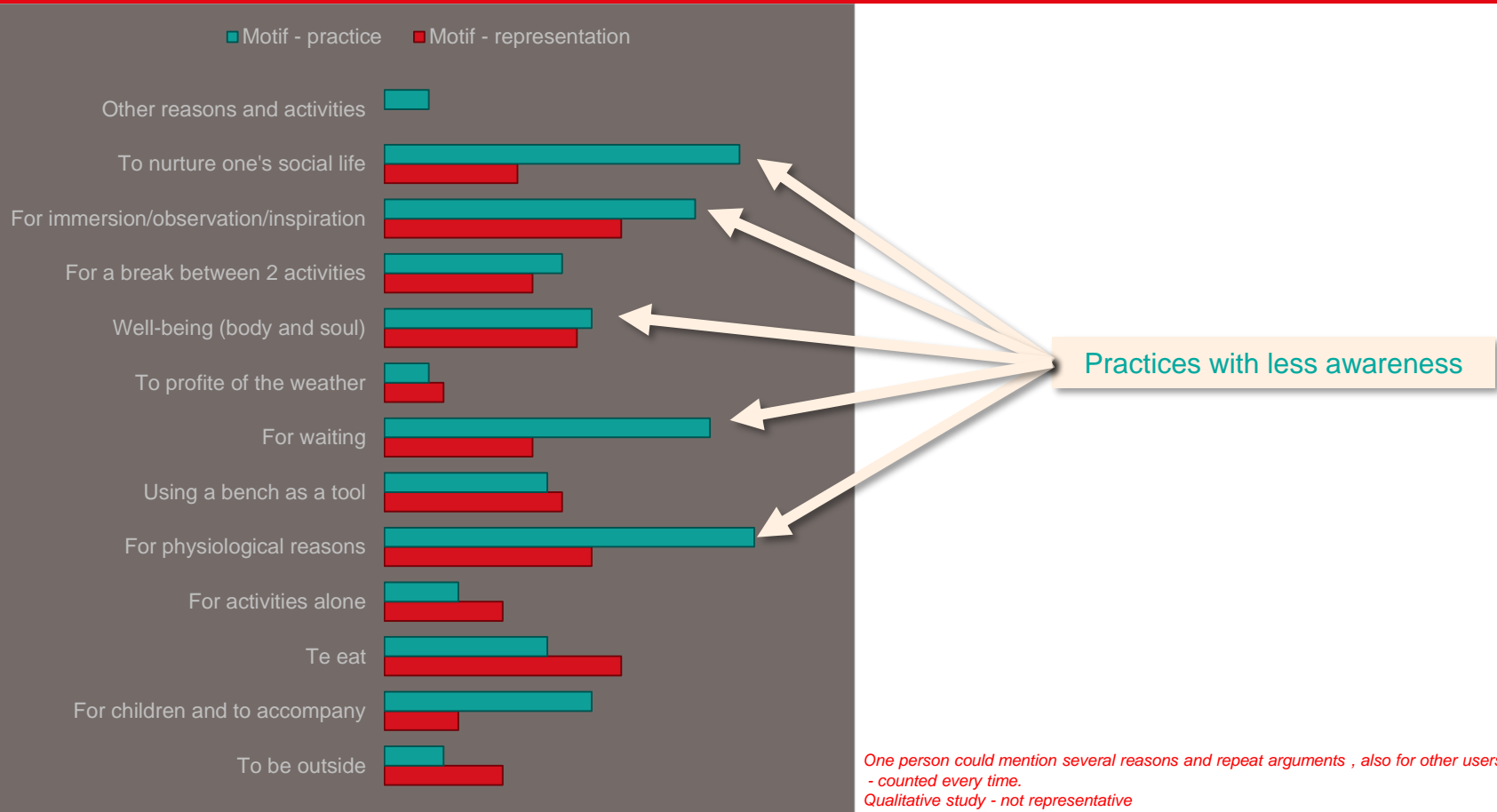
- 29 participants, 53 commented walks on 8 itineraries in 4 urban areas
 - 30 micro-interviews with people sitting on a bench close to the itineraries
- 

Semi-confinement!

