“Care is what you miss from the organization”: Experiences of pre- and post-retirement academic staff at Maastricht University

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1. Introduction: UM's ambition to become an age-friendly university

To close the first Diversity Day, organized by Maastricht University (UM) on 8 March 2018, Rector Magnificus Rianne Letschert signed the ten principles of an age-friendly university. This signature made UM the first continental European university to join the Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network, initiated by Dublin City University in 2012.[1] AFU is part of a global movement that advocates for age-friendly communities of which the *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide* (2007) of the World Health Organization is probably the most well-known example. This movement argues that aging is not just a corporeal phenomenon. We are all 'aged by culture' as well, to use an important phrase coined by Margaret Gullette in *Aged by Culture* (2004). Culture here does not only refer to the often insufficient accessibility of public spaces as an obstacle to the development of age-friendly societies. It also refers to the cultural meanings of aging that circulate in our societies and that we all have to relate to. In today's Western context, the dominant representation of aging has a Janus face: it consists of a depressing narrative of inevitable physical and cognitive decline, on the one hand, and an unattainable consumerist discourse of compulsory everlasting youthfulness on the other (Lamb, 2017; Gibbons, 2016). Both alternatives are one-sided ageist stereotypes that do not honor the variety of experiences of older people themselves, nor do they acknowledge that people are vulnerable and co-dependent in multiple ways across the life span. Moreover, they seriously impact how older people are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves. A belief in the inherent value of people of all ages and abilities, including older people and people who live with disabilities (who are not necessarily older), underlies the call for age-friendly communities. There is evidence that intergenerational connections based on equality, cooperation, and individuality are effective ways to rebut all-too-positive and -negative stereotypes (Lytle & Levy, 2019; Levy, 2018). They increase the self-esteem, well-being, and sense of belonging of older adults as well as improve the social skills and aging literacy of younger people (Vrkljan et al., 2019, pp. 244-245). Indeed, as Claire Luz and Roger Baldwin write, "becoming age-friendly is not about meeting the needs of older adults; it benefits everyone, enriches all of us personally and collectively" (2019, p. 15).

During UM's Diversity Day 2018, the coordinator of AFU, Christine O'Kelly, presented the network's history and rationale. The original team behind AFU identified six areas within academic institutions that can be approached through a critical lens of age-friendliness, namely research and innovation, teaching and learning, intergenerational learning, lifelong learning, encore careers and enterprise, and civic engagement (Montepare et al., 2019, p. 4). Ten principles of age-friendliness (Table 1) serve to operationalize this lens.

[1] Full list of members: https://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly/age-friendly-members.

Table 1: Ten age-friendly principles[2]

1.	To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs.
2.	To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue "second careers."
3.	To recognize the range of educational needs of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue Master's or PhD qualifications).
4.	To promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.
5.	To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
6.	To ensure that the university's research agenda is informed by the needs of an ageing society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
7.	To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that ageing brings to our society.
8.	To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.
9.	To engage actively with the university's own retired community.
10.	To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the ageing population.

These principles focus on the participation of older people in educational programs; accessibility; career development; a tailored research agenda; aging literacy; and community engagement. Implementing these principles is easier said than done. Craig A. Talmage et al. warn that "achieving a university that is age-friendly in practice would require nothing less than a cultural transformation" because most higher education institutes – including Maastricht University – have "an educational mission centered on young adults" (2016, p. 14). Joann Montepare (2019) goes so far as to argue that the neglect of age as an identity marker in academia reflects "the historical age-segregated structure of higher education which builds age barriers and fosters ageist practices" (p. 139).

Since the AFU initiative is of a recent date, research into what it means on campus and what it takes in practice to become an age-friendly university is still relatively modest in scale. The most important contribution until this date is the special issue edited by Montepare for *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education* in 2019. Roughly speaking, the research can be divided into projects that aim to develop audit tools to assess the degree of age-friendliness that an institution has accomplished (e.g., Silverstein et al., 2019; Chesser et al., 2020) and projects that investigate the potential of specific existing programming to further develop towards more systemic age-friendliness (Montepare et al., 2019; Luz & Baldwin, 2019). Luz and Baldwin

[2] Downloaded from https://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly/principles.shtml Sep 4, 2020.

caution that AFU designation "shouldn't be about simply 'checking off' that criteria have been met but rather making a commitment to an age-friendly campus culture that is reflected in concrete practice" (2019, p. 2). In a similar vein, Jack Hansen et al. warn that the AFU label should not become "simply a form of university branding, a contemporary fad, or failed endeavor" (2019, p. 223). They and other scholars emphasize the importance of institutional support and careful coordination and planning to the work that becoming a more age-friendly institution entails. Moreover, to understand older *and* younger adults' needs and interest in this endeavor, it is important to engage all stakeholders in this process.

The UM project "Transitioning into retirement: Building sustainable relations beyond employment with UM academic staff" directly follows from the university's ambition to follow up on and materialize its commitment to the AFU principles. It is the first project to do so. Financed by a Diversity and Inclusivity grant, it can count on the support of the university administration. The project's leading research question is how academics who are transitioning into retirement or who have recently retired experience and give meaning to this particular phase in their career. As such, the project ties in mostly, albeit not exclusively, with the 9th AFU principle, "To engage actively with the university's own retired community." The focus on this particular group of academics is both because it appeals to the imagination – everyone knows the stereotype of the old professor who refuses to leave their[3] cluttered office – and for reasons of feasibility. The project aims to give this specific UM population the opportunity to share their stories and voice their concerns and to help UM to develop a retirement policy that is well-thought through and that takes the worries and needs of its employees as a starting point. Developing this policy will hopefully fuel a broader discussion about what the age-friendly principles could mean for UM and what actions are necessary to turn our institute into a truly age-friendly environment.

The team behind this report consists of Hadewych Honné, Ilya Malafei, Mara Stieber, and project leader Aagje Swinnen. Swinnen (Belgium) holds a chair with a specialized remit in Aging Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. In her research, she questions the successful aging paradigm that, through its emphasis on autonomy, health, activity, and independence, suggests that the best way to age is not to grow older at all and stay young forever. Her teaching activities at FASoS and UCM are dedicated to AFU's 7th principle "To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that ageing brings to our society." Over the years, she has witnessed different retirement scenarios at her own faculty and listened to many colleagues telling stories about the final years of their career and their professional exit. This prompted her to put this project forward. Hadewych Honné (The Netherlands) is a graduate of the Research Master program Cultures of Arts, Science, and Technology at FASoS. Ilya Malafei (Belarus) and Mara Stieber (Luxembourg) are both graduates of the Liberal Arts program offered by University College Maastricht. While finalizing this report, these three junior researchers have continued their education at other academic institutes both in- and outside the Netherlands. As part of an integrated intergenerational approach, all team members were involved in all stages of the research project. Through intensive collaboration, the junior researchers learned from the

[3] The report makes use of the singular "they" as a generic third-person singular pronoun in English in accordance with APA style – see Section 3.

project leader and vice versa. In addition, the project members learned from exchanges with the participants and the project advisors Hans Kasper (SBE), Hanneke van Mier (FPN), and Dorry Spijkers (HRM). Thus, the junior researchers, who are at the beginning of what may become an academic career, had an opportunity to hear what such a career entails from the perspective of people who are at the end of it. The dialogue between junior researchers, a mid-career scholar (i.e., the project leader), and retiring or newly retired employees is indicative of the kind of dynamics that the research team advocates for in a university setting and meets the fourth AFU principle "To promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages." The team hopes that "Transitioning into retirement: building sustainable relations beyond employment with UM academic staff" will inspire others to set up projects that also start from reciprocal learning, i.e., projects in which expertise is shared and co-created between learners of all ages.

2. State of the art

What follows is an overview of the academic literature on the topic of academics in and transitioning into retirement. It allows us to map out relevant themes and patterns in the latest research and lay the foundation for our own study. We start with a comprehensive meta-ethnography by Cahill et al. (2019) which covers research published between 2000 and 2016 and then proceed to discuss post-2016 academic literature on the subject.

