

Title: *Co-Designing Age-Friendly Sociocultural Spaces: A Participatory Project with Older Adults in Santiago de Compostela*

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Key highlights:

- *Co-designed community spaces for older adults.* The project supports the design of space for socialization, intergenerational interaction, and active aging.
- *Participatory design methodology.* Using Co-Design, Co-Creation, and Design Thinking principles, the team implemented structured methods to gather ideas directly from the users.
- *Concrete outcomes and guidelines.* Information collected through group activities and ethnographic visits led to practical design guidelines.

Keywords: Co-creation, Design thinking, Environmental psychology

Text: The Psychogerontology Unit of the Institute of Psychology of the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), in collaboration with the Concello de Santiago de Compostela (Santiago de Compostela City Council) and its Network of Sociocultural Centers, has developed a co-design project to create spaces for older adults in these centers. These spaces are called *Espazos non tan maiores* (“Not-so-old spaces” in Galician language) and are expected to be a place for people to meet and socialize, friendly and intergenerational, a point of reference that old adults feel is their own and that promotes active aging.

The theoretical framework for this project was developed around the theories of Co-Design and Co-Creation (Bernardo et al., 2024; Sanders & Stappers, 2014), as the aim was to actively involve the users and staff of the sociocultural centers in the design process. Design Thinking was used to create an active and participatory methodology. From the wide range of methodologies that Design Thinking offers (Feijóo-Quintas et al., 2024; Fernandez et al, 2020), the Nominal Group Technique and the Idea Map Technique were selected. We also used the Environmental Psychology theory (Berroeta et al, 2017 and Proshansky,1978), the Housing model, and the proposals from the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) (World Health Organization, 2007).

This methodology was implemented at A Trisca Sociocultural Center, starting with observational records and ethnographic visits (see Figure 1). Then two participatory dynamics were implemented. The first session, called *Entre todas hacemos A Trisca* (Together we make A Trisca), was based on the Nominal Group Technique (see Figure 2). Participants were asked to create questions about their motivations for attending the sociocultural center and how it could be improved. These questions were presented both orally and written. Users were then asked to write down their ideas individually on a piece of paper. For each question, they placed their paper in a box with a slot at the top. The box was shaken, after which the people in charge of the session read out each response. These were then discussed and classified with the participants. The ideas were prioritised and debated. The motivations and needs regarding the center, as perceived by the users, were discussed, as were possible solutions. Subsequently, the researchers classified and analysed these ideas. The other dynamic, called *Mapa de ideas Espazos non tan maiores* ("Map of ideas Not-so-old spaces"), is based on the Idea Map Method and consisted of creating a poster with the central message "How would you improve this space?" and hanging it on a wall in the "Not-so-old space" of the A Trisca center (insert Figure 3). Post-it notes and coloured markers were made available to participants on a table near the poster, and after a brief explanation, users and staff of the sociocultural center wrote their ideas on post-it notes and stuck them on the poster. After eight days, the poster was removed and the data was analyzed. Based on these ideas, specific proposals were generated about the physical environment and the preferred equipment for the spaces.

The information gathering was completed with ethnographic visits involving participant observation of different activities carried out in A Trisca, including craft workshops, cognitive stimulation and weekly cultural visits to museums and the city's historical heritage sites. The participants were mostly female, they participated actively with a high degree of commitment, and there was a high degree of identification with the center and its staff, which contrasts with the limitations observed in terms of the environment and resources in previous sessions. The data obtained was verified

through ethnographic visits with observational records to two other sociocultural centers belonging to the Santiago de Compostela City Council's network: O Ensanche Social and Youth Center and As Fontiñas Sociocultural Center. Similar dynamics were observed in these two centres in terms of user participation and involvement, and similar needs were also identified in terms of the physical environment, equipment and staff needs.

In developing this co-design project, we gathered a wide range of information from users and staff. Based on this, we have developed design guidelines applicable to A Trisca and other sociocultural centres in Santiago de Compostela. These guidelines cover improvements to the physical space, such as brighter paint colours and ergonomic furniture; improvements to the design of activities, such as providing specific materials for memory stimulation activities; and providing staff with up-to-date training in gerontology and interpersonal skills, such as training on the housing model and person-centred care. These guidelines cover the following areas: improvements to the physical space, such as brighter paint colours and ergonomic furniture; improvements to the design of activities, such as providing specific materials for memory stimulation activities; providing staff with up-to-date training in gerontology and interpersonal skills, such as training on the housing model and person-centred care.

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Figure 1. Not-so-old space at A Trisca sociocultural center.



Figure 2. Nominal Group session.



Figure 3. Map of ideas about the physical space.



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