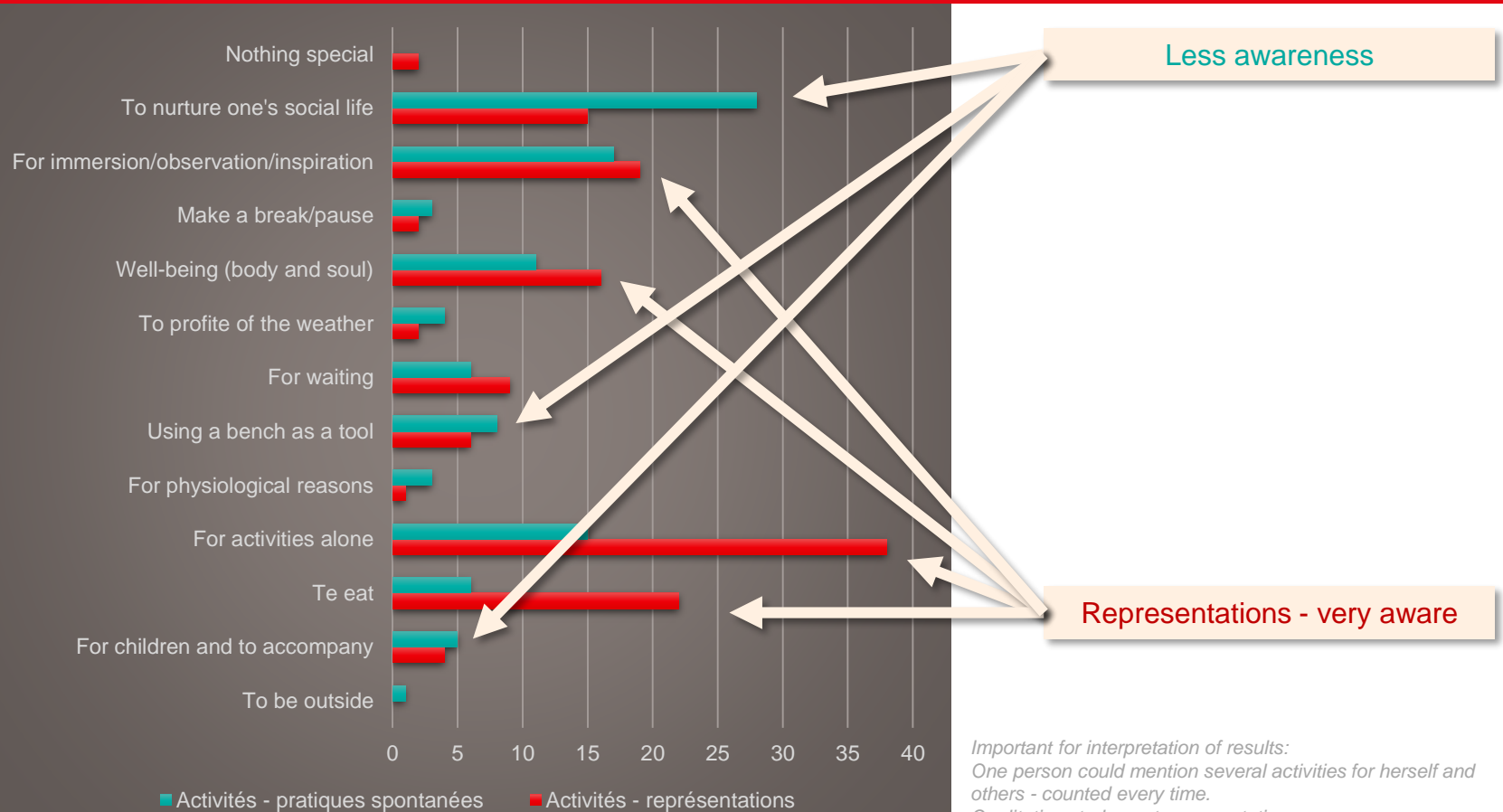


- 32 x 1 hour of observation = 7'500 pedestrians
(amongst other criteria: stops, standing/sitting, duration, activities)