2.1. Summary of Cahill et al.'s meta-ethnography (2019)

Mairead Cahill et al. (2019) provides a thorough overview of academic literature on the transition of academics into retirement, published between 2000 and 2016, and aims to deliver a "new conceptual understanding of the retirement experience of academics" (p. e178). The authors focus on qualitative studies that comply with their own quality criteria derived from the questions on the Critical Appraisal Skill Program (Campbell et al. in Cahill et al., 2019). Twenty articles, related to eighteen studies focusing on different parts of the retirement process, are included in the meta-ethnography. Accounts of 354 participants, located primarily in the United States of America but also in Canada, the Philippines, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Hong Kong are part of the meta-synthesis. The authors use reciprocal translation of the concepts from every study which entails finding analogous second-order concepts across the studies. They subsequently proceed to establish theories that they synthesize into an overarching argument about the phenomenon of retirement experiences of academics.

Cahill et al. conceptualize the retirement trajectories of academics emerging from this literature as two general pathways. They describe the first, and the more prominent one, as gradual retirement while the second frames retirement as a singular event or a brief transition. In relation to these pathways, the authors pinpoint five central themes that are developed in academic literature on the transition of academics into retirement. The first theme is *continuing working in retirement.* Most of the selected studies cover experiences of participants working in countries where there are no obligatory retirement policies, which allows academics to continue working after the official retirement age.[4] There is overwhelming evidence that the majority of participating academics make use of this opportunity. Cahill et al. distinguish between three categories of work engagement by retired academics: continuing scholars, opportunists, and avoiders. 'Continuing scholars' remain closely connected to the university and proceed with most of their pre-retirement activities. The term 'opportunists' refers to retired academics who only stay involved in the academic activities they enjoy and find fulfilling, and this to a limited extent. Moreover, those who decide to stay engaged in university life see retirement as a positive change: having the space to independently make decisions

[4] Since the overwhelming majority of the participants in the studies under discussion live and work in the USA, we decided to adopt the term "full retirement age" as defined by the USA Social Security Administration ("Benefits Planner: Retirement | Retirement Age and Benefit Reduction | SSA," n.d.). Our decision is motivated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the participants in the covered studies live and work in the USA. Depending on one's year of birth, full retirement age can be between 66 and 67. Therefore, our use of the terms "in retirement" or "after retirement," implies being (chronologically) older than one's full retirement age.

about what activities to engage in (i.e., prioritizing the most enjoyable ones) suits them. A third category of academics' engagement with their job in retirement is that of 'avoidance.' Irritation with day-to-day pressures at work as well as a wish to "rebalance" work and private life are some of the reasons for their refusal to continue to engage with academia in any way (Davies & Jenkins, 2013, p. 327).

A second theme centers around the *potential toll that retirement may take on the identity of academics* who are transitioning into retirement. They have built this identity through their work and their position within institutions. As cited by Cahill et al., "the prospect of discontinuing work was disruptive to their sense of self in various ways" (Onyura et al. in Cahill et al., 2019, p. e187). Potential loss of their academic identity poses a perceived threat to scholars' self-esteem and self-worth and makes them feel excluded from a professional community. They might maintain their academic identity by applying their academic skills and knowledge to other areas and types of institutions. Seth Matthew Fishman (2010) describes a participant who used to be a business scholar and in retirement became a history teacher. Another participant turned their research interest into filmmaking and set up a film production company. What may complicate this renegotiation of one's identity, however, is a possible mismatch between the academics' own ideas about how to optimally use their time versus society's. Indeed, many scholars in retirement tend to defy the general stereotype of the retiree as necessarily withdrawing from paid employment and other productive activities.

Transitioning into retirement often implies *the transformation of several relationships* in the lives of academics, including those with students, colleagues, university, and family. This transformation constitutes a third theme identified by Cahill et al. The relationship to students is often addressed in the literature; academics tend to report weakening contacts to students as an experience of loss while highlighting the high value that exchange with students has as part of an academic career. However, scholars who wish to invest more in caregiving activities tend to disconnect from the university to a greater extent. Female academics express more eagerness than their male counterparts to spend time with their partners in retirement, and they "were crafting their retirement plans to follow their partners" (p. e189). Male academic staff refer to a lesser extent to their partners as a determining factor in their decision to retire.

A fourth theme emphasizes a connection between transitioning into retirement and the *fear of age-related health issues*. "Lack of social contact" and "having nothing scheduled to keep them busy and stimulated" are some of the retirement-related risks that can cause "intellectual and physical sluggishness" among other things and have an impact on one's health (Williamson et al. in Cahill et al., 2019, p. e189). For some participants, physical aging, including loss of hearing and changes in vision and mobility, influences their decision to retire. Retirement is then perceived as offering academics the opportunity to focus on desired health-permitting activities as well as on health and well-being itself. The conflict between the retirees' self-perception and "normal societal expectations" (Cahill et al., 2019, p. e190) returns in this theme. As one of the studies puts it, "the term 'retired' was felt to represent something that did not reflect participant experiences" (p. e190). To phase their retirement instead of arranging it as a single event in time enables academics to deviate from the conventional idea of a retiree who immediately stops working and is altogether no longer economically productive.

A fifth theme, *planning for retirement*, emerges from the literature in two contexts. While many studies in Cahill et al.'s review demonstrate that planning is a significant part of the transitioning process of their participants, others claim the contrary. Still, strategic and systematic planning is widely considered essential for a satisfying retirement experience, especially in relation to financial planning. As such, "retirement was portrayed as a challenge to be managed with careful timing, the development of new objectives and a reprioritization of goals" (Silver et al. in Cahill et al., 2019, p. e190). Another dimension of planning has to do with securing a successor in place of the retiree since the absence of such a successor threatens the continuation of the retiree's work. Those who stay in the workplace beyond retirement for fear of not having a replacement are labelled 'delayers' (Cahill et al., 2019, p. e190). The responsibility to retire and allow space for junior colleagues is also widely acknowledged by the participants though.

In their analysis, Cahill et al. conclude that, given the abundance of retirement trajectories that a member of academic staff can pursue, it is crucial that institutions understand retirement in a nuanced way and facilitate different trajectories depending on the diverging needs of academics.

2.2. Overview of post 2016 literature

This section contains a brief overview of the post-2016 scholarship on the retirement of academics. We have identified three major strands in this research: factors in retirement decisions; conditions for change in institutional retirement culture; and institutions' efforts towards becoming age-friendly universities.

Factors in retirement decisions

A number of further studies in this first strand of research after 2016 have been conducted to identify the factors that affect decisions regarding retirement pathways of academics after Cahil et al.'s extensive meta-ethnography. The studies below investigate geographically and politically specific factors that influence retirement decisions.

A study on why Spanish faculty members increasingly retire before the fixed retirement age of 65 years, shows that early retirement is mainly rooted in the "damage of the job of teaching" (Romero-Tena et al., 2019). The authors describe how recent changes in the Spanish academic system have led to higher demands on faculty members' dedication and time, while they feel their contributions are undervalued at the same time. Combined with overbearing bureaucratic tasks, this leads to burn-out in faculty members, as they are emotionally exhausted and disappointed. Consequently, faculty members retire as soon as they are able to.

In other contexts, scholars desire to work up to and past the fixed retirement age. Altman et al (2019) investigated what scholars are opting for when approaching retirement, on the basis of data from the USA, the UK, France, as well as Spain. This study identifies four different categories of engagement after academic retirement (Altman et al., 2019). While they mirror Cahill et al.'s categorization, they add to it by differentiating between 'reduced engagement, with emphasis on [academic] work,' and 'reduced engagement, with emphasis on non-academic work.' In the absence of competing interests and passions, scholars' strong identification with their professional role tends to equal their desire to continue academic work and perhaps not reduce professional engagement at all. Alternatively, financial confidence, on the one hand, and attraction to the positive sides of retirement on the other, lead scholars to opt for a reduced engagement either inside or outside of academia. Other factors playing a role in the decision to work less are health issues or perceived lower self-efficacy. Academics who decide to reduce their engagement with an emphasis on non-academic work do not desire continued professional engagement but prefer to pursue new activities instead. The motivators for the last category, identified as those who are "calling it a day," (Altman et al., 2019, p. 7) are work stress and changes in the retirees' work context, especially an increase in teaching and administration loads.