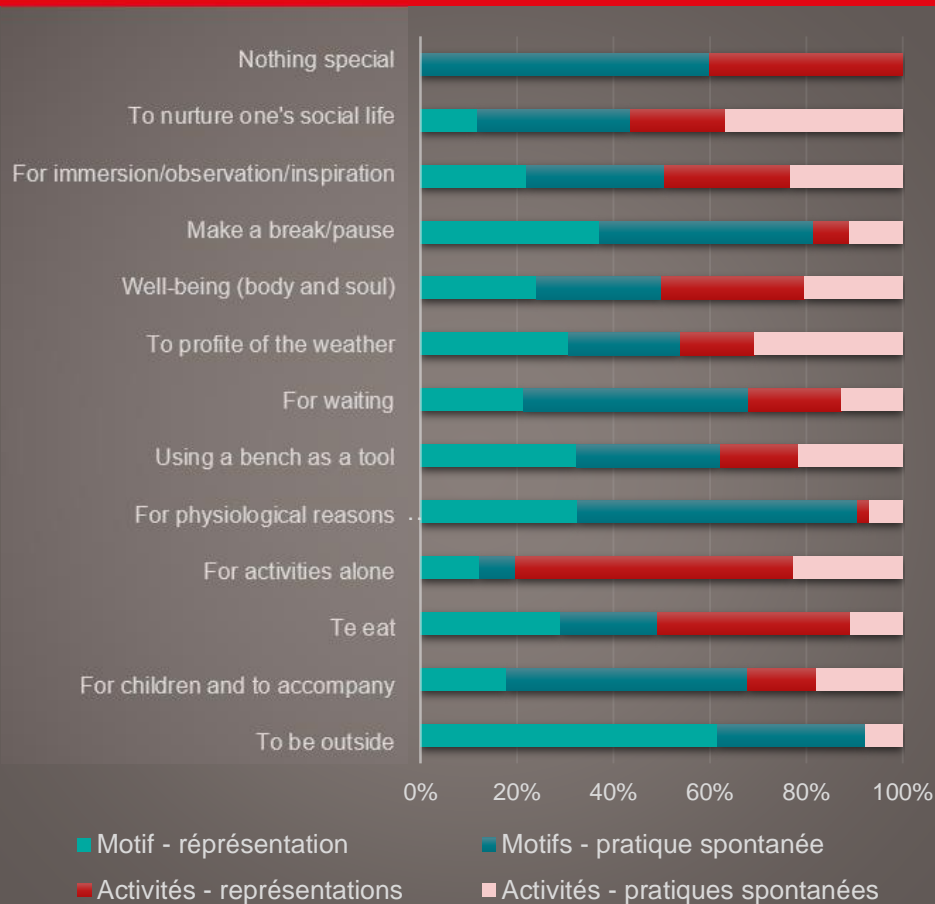
Reasons for using a bench - representation vs. spontaneous practice



Activities on a bench – representation vs. spontaneous practice



Difference reasons and activities, representations and practices



More reason than activity

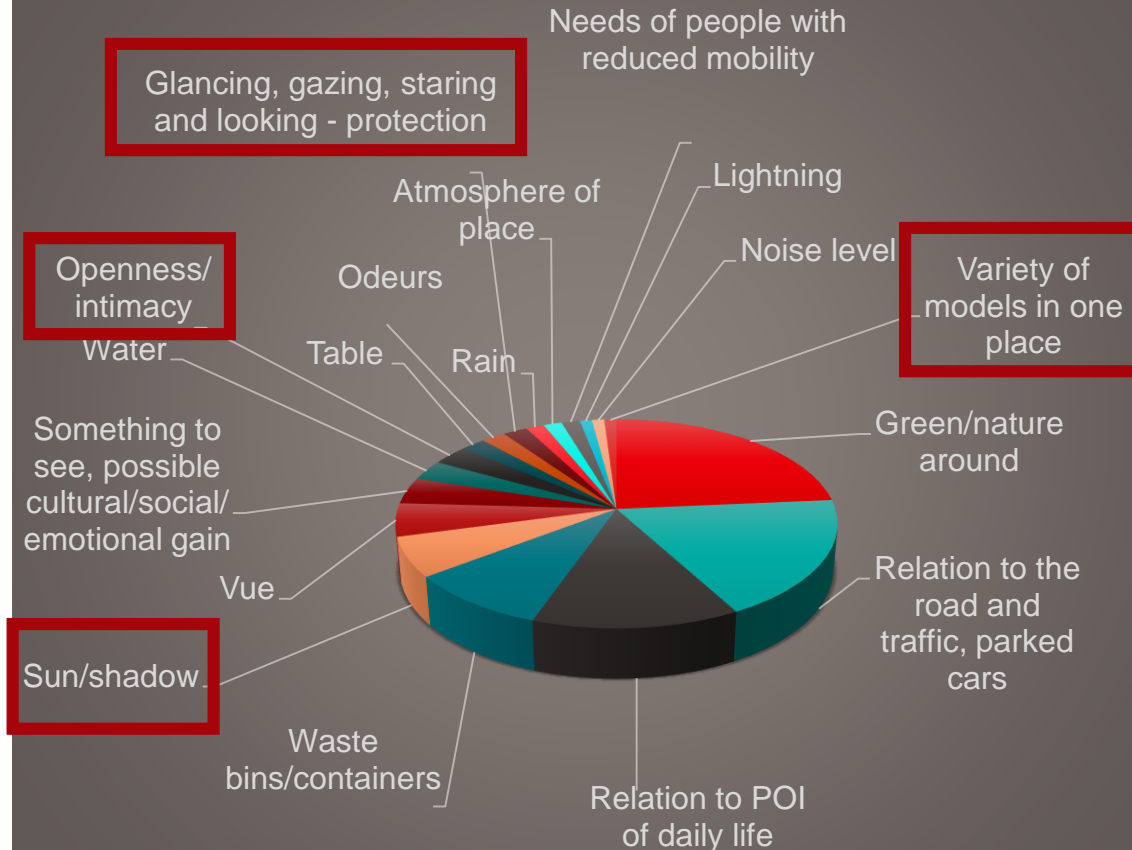
More activity than reason

Important for interpretation of results:

One person could mention several reasons and repeat arguments - counted every time.

Qualitative study - not representative

Equipment of a bench place



- Large number of criteria for the users decision-making process or well-being
- Often contradictory
- Often not measurable or temporary, but decisive!
- The materiality of the bench as direct experience
- Rare mentions may have high impact - users are not aware
- Absence creates dissatisfaction / avoidance
- Presence encourages use

*Important for interpretation of results:
One person could mention several reasons and repeat arguments - counted every time.
Qualitative study - not representative*

Being gazed at, glanced at, looked at and starred at

Three positions in relation to each other

- Don't be seen at all
- Be part of the scenery, background, decor
- Being looked at – between gaze, glance and starring (*tacit communication, even against will*)

Influence on the **choice** or **avoidance** of a bench

- Particularly for women
- Repertoire of (unconscious) strategies to be able to "control" these looks passively; through positioning, gestures, posture, etc.

« I almost sat down and I saw that people were looking at me, men were staring and I didn't feel safe. I immediately said to myself that if I sat down I would be bothered straight away and so I didn't sit down and I left. »

15 LA I, femme adulte, fit, accompagnante d'un enfant, sans voiture

« If I am too exposed, I prefer not to sit down. »

13 PL I, femme adulte, fit, accompagnante d'un enfant, experte piétonne

Distances – back and front of bench

Preferences, that the bench is out of sight of people passing

- On the back, the blind spot of the bench
- In front of the legs

The further away a bench is from passers-by

- The wider the field of vision of the person sitting on the bench
- The more the person sitting on the bench is on the edge of the line of vision of passers-by



«When a lot of people are walking right behind you it's oppressive and you don't want to sit there. I imagine at least 1.5 m distance in front and behind. Just don't get stepped on. »

05 GL I, femme adulte, fit, accompagne personnes âgées et chien

Shape of a bench

The shape of the bench concerns several dimensions, whose **needs and preferences vary** greatly :

- The **backrest**, its presence or not, its inclination, curved or not, how curved
- The **height** of the seat, its shape (curved or not, how curved)
- **Armrests**
- La **size** (length)
- The **shape** (round, angle, turned out, turned in, etc.)
- ETC.

Most mentioned criteria

SEAT HEIGHT

High seat → For people with physiological problems
→ At least right angles at the knee or higher

→ Unpleasant for short people, as the feet cannot touch the floor, the edge of the seat cuts off the blood in the thighs. To touch the floor, the use of the backrest must be abandoned.

Low seat → Allows for a relaxed position, especially if the backrest is tilted backwards

The SN 640 075 standard recommends a height between 45 cm and 50 cm, so a variability of 5 cm. According to our calculations, based on the average height in Switzerland and these conflicting needs, a variability of 20 cm would better correspond to the needs of the population.