Especially in the USA, pre-retirement academics fear they will have insufficient resources to live comfortably and to maintain their living standard post-retirement (Baldwin et al., 2018). As such, financial factors often take a primary importance in retirement decisions (Strage, 2018; Altman et al., 2019). Concern about the lack of financial security in retirement is a key consideration among senior faculty who are reluctantly anticipating working within academia beyond the 'normal' retirement age (Strage, 2018, p. 31). Kwesi Nkum Wilson (2017) calls for expanding the scholarship on academic retirement to developing countries as well. The findings of his survey conducted in the non-Western setting of Ghana illustrate that financial implications are the main consideration in retirement decisions for senior staff in public universities (Wilson, 2017). As they are not able to continue working inside the university beyond the compulsory age of 60 years, many plan to start working in business after retiring from academic work.

Gender can be another factor in retirement decisions. A Swedish study on academics' attitudes towards working in old age (Kadefors et al., 2016) found that significantly more men than women were interested in working into old age. This mirrors the statistic that, in Sweden, women tend to exit all professions earlier than men, even if this difference is becoming less significant over time. They suggest that this gendered dimension of retirement attitudes could partly be rooted in the age differences in the marriages of women academics who are often younger than their husbands. Women are found to be less interested in continuing to work past their retirement age when their partners are already retired. Furthermore, the study identified that age, position, and work satisfaction were predictors of women's and men's interest to work past 67 years of age, while perceived health was a predictor only for women and not for men. Further inquiry into the gendered dimensions of retirement decisions is needed, as much of the literature reviewed for this project does not pay specific attention to gender differences in academic retirement.

Creating conditions for change in institutional retirement culture

Several researchers (Kezar, 2018; Baldwin, 2018; Baldwin et al., 2018) have raised the question how to progress towards more positive academic retirement experiences within institutions that come with a specific culture and history. Adrianna Kezar (2018), for example, explores the question whether retirees are seen as burdens or as assets within the academic community and how cultural values shape retirement practices and policies in turn. They point out that new projects and schemes will not have a great impact, as long as there is an institutional and departmental culture that views older faculty members or retirees negatively.

Other scholars are raising questions on how to reinvent academic retirement altogether. Roger Baldwin (2018) stresses that the ideal context is an institution that rethinks its approach to faculty and staff retirement by ultimately maintaining connections across generations and welcoming retirees' contributions whenever mutually beneficial. A first step in this process is a critical review of the current institutional culture and practices revolving around the involvement of senior faculty members at universities. Baldwin et al. (2018) stress that retirement programs should provide retiring scholars with predictable costs, minimal administrative responsibilities, legal protection, and easily available information in order for them to be able to make informed choices. The latter reduces the risk of disengagement, the loss of efficacy, and the sense of marginalization academics may have in the period before their retirement (Cain, 2018). Moreover, a clear and transparent retirement policy guarantees that persons will be treated in a fair and equal manner by their institution (Goldberg & Baldwin, 2018). Furthermore, making information freely available as to how previous retirees structured their retirement transition and their post-retirement life can benefit those in the pre-retirement stage. The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Retirement Liaison, for instance, shares information about the experiences, activities, and feelings of former faculty in this respect (Goldberg & Baldwin, 2018).

Some scholars, such as Joanna M. Cain et al. (2018), focus on the cultural barriers to meaningful retirement and assess how the University of Massachusetts Medical School has supported the retirement transitions of senior faculty. To examine the needs of individual employees and the institution, Cain et al. surveyed faculty leaders and retired faculty. From the survey, they developed a comprehensive framework to address the needs and tasks of faculty in late career transitions. Among the significant cultural barriers that they identified were fear of giving up a professional identity and a sense of purpose, as well as reluctance to raise the topic of retirement among faculty members and administration, as it is a 'taboo' topic. They adopted a multi-pronged and multi-year strategy to address these barriers. During the first stage of this strategy and a first step of pre-retirement, they created a retirement checklist and planned seminars to support faculty members in their retirement decisions. During the retirement transitions, retirees were provided with retirement and succession planning guidance. They also received support when informing their administration about their retirement plans. Post-retirement, retirees received email connections and access badges that also grant access to the Wellness Center and academic engagement programs.

More generally, in order to implement changes in policies and practices regarding academic retirement, it is necessary to think strategically about how to create an environment that embraces change. Critiquing existing retirement practices and proposing reforms may be seen as hostile or threatening by employees (Bugge et al., 2018). John Bugge et al. present a framework to engender sustained institutional change. By achieving a better understanding of what changes are needed and how these relate to individual stakeholders, initial anxieties can be resolved. The steps to follow include: create a sense of urgency, establish a guiding coalition, develop a vision and strategy, communicate this vision, empower individuals, and, finally, generate short-term wins. Additionally, showing that improved academic retirement policies and practices are beneficial not only for retirees but also for institutions can help even the path for institutional reforms. It will also enhance personnel and curriculum planning, help ensure ongoing access to needed resources, and generally open the conversation about retirement (Goldberg & Baldwin, 2018).

Institutions' efforts towards becoming age-friendly universities

The third major strand in post-2016 scholarship focusses on institutions' efforts towards becoming age-friendly universities which can be inspirational to UM. Recent scholarship connects the study of the experiences and needs of academic retirees with the aspiration of certain universities to become more age-friendly through the continuing participation of former faculty. They detail how initiatives to engage retired academics in university life are beneficial to both retirees and the institution. Retirement organizations that are set up on campus, for instance, seem to contribute to meaningful aging and prolonged involvement of older scholars. They are described as a successful institutional strategy to demonstrate respect for faculty, honor their service, and show a willingness to keep them connected post-retirement (Brown & Jones, 2018). Retiree organizations, which exist in many different forms, can make the retiring process easier and more productive for an institution and its former employees. A retiree center may become a locus for interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and multicultural initiatives and educational events in which faculty, students, and retirees come together (Brown & Jones, 2018). Illustrating the positive impact that retiree centers can bring about, a retired scholar said they no longer felt disconnected from the university since an emeritus academy was set up on their campus (Ellis et al., 2017).

Several other initiatives situate an improved approach to the retirement of academics in the universities' ambition to become more age-friendly institutions. One such initiative is the Impact program in the USA by the National Science Foundation (NSF) Office for Broadening Participation in Engineering. This program matches emeriti professors with younger faculty members from underrepresented minorities for mentorship. Consequently, the mentorship helped retirees transition into retirement while staying connected to the academic world (Mendez et al., 2019). The University of Southern California's Encore program is another example of an effort to move away from an institutional culture that sees older academics as burdens, in order to create an 'asset-based' culture in which retired faculty members are valued within the academic community (Kezar, 2018). Additionally, Michigan State University created an AgeAlive network in 2014 that is based on AFU principles to embrace old age on campus by taking a holistic approach (Luz & Baldwin, 2019). Advocacy for aging-related programming already started fifty years ago at this university. This particular case shows that it takes time and persistence to become a truly age-friendly university.

In summary, different institutions are creating a myriad of different projects and spaces in which the whole academic community, including retired and retiring scholars, can come together. These take on different shapes and forms, but the common thread is the understanding that retired academics are valuable members of the university community.