Seat to low for persons with reduced mobility



Decide between backrest or resting legs on floor



Pleasantly low seat for a relaxed posture



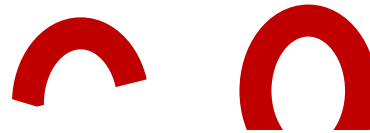
Shape of benches – two or more users



Shape of benches – two or more users



Sitting positions of two or more persons



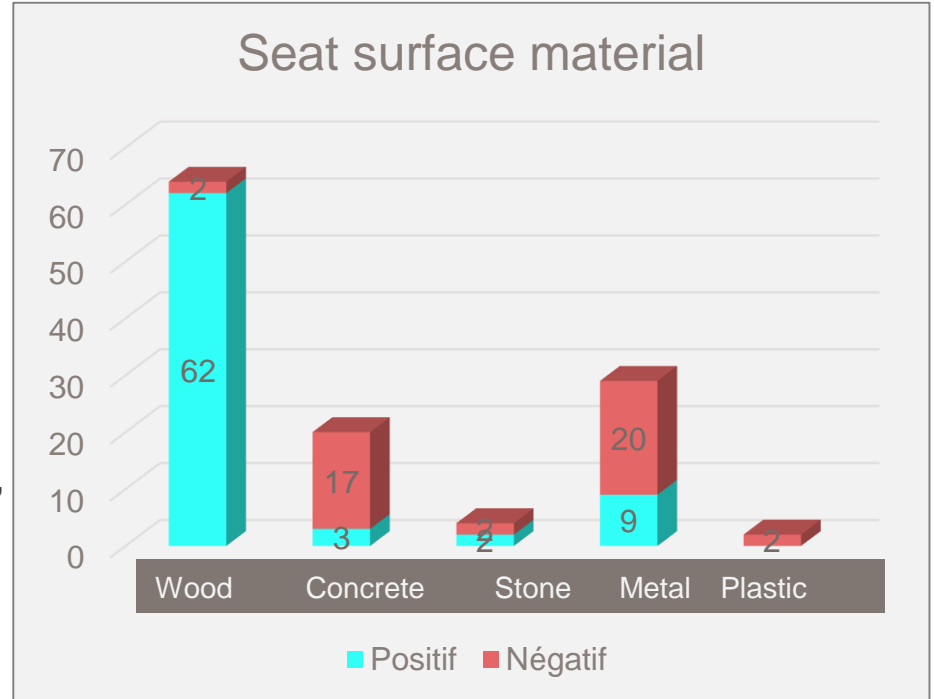
Material & colour of benches

Material

- Clear and strong opinions
- Central quality of bench experience (touch and overall comfort)

Colour

- Less importance
- Preference for natural or vivid colours, to bring life « *into the often too grey city* »



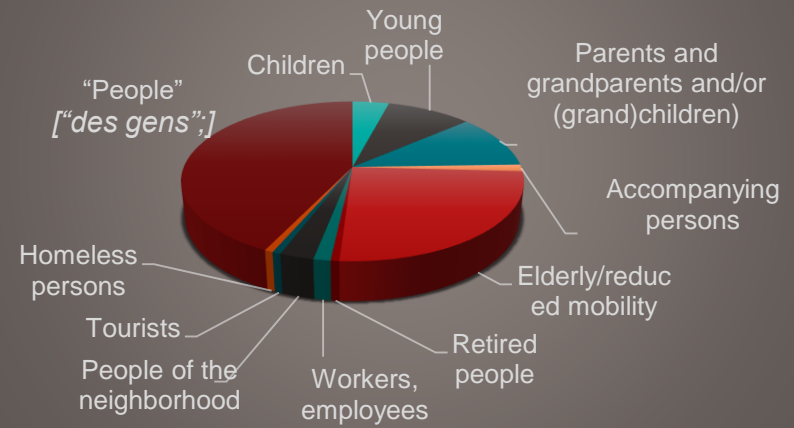
Qualitative study with 59 participants, every mention counted
 → one person can count several times

Problem & solution

- Complexity of great variety of needs – often contradictory
- Generalisation is difficult :
One model strategy “style of the city” or “one fits all” excludes user and uses
- Limited possibilities due to competition for public space