2.3. Previous retirement-related research at Maastricht University

The 6th AFU principle wants to ensure that universities' research agenda is informed by the needs of an aging society and wants to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults. In this section, we will briefly introduce some of the retirement-related research conducted at UM. We consulted with some of the main scholars within this field and have identified two strands of research.[5] The first looks at challenges around the changing Dutch pension system and its viability from various angles, including early engagement with retirement planning, the relation between health and retirement pathways, and financial incentives to stimulate workforce participation. Secondly, we will describe an initiative that explored possibilities for informal intergenerational learning between retired staff and current UM students and staff.

The retirement system in the Netherlands has changed as a result of population aging and the 2008 financial crisis. One of the implications of these changes is that institutional responsibility for people's financial well-being in later life has decreased, while individuals' personal responsibility has steadily grown. To ensure that people have sufficient financial resources post retirement, some argue that it is critical that they engage with their own retirement planning early on. Lisa Brüggen (SBE), whose research focuses on pension communication in academic and public contexts, and Thomas Post (SBE), whose scholarship involves pension communication and understanding the financial resource allocation of households over the lifecycle, have worked together extensively on this subject. Together with colleagues, they have examined how and when to get people actively involved in the planning of their retirement. One of the issues of retirement planning is that it involves a high degree of uncertainty in the long term. This negatively affects people's emotions towards retirement and influences not only the kinds of decisions that people take, but also the degree to which they are willing to engage with retirement planning in the first place (Perik et al., 2018).

Further research will show how pension communication should be framed to avoid negative associations with pension planning. One promising direction in this regard is reaching out to pension participants at times when people are expected to be more open to pension communication, i.e., life events such as marriage, having children, or the passing away of a loved one (Blakstad et al., 2017). A study of the Swedish pension system shows that it is often assumed that a greater number of options will enhance people's willingness to

[5] The meetings with Elianne Janssen and Lisa Brüggen took place on November 11 and November 21, 2019, respectively. We were in contact with the researchers from the UM Expertise Zone through email in September 2020.

engage with pension planning. However, while people generally appreciate a high number of options, having excessive options can be disheartening, especially for people with limited financial knowledge (Brüggen & Post, 2018; Brüggen, Böhnke, & Post, 2019). Finally, once people do engage in retirement planning, interactivity in online pension planners enhances their engagement (Brüggen, Post, & Schmitz, 2019).

Another research project, "Work, ageing, health and retirement," is taking place at SBE within the Research Centre for Education and the Labor Market (ROA). The main focus of this project is on determining inequalities in the response to major pension system reforms and on what challenges the increase in life expectancy poses to the Dutch pension system. One of the results of this demographic development is that "governments, social partners, insurance companies, and pension funds have strong incentives to increase the labor supply of older generations" (ROA, n.d.) and have to provide tailored services to an aging work population. The aim of the project is to get a better understanding of the effects of pension reforms and people's health conditions on the selection of different pathways to retirement, such as unemployment, bridge jobs, part-time retirement, self-employment, and full retirement. In addition, the project looks at the needs of employers and the impact of employer demands and human capital investments on older employees' vitality and employment prospects (De Grip et al., 2019). The project takes current pension reforms as natural experiments (De Grip et al., 2012) that allow for the analysis of causal relationships between health, job motivation, human capital investments, and retirement pathways (Montizaan et al., 2016; Montizaan & Vendrik, 2014). This, in turn, provides insight into which health conditions, in which sectors of work, have the greatest negative effect on continued employment and, therefore, require financial incentives.

In connection to the issue of health and varying pathways to retirement, Elianne Janssen is writing her PhD dissertation in affiliation with the Faculty of Law, while working as a pension advisor at KPMG. The focus of her dissertation is on the transition from work into retirement, more specifically, on the tax measures around early and late retirement. The mandatory retirement age in the Netherlands has increased and is likely to further rise in the years to come. However, not all employees will be able to or want to work until the mandatory retirement age. Currently, however, both early retirement and late retirement are subject to fiscal restrictions, which have changed constantly over time, so that no sustainable solution exists. Furthermore, most tax measures focus on employees, without taking into account self-employed persons. Janssen's alternative revolves around introducing a (sustainable) new tax measure that optimally and adequately facilities the transition from the working phase to the retirement phase of a working person (both employees and the self-employed), from a financial perspective.

All projects above focus on challenges and solutions related to the Dutch pension system, concentrating mainly on the financial aspects of retirement and on retirement planning. In a different strand of research activities around retirement, Sascha Hardt (FoL), Joey Mak (SBE), Zina Nimeh (UNU-MERIT), and Maartje Willeboordse (FHML) have developed a blueprint for an "UM Expertise Zone" as part of the UM Steep Face program.[6]

[6] The researchers from the Steep Face project "UM Expertise Zone" have provided us with information about the project, which is not openly available.

They found that when UM staff retires, there is often a sudden relational break between employer and employee and valuable (institutional) knowledge, experience, and skills are lost. By the same token, retired and retiring staff have a desire to continue to contribute to and play a role in the university. UM Expertise Zone was an initiative "to preserve expertise and transfer knowledge through creating a platform where (almost) retired staff interact with students and junior staff through informal discussion, coaching and other forms of exchange." The platform would in this way enable intergenerational learning, beneficial to students and junior staff who receive guidance and advice, as well as to retired and retiring staff, who could continue their involvement in UM and share their expertise and experience. Unfortunately, the UM Expertise Zone, which is an excellent example of an already existing initiative that could be further developed to make UM a more age-friendly environment (cf. AFU principle), never came to fruition.

The current projects that focus on retirement-related issues at UM do not explicitly engage with the idea of the age-friendly university or the (experiences of) retiring academics. Still, there is potential to link this existing UM scholarship with our project. As the changes in the Dutch pension system are a reality for all retiring (academic) staff, acknowledging this socio-economic development is important when interpreting retiring and retired academics' experiences. Furthermore, as our findings will show, retirees' desires regarding the (dis)continuation of their involvement in the university appears to be a recurring theme in their retirement experiences. Through our project, we hope to contribute to a possible future integration of scholarship on retirement at UM.

3. Methods of data collection and analysis

We have opted for a research design that is based on qualitative focus group interviews. Such interviews enable us to elicit qualitative data on the experiences of transitioning into retirement and retirement whereby the "purpose is to explore different perspectives […], rather than to access representative or generalizable views" (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 236). The strength of focus group interviewing is that group discussion may encourage people to speak with more openness than they would in individual interviews. In addition, as all participants in our research were going or have gone through the process of retirement, group discussion allows for a greater coverage of topics and issues that may not have come up otherwise or that participants may have experienced differently.

We organized six focus group interviews (referred to as FG1-6 in our findings section) with a total of 26 participants (for an overview of general data on the participants, see Table 2). Three groups included five participants; one group consisted of six participants; one group had three and one group had two participants. Two focus group interviews were conducted in Dutch (following the preference of the participants). The others were in English (to accommodate the two junior researchers who do not speak Dutch). When composing groups, it is important to arrange units small enough to permit participants to take part in the discussion, while at the same time capturing a large enough variety of perspectives (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 228). To ensure richness and variety of discussion, we aimed at including participants from different academic ranks, faculties, and gender, and to arrange focus groups with an eye on the heterogeneity of participants. Our research was based on purposive sampling (Tonkiss, 2012), which entailed that we selected participants based on their significant relation to the topic of research, i.e., the experience of retiring/retirement and the retirement policy of Maastricht University. We recruited participants through a call for participation that we circulated in faculty and UM newsletters. The call for participation was also sent to possible participants with the help of UM HR departments (Dorry Spijkers and Antoon Vugts especially) and SenUM[7]. Snowball sampling complemented the purposive sampling process. Our inclusion criteria were: people interested in participation (had) fulfilled an academic position at UM; they would be retiring or had retired ideally, albeit not exclusively, within three years of the period in which we conducted the focus group interviews.

Table 2: Participants (academic rank, gender, and faculty)

	Female	Male
Instructor	2	3
Assistant professor	3	2
Associate professor	2	3
Full professor	-	11

[7] SenUM is the Association of Former Maastricht University Employees, meant to serve as a platform for contact between former employees of UM. It organizes excursions, company visits, walks, and lectures for its members. SenUM, furthermore, offers members access to various (UM) facilities (cf. https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/support/um-employees/you-and-your-work/extra-activities/senum-association-former-maastricht).