→ **Involve all potential users
in the local planning process :**

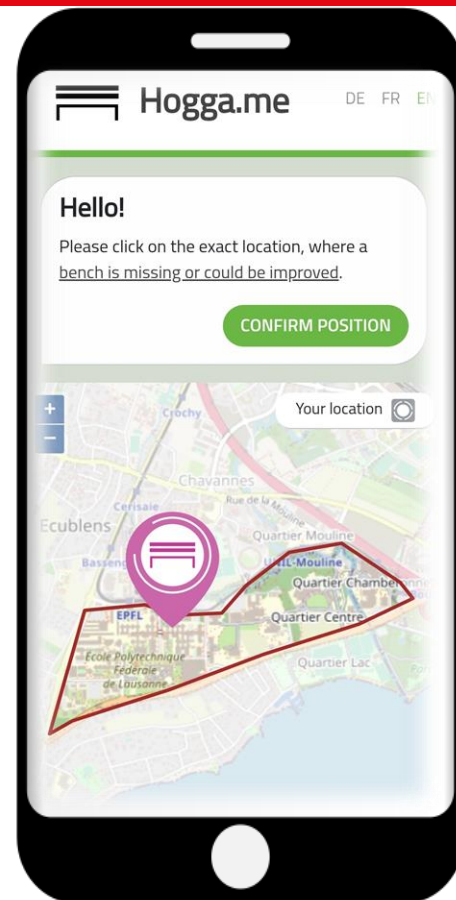
User groups mentioned by participants in interviews

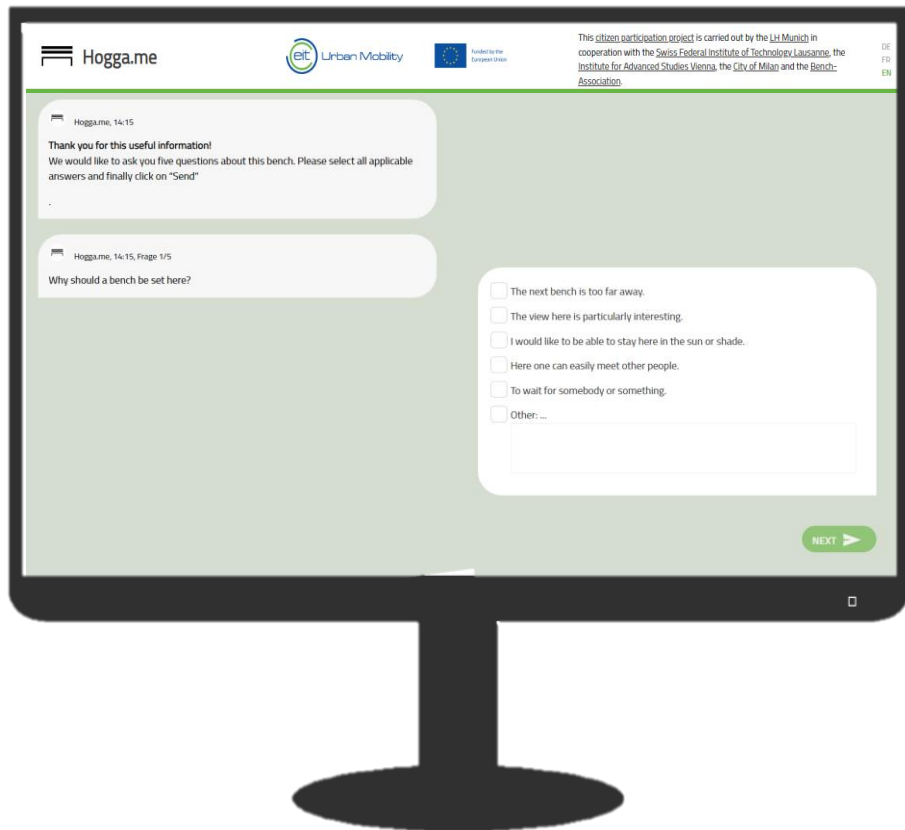



Low threshold citizen participation



Missing benches and improvements to existing benches can be easily shared with the city





 Hogga.me

Contact point for cities,
regions and communes:

info@bankkultur.ch



Report of study on
urban pedestrians and benches (FR)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360942499_Mobilite_pietonne_le_role_des_bancs_publics_dans_la_promotion_de_la_marche



Report of the pilot project
on citizen engagement for benches in Munich (DE/EN)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360942499_Mobilite_pietonne_le_role_des_bancs_publics_dans_la_promotion_de_la_marche

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Merci !

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