FASoS	6
FHML	9
SBE	6
FPN	2
Law	2
UCM	1

These interviews took place at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in January and February 2020. Participants were asked to sign a consent form that detailed the audiotaping of the interviews and the purposes of the data collection, as well as how the data would be used and stored. In addition, the consent form also explained to participants that they could contact the researchers after the focus group interviews, in case participants wanted to add oral or written information (nobody used this option in the end). All focus groups interviews were led by the principal researcher who facilitated discussion and interaction, balancing the time for participants to speak, and keeping the discussion on topic (Tonkiss, 2012, p. 240). At each interview, an additional researcher was present who observed and took notes on the interaction and group dynamic during the discussions. We created an interview topic guide that was informed by the existing research on retirement experiences of academics, including topics and questions that had been discussed in prior research or went beyond the scope of this research. Topics included identity and self-perception, work-life balance, emotions around retirement, connection with UM, institutional support from UM, and stereotypes about retirement and older academics. As project advisors, Hans Kasper provided extensive feedback on the first draft of the topic guide and Hanneke van Mier advised on the general methodological approach.

After finishing all focus group interviews, we transcribed the interviews by dividing them among ourselves. During the COVID 19 "intelligent lockdown" and in the months thereafter, the researchers met online through Zoom and shared and collaborated on documents in Microsoft Office 365. The researchers present at the interviews proofread the transcripts to check for accuracy. In the transcripts, we took note of long pauses, laughter, gestures, and body language which were important in contextualizing interviewees' statements. After finalizing the process of transcription, we began the analysis of transcripts by extensive rounds of initial notetaking and coding. To ensure that the two non-Dutch researchers could be fully included in the coding process, the Dutch-speaking researchers provided the Dutch transcripts with very extensive English notes (including quotes). Our analysis was an iterative and systematic process during which we went back and forth between interviews in order to refine, elaborate, and integrate the concepts and themes that emerged in relation to our overarching research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 207). To cross-check coding strategies and interpretations of individual researchers, we worked in flexible pairs. This multiple coding enabled us to discuss diverging interpretations and arrive at consensus.

The next part of this report contains our findings in the form of themes and subthemes (Table 3). We arranged them according to different career stages. The first, "Making a Career at UM," introduces the participants as representatives of a first cohort of UM retirees and presents what they valued throughout their careers. We need this vital information to frame our participants' experiences of retiring. The part "Transitioning into Retirement," includes what came up in the interviews especially related to the period before retirement while the section "Post-retirement" focuses on the period thereafter. Since one of the main aims of the report is to help UM develop a retirement policy, we have not only included themes and subthemes that emerged in all interviews but any theme that we believe is relevant in this regard. We have executed a member check to make sure that the identity of the participants is sufficiently protected. Dutch quotes have been translated into English by the Dutch-speaking team members. The report makes use of the singular "they" as a generic third-person singular pronoun in English, which is "endorsed as part of APA Style because it is inclusive of all people and helps writers avoid making assumptions about gender."[8]

Table 3: Themes and subthemes

1. Making a career at UM

1.1. The first retirees of UM

- "The UM veterans," or the first cohort of UM retirees
- The "pioneering" days of UM: An abundance of possibilities and aspirations
- The impact of changing retirement arrangements and retirement ages

1.2. Experiencing meaningfulness throughout an academic career

- Multiple degrees of identification with the institution and the role of academic
- Essential interactions with the academic community and society at large
- Interactions with students: Teaching as leaving a mark

1.3. Unease about academic freedom because of recent developments

- The risk of "being squeezed and slayed" by increased bureaucratization
- The overemphasis on acquisition power and number of publications in performance reviews

2. Transitioning into retirement

2.1. To stay involved or to let go: Balancing engagement while retiring

- Reasons behind retirement decisions
- "Leave it to the new generation": The relation between younger and older academics
- "There's no other you": Facilitating succession

2.2. Minimal support in transitioning and systemic exit problems

- Surprise over the absence of a retirement policy
- Who does HRM serve in the end?
- Bafflement over being "killed administratively"

2.3. Recommendations regarding transitioning into retirement

- Caring is sharing responsibility
- Phasing out to "transform work addiction into something else"
- The importance of a good farewell
- "Taking UM's diversity policy a step further": A life course perspective

[8] See https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/grammar/singular-they, consulted Oct 13, 2020

3. Post-retirement

3.1. Cultural aging and older academics' positioning practices

- Making sense of the connection between chronological age and retirement
- Retiring and the matter of identity
- Being old in the eyes of the other
- Resisting the "Zwitserleven" feeling with its notion of perpetual holiday
- Positioning towards SenUM: An organization for "the very old"

3.2. Rethinking relations and activities after retirement

- The academic community as part of social life
- Finding a new balance at home
- Continuing paid academic activities/employment beyond retirement
- Enjoying new-found freedom

3.3 Recommendations regarding the post-retirement period

- "You deserve that, after you retire, UM cares for you": Staying in the UM family
- Post-retirement contributions based on specific skills and experience
- Email addresses "for everyone, from the person in the mail room to the full professor"
- The matter of the UM card and zero-hour contracts

4. Findings

4.1. Making a career at UM

In this first section of our findings, we want to contextualize our research. As UM is the research site, it is important to highlight what our participants see as its most distinctive characteristics. Many of them have been affiliated with UM for decades, which has positively and negatively shaped their view of the institution over the years and of how UM has organized retirement.

4.1.1. The first retirees of UM

"The UM veterans," or the first cohort of UM retirees

The participants in the focus groups feel that their generation is a distinctive "cohort" (FG6) in the history of UM. Many of them were among the first academics to start at the university or one of its newly created faculties in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Some had already accepted a position at the university in 1974, before institutional plans were even officially approved. This explains why certain interviewees termed themselves "veterans" (FG1, FG5) of the institution. These participants are aware that the coming of age of the university implies that they themselves are getting older. A participant explains that when they began working at the university, "everyone was young and that was the reason why it was a nice and dynamic working environment, because everyone was in the same life stage more or less." This person now observes how "the last few years, I got new colleagues who were younger than my own children," and they said: "oh, so you are a lot older than my parents" (FG1). In other words, although UM is a relatively young university, "we are now getting into an age category where people are retiring" (FG1), as another participant points out.

The "pioneering" days of UM: An abundance of possibilities and aspirations

One of the focus group participants explains that, compared to current academics, "our generation never thought in terms of making a career" (FG1), which was echoed by many other interviewees. Indeed, numerous participants applied for the many positions that were available at the university in the 1970s and 1980s, because it was difficult for them to get a job elsewhere in the Netherlands. Because UM was in its commencing phase, it was the only university that was "not cutting down [budgets]; they were expanding" (FG5) and, as a result, "there used to be new opportunities every year. That is something specific, I think, for this university. There was always this new opportunity that could make life good for you as a person" (FG5). The participants who found an academic position during this time are highly positive of the "very pioneering spirit" (FG4) of the university in its early days. One describes this as a period where "everybody was very close and enthusiastic; there was no history of problems with each other. So, everybody started fresh and the interaction between different disciplines was very intense" (FG6). Comparing UM to other longer-standing institutions at the time, interviewees describe the latter as “very traditional” (FG6), “hierarchical,” and “patriarchal” (FG4). The absence of a hierarchical structure at UM made the academic environment “so stimulating” and “everything [was] possible” (FG6). In sum, interviewees felt that it was “great coming here at that time; [they] really loved it” (FG5).

UM stood out as a pioneering institution in multiple respects. The university was not just developing “new opportunities, developing new research, developing new education” (FG5); it was creating faculties and programs “from scratch” (FG6). A participant describes one of the faculties (FASoS) as a unique project when it was initiated in the 1990s: “[there is] nothing like it probably in the world” (FG6). In addition, another interviewee explains how UM stood out as “less traditional, especially regarding ideas about women and men” (FG4). An interviewee recalls being involved in an initiative that established a research group focused on gender equality in science, as there was “nearly nothing in that field.” This participant further clarifies how it felt as if this group was entering academia “as pioneers” and “idealists”; “being a woman in the early years […] you were more of an exception than a normal phenomenon” (FG4). In other words, for the interviewees, the university stood out as an environment of possibilities and aspirations in its early years: “we had to change the world and we would do it […] we really had that feeling, which was beautiful, I think, to work together on something big” (FG4).

The impact of changing retirement arrangements and retirement ages

Changes in state policies on retirement unavoidably influence soon-to-be retirees’ pension arrangements and, consequently, their feelings about and, more generally, their experience of transitioning into retirement. In 2019, the Dutch government passed the ‘Vitaliteitspact’ or ‘Vitality pact.’ This arrangement enables employees, five years before their retirement age, to start working three or four days per week and earn 70% or 85% respectively of their former salary, while retaining 100% of their pension accrual. Some participants had, however, already opted for a pre-existing mode of phasing out into retirement, prior to the passing of the regulation, and, therefore, could not profit from the new arrangement (in which case they would have had a greater pension accrual). Despite our group of participants’ closeness in terms of chronological age, the variety in retirement arrangements, thus, caused inequalities between individuals.

Another recent change is the fixed retirement age at 66 years and four months in 2020 and 2021, which implies that many of our participants retire several months earlier than expected. The feelings towards this change differ. Some participants, who were looking forward to retiring, do not mind the change: “I heard about the discussion about the fixed age and […], for me, it meant almost eleven months earlier than […] if there was not an agreement. Yeah. And, actually, I liked it.” (FG3). Others are confronted with unforeseen issues resulting from the changing retirement age. One participant, for instance, planned to retire gradually by using the free days they had left to work less in the months before reaching the retirement age. The new fixed retirement age makes it impossible, though, to use the days that this person saved in the past and a clear policy on how to compensate for them is missing. The managers involved at faculty level seemed unwilling to offer a tailored solution to retirees who were confronted with this change: "But like my faculty, sorry to say, but they say, no, no, no, we will not discuss that. Well, it's unfortunate if you have lost your days – or something like that" (FG5). Other interviewees describe their worries about suddenly having to retire up to eleven months earlier than anticipated, not knowing how to prepare practically and emotionally. To conclude, retirement is a significant transition in the lives of our participants that requires careful planning and reflection. Sudden changes in regulations may complicate this process.

4.1.2. Experiencing meaningfulness throughout an academic career

Multiple degrees of identification with the institution and the role of academic

Most participants identify with their academic job at UM and perceive it as a significant part of life. This is in sync with the findings of Cahill et al. (2019) who highlight the importance of such identification for academics. What we have observed, however, is that the nature and extent of the identification may vary greatly among academics. For some, being a member of academic staff in a certain field at UM is central. This manifests itself, for instance, in one participant's striving to keep interfering in the ongoing activities at their workplace and their difficulty in taking some distance from it. Such strong identification is also illustrated by an interviewee's declaration to always have "a soft spot" (FG2) for the university. A sizable group of interviewees identify less with the institution (UM) and more with a rather general idea of being a scholar and with one's academic status. Some participants see their job as a hobby and note that being a scholar entails a certain way of thinking that penetrates other realms of life as well. Others particularly emphasize the bond with colleagues working in the same field, even when territorially dispersed. This is illustrated by one of the interviewees saying, "it was just: yeah, you have a job there [at UM]," while international friendships led to a secure career and "determined [their] life" (FG4).

A small group of participants (with a prevalence of women) made a special effort to balance work and private life throughout their careers, "which is not exactly a theme that is high on the agenda of the university" (FG2). One interviewee states: "I think working as an academic is a kind of an identity thing for me, but it's not a whole thing. I mean… My male colleagues have more [of] this total identification with the job. I didn't" (FG4). From this quote it follows that this person has a weaker identification with the role of academic than others and that this difference may be gendered. Overall, there are multiple ways in which UM and academic work are part of the participants' identities. This, in turn, may have implications for their choices related to a retirement trajectory.

Essential interactions with the academic community and society at large

All the focus group participants are eager to share what has made their careers at UM a source of fulfilment and satisfaction. "The joy of doing research" (FG3) and its spirit of discovery, as well as the value of teaching, dominate the participants' narratives, though to a varying extent. For many, receiving a doctoral degree is a significant and a festive moment, a major milestone, a "rite of passage" (FG4). It is the first important token of recognition that comes up immediately in most conversations with the interviewees; that is *how it all started*. Later in their careers, interviewees went through similar events where their work gained recognition through conversations with colleagues, promotions, and invitations to international events. Those are special occasions that punctuate the careers of the participants and are dear to them, not (only) because these occasions elevated their status but also because they contributed to their sense of self-worth. One interviewee recounts a story of their participation in a research congress abroad. After their highly successful presentation, they felt they “didn’t need a plane” back home because they “could fly” (FG3). It illustrates the degree of their satisfaction with peer exchanges and how this is linked with self-esteem. Several participants share their experience of travelling as a valuable source of “discoveries and encounters” (FG6), both in terms of places and colleagues.

Their contribution to society is also what academics find meaningful about their job. Many participants find it important and rewarding to be socially aware, to be involved in ongoing discussions in society (for instance by “being asked as an expert” (FG3)), and to gear their work towards the public good. This societal engagement is seen as a crucial part of being a scholar. One interviewee argued that “academic work flourishes when part of society” (FG6), implying that not only may society benefit from an academic’s work, but also that academic research should be in conversation with society in order to be able to develop.

Interactions with students: Teaching as leaving a mark

Teaching and interaction with students are valuable and rewarding for the participants in several ways. First, some interviewees find pleasure in everyday engagements. A tutorial that goes particularly well can make the teacher’s day better and stays with them as a small highlight for the rest of their career. Some note that a successful class like that and the “improvisation” (FG2) it sometimes requires from the teacher, inspires them and “triggers” (FG6) their brain, which implies intellectual stimulation – an aspect that is in itself valuable to an intellectual. Additionally, some participants emphasize the value of a student’s interest resonating with the professor’s. A student who is passionate about a topic “even when it’s a priori not an attractive or popular but a technical and obscure one” (FG3), as one interviewee puts it, keeps them happy and motivated.

Second, the interviewees express a great degree of investment (assumingly, of effort, time, intellect, perhaps emotions) in their students that “enables [the latter] to take important steps” (FG2). Many participants note that the process of collaborating with students closely, in contexts such as a PhD trajectory and a Maastricht Research-Based Learning (MaRBLe) project, is a precious part of their job. Therefore, when a (doctoral) student is successful, for instance graduating cum laude, the academics involved in their development feel rewarded.

A third dimension of the value of teaching is an organizational one. Several interviewees have participated in or led the development of teaching design and materials. ‘Innovation’ has been a keyword in this context, which is related to UM as a young university, singling itself out by introducing Problem-Based Learning in the Netherlands. Having made such a major contribution to the identity formation and success of the university is viewed by the participants as a major milestone and achievement. They experience UM as an arena where one's skills and experiences were given free rein to be used and to flourish.

4.1.3. Unease about academic freedom because of recent developments

The risk of "being squeezed and slayed" by increased bureaucratization

Focus group participants voice a general concern over the changing academic culture and work environment at UM. They contrast the current working climate to their past experiences of the university in its early days, as described in section 4.1.1. The proliferation of bureaucracy in all administrative processes is at the core of their discontent, a concern that is shared by many in Dutch academia, as the recent initiative WOinActie shows. Participants feel a loss of autonomy in their professional roles as a result of this increased bureaucratization. One interviewee describes it as follows: "[…] having no say anymore. Almost being slayed for purely bureaucratic reasons. That is very frustrating" (FG2). In a similar vein, others describe top-down decisions, made arbitrarily by their superiors, that curb their autonomy. Indeed, many share stories of promotions, retirement benefits, and performance evaluations that were decided in an apparently arbitrary fashion by superiors. This arbitrariness, masked by seemingly transparent rules and regulations, significantly affects participants' wellbeing and work satisfaction and even leads to employees retiring earlier than the mandatory retirement age because of emotional distress.

This is not unlike the experiences of Spanish faculty members as described by Rosalía Romero-Tena et al. (2019), in which increasing demands combined with feeling undervalued leads to burn-out and early retirement. Upon being asked about positive aspects of retiring, one participant answers: "What I really liked getting rid of was the academic bureaucracy […] every year it became worse. You have to squeeze in, even with your teaching, and you're being squeezed into all kinds of schemes" (FG6). Cahill et al. (2019) report a similar pattern of scholars being happy to retire thanks to the fact that they could stop spending time and energy on tasks that they do not perceive as valuable (of which administrative work is one). Moreover, participants contend that academic freedom has eroded as a result of bureaucratization. One participant says: "I am a real old fashioned liberal in the sense that I want to have a lot of freedom in academia and I don't like all those rules that some people impede on me" (FG6). The loss of autonomy through ad-hoc decisions of superiors in combination with overwhelming bureaucratic obligations, thus, creates an environment in which it is felt that academic freedom is restricted. This development worries interviewees, and they connect it to the high burnout and sickness rates at the university, not just at UM but across the Netherlands. Some participants identify the growth of UM as the root of increased bureaucratization. As one person puts it: "My biggest disappointment is bureaucratization. We have come to be too big. […] Small is beautiful" (FG5). The underlying idea is that smaller institutions are more manageable, which might originate from this interviewee's experience of UM in its earlier days when it was still a much smaller institution.

The overemphasis on acquisition power and number of publications in performance reviews

A strong focus on the quantitative indications of professionalism and success is another perceived negative development at UM related to bureaucratization. Participants argue that the environment's prioritization of the number of publications rather than the quality of output incentivizes competitiveness between colleagues. One participant identifies "academic life [as] far more political than [they] ever expected" (FG3) as one of the main disappointments in their career. Another interviewee adds that they are wondering whether there is any societal relevance to research produced in an environment prioritizing quantity over quality:

> I was a bit surprised how competitive the academic world is and has become. I have worked here since 1983 and it has become more and more competitive. And, in the end, it's all about publications. It doesn't matter what the topic of the publication is. As long as it's published, everybody's happy. (FG3)

Having to apply for grants in order to be able to pursue research is another obstacle connected to participants' work dissatisfaction: "I did not want to care about money. And I'm very disappointed that, at the end of my career, we are continuously under pressure to find sources and get money" (FG3). As such, interviewees do not feel valued for their expertise but rather for "bringing money in the house" (FG4) in the form of research grants. In addition, they fear that the pursuit of grant money in order to be able to conduct research projects risks jeopardizing academic freedom: "And, so, part of the academic context [i.e., independence] has disappeared. As an employer, the government determines your research field" (FG5). The same participant also voices their disappointment over the fact that this loss of academic freedom is not sufficiently questioned and debated at UM. Some interviewees feel that there is a lack of support for research at the university, which is in surprising contrast with the focus on research output in performance reviews.

While acquisition power and publication output are prioritized, teaching requirements fill up a large part of scholars' schedules: "It's imbalanced. The main career focus is research, but the reality is completely different" (FG6). Participants criticize the undervaluation of teaching, as this quote illustrates: "It's like the research aspects that are much more valued than education, whereas they [educational aspects] should be [valued]. And they are an important landmark for me personally" (FG5). Especially in the context of UM as internationally renowned for PBL, participants find it odd that teaching is not valued more.

Moreover, the high overall work pressure creates an environment of individualization and isolation. One participant recalls that, in the past, one used to "be devoted to community. And, then, bureaucratization comes in and you get all kinds of isolations and interests" (FG5). Scholars work on their own projects at the expense of cooperation between colleagues. Also, interviewees suggest that the high work pressure is inhibiting the creation of social bonds. One participant puts it as follows: "Teaching pressure that grew and grew over time, and so that people didn't want to have lunch together because they want to do something themselves and […] So the work pressure played a large role in avoiding social connections" (FG4). The focus on the amount of publications also means that when asked to take on a community-related administrative task, scholars are reluctant to do so, as they would miss out on time that they could spend on research.

In sum, it appears that the bureaucratization at UM affects not just the quality of research and teaching (and thereby the quality of the education that students receive) but also the wellbeing of employees (not just the ones who are close to retiring).

4.2. Transitioning into retirement

The current section focuses on the interviewees' differing attitudes towards retirement. These differences consequently lead to different considerations vis-à-vis retirement or to a continued engagement with UM. The interviewees have distinct views on what it means to be an academic and what their career and their succession means to them. Here, we foreground their opinions on how UM has currently organized its retirement policy and how the latter could be improved in view of the heterogeneity of retiring academics.

4.2.1. To stay involved or to let go: Balancing engagement while retiring

Reasons behind retirement decisions

Throughout the focus group interviews, it became apparent that factors related to both the personal and professional life of interviewees influenced their contemplation of retirement, possibly leading up to the decision to retire early. For some, retiring "came sort of natural," when grandchildren were born (FG3). In a few cases, participants' spouses, relatives, or friends encouraged them to stop working. Cahill et al. (2019) explicate a potentially gendered dimension of such a decision: they report that women academics are more likely to decide to retire (earlier) to spend more time with their partners. Our findings do not necessarily suggest a similar dynamic. Although women discussed the relational aspects of decision-making regarding retirement more than men in our focus groups, a few of them feel strongly about the need for women to be financially independent.

Occasionally, interviewees came to relativize the importance of work due to painful life events, such as a decline in one's own physical or mental health or a sudden illness of a loved one: "There is more in life than just working. And, I still want to do a lot of things, I really do" (FG1). A lack of financial means, however, makes it more difficult to retire early. In addition, several participants indicate that the decision to stop working relates to changes in their work environment. Many have worked at UM for a great number of years, so they have actively experienced changes resulting from decisions taken at the level of the faculty or institution. One interviewee expresses their disappointment over seeing the university repeating past mistakes: "And, you know […] how things went wrong […] And, then, I think it is time to [retire], because we are the ones who will notice that this will be going in the wrong direction" (FG5). In some cases, participants feel they were wrongfully pushed out and positioned as "the older employee who is unable or unwilling to keep up with new developments" (FG1). In other words, while the choice to retire earlier is a voluntary one, some participants choose it because of important personal life events or because of a lack of feeling at home in a changing university environment.

"Leave it to the new generation": The relation between younger and older academics

In the focus group interviews, different opinions came to the fore regarding the dynamics between younger and older academics on the work floor. Participants' ideas about the appropriate degree of involvement of older people as well as the kinds of roles they could fulfill vary. One of the interviewees raises the issue of limited resources and who should benefit from them. In their view, wanting to "make space for younger people" (FG2) not only involves leaving opportunities open to new generations but also, literally, freeing up expensive office space. Most participants agree that there is a given point in time when older people "should not take the lead anymore" (FG3) and that "the new generation should set the agenda" (FG4). Also, the following statement from one interviewee is illustrative: "I think, if you are retired, you've had your opportunities and your time is over. And, of course, you can think and help. But leave it to the new generation" (FG3). Cahill et al.'s meta-ethnography demonstrates the prevalence of such ideas among retirees as well. Some of our participants relate this sentiment to the time when they were young and felt that older colleagues occupied space meant for younger people. They witnessed how many people grew miserable towards the end of their career: "they are stuck, they are no longer active, but they continue and, thereby, they unintentionally – truly unintentionally – do a lot of harm" (FG2).

At the same time, interviewees recognize that older academics still have a lot to offer. This is, partly, in dissonance with the findings of Cahill et al. (2019). They observe that, as a potential consequence of internalized negative age stereotypes, senior academics see urgency in making space for junior faculty and make little reference to their own wisdom and experience as a specific valuable contribution. Our participants realize that the university should take care not to push older academics out and, in doing so, lose valuable skills, knowledge, and experience. A person explains how one of their retired colleagues "had really good ideas […] still had good involvement and engagement with the projects" but, unfortunately, faced "an unfriendly attitude of 'we don't want to see you here again'" (FG4). Participants feel that older academics can reflect on and efficiently take care of issues in ways that younger generations will benefit from. Most agree that there are specific tasks that (nearly) retired academics could fulfil, like taking on specialized and/or advisory roles. In doing so, they would not put the opportunities for younger generations in jeopardy and would support and facilitate the latter instead. This is a topic that we will return to in Section 4.3.3.

"There's no other you": Facilitating succession

The legacy that retiring academics leave behind is also related to the relationship between younger and older academics. Throughout the focus group interviews, participants tell different stories about the ways in which their succession was arranged. Some participants explain how their "dream scenario" (FG1) came true, as they were able to work side by side with their successor for a period in which they were able to transfer knowledge and responsibilities. Others, however, have different experiences. An interviewee explains that nobody in their research group was able to take on any additional research to arrange continuity for their scholarship: "they had too many tasks and they had to focus on the thing that the professor wants" (FG4). On the one hand, participants understand that "time changes and so does the faculty," which makes it necessary to "be able to let go" (FG1) and not to govern "from beyond the grave" (FG2). On the other hand, interviewees express their frustration over the fact that their work might "thoughtlessly" disappear as a result of a lack of possibilities for transfer

(FG2). Cahill et al. call this a “threat to the continuation of the academic work” (2019, p. e190). A participant emphasizes that:

> there should be more thorough thinking within departments. You should start recruiting in time. Think about whether you are willing to pay double salaries so that two people are temporarily working in the same positions and tasks get transferred properly. (FG1)

Another interviewee describes the difference between transferring official tasks and “invisible tasks,” such as networking and coaching (FG1). When a person who takes on many of the latter retires, these tasks are left unattended. They take with them their embodied “tacit knowledge” – after all, “there’s only one you” and “a part of it [your work] you take it with you, because it’s very personal” (FG5) – and “there are no good transfer mechanisms developed for this” (FG1). It seems that arranging continuity in teaching is easier than in research. Still, the university does not always seem to be considerate about the educational legacy of retiring academics, in the opinion of some interviewees. Instances of abandonment of pedagogical achievements come up on several occasions in the focus group interviews.

A participant who fulfils the role of head of department explains that overall it might be hard to discuss succession as “there seems to be some kind of taboo [on retirement]” and that “people don’t want to talk about it” (FG5). In other words, organizing people’s succession is about striking a delicate balance between responsibilities and desires of the individual and of the organization.

4.2.2. Minimal support in transitioning and systemic exit problems

Surprise over the absence of a retirement policy

Each time we asked focus group members how UM facilitates the transition into retirement, the answer came down to ‘not at all.’ The participants recognize that UM has outsourced its information about and preparation of retirement to the pension fund ABP. Although the vast majority say that they were pleased with the ABP meetings themselves, they also say that there is little coordination between HRM at UM and ABP. Some participants suggest that HR managers have too little knowledge about and expertise in the possible scenarios that one can opt for when transitioning into retirement. These scenarios include, for instance, different types of part-time constructions, how holiday reserves can be spent, and what the implications are when an employee lives in Belgium or in Germany – the latter will become more urgent because the academic staff at UM is becoming more and more diverse as UM has a geographical location that attracts cross-border employees. Several interviewees believe that a more centralized HRM department, as there used to be in the past, could offer better support:

> It used to be that there was a human resources department that was slightly above all faculties, you could go there. It was then discontinued, and people were seconded to the faculties. And that has made them much less independent. And what happened is – at least what happened to me is – that such a person absolutely did not listen to me, but just listened to my boss and just went along and I had nowhere else to go. (FG1)

Better support is here presented as a more objective and neutral approach. Many interviewees point out that employees are not treated equally because a clear retirement policy or specific guidelines at UM or faculty level are lacking, cf. "I was negatively surprised that there wasn't any policy at all. There even wasn't an exit talk, there was no official ending" (FG5). What is negotiable seems to largely depend on one's own information channels and personal connections and how close one is to the center of power. Yet, people discover discrepancies when talking about and comparing arrangements, which causes animosity. Consequently, instead of ad hoc, subjective, and arbitrary approaches, the interviewees express a need for a consistent, transparent, and flexible policy that strikes the right balance between an overarching faculty/UM policy and a person-tailored approach. Developing such policy should become a priority for UM.

Who does HRM serve in the end?

Several participants felt not heard or taken seriously by HR staff at the end of their careers. They experienced it as painful and disappointing how professional problems quickly were turned into personal failures which the employee is then ultimately held accountable for. One interviewee recalls how they felt positioned as no longer up to the task (FG1) when reintegrating after an accident. This person would have preferred a proper dialogue on how they could spend the final years of their employment in a meaningful way instead of feeling almost forced into early retirement. It is remarkable that several participants bring up the name of late company doctor Ton van Attekum. They describe him as the epitome of a person who cared for the UM employees in contrast to how the role of HRM and medical support on university and faculty level is understood nowadays. Often, the letter that an employee receives about the nearing of the pension age was mentioned as an illustration of indifference:

> And the university, that was just a letter, I got a letter last February, March, or something. And, then, another letter somewhere in September. Almost identical letters, that you have to pay attention to the ABP and that you should arrange your affairs. And, for the rest, there is a sentence, "thank you for your contribution." That's actually all. […] If that is how it goes everywhere, that is pretty bad frankly. (FG2)

Many participants are quite negative about HRM that they describe as "it's so bad, it's so nothing" (FG 4) amongst other things. Only one participant made an attempt to defend HRM by pointing to the decreased size of the HR departments over the years while their assignments and responsibilities have expanded. Tenure track trajectories, the internationalization of staff, and the call for transparency in appraisals and promotions cause HR managers to be overburdened. The consensus seems to be, though, that this cannot be an explanation or excuse for the perceived lack of care and empathy, which is said to result directly, albeit not only, from processes of bureaucratization.

Bafflement over being "killed administratively"

The interviewees are less than pleased with the fact that all access to university resources stops on the first day of retirement without notification. If you have not pro-actively negotiated to keep an e-mail address and UM card, you will discover that, from one day to another, "you're killed administratively" (FG5), as one participant formulates it poignantly. This specifically applies to academic staff at UD or UHD level for whom it is far more difficult than for full professors to get a zero-hour contract and associated benefits. People do not understand the rationale behind the radical administrative disappearance that they are faced with:

> Your list of publications is removed from the university's website. And you're totally non-existent. […] It is gone. And, of course, this is just silly, once you start thinking about this. It is so totally contrary to what the university wants. Why do they always force you to report on your scientific activities – preferably before you've even executed them? And, then, once you retire, it is totally the other way around. So, I'd say, at least on a formal level, on an administrative level, you could stay. You should. You should remain a part of the university. By default. (FG5)

A sceptic reader of this report may wonder whether our sample is representative of all UM academics when it comes to this particular sentiment. Although some participants did, indeed, proclaim that the opportunity to finally be able to discuss exit problems was one of the reasons they signed up for participation in the project, their contributions transcend personal anecdotes. They referred to many cases other than their own to identify and explain what they consider to be a systemic problem. A pressing need is felt for the university to acknowledge the existence and needs of its retirees.

4.2.3. Recommendations regarding transitioning into retirement

Caring is sharing responsibility

Many participants in the focus group interviews feel that they are solely responsible for the information gathering around and organization of their transition into retirement and wish UM would show a more proactive stance. Initiative and a more active involvement on the part of the employer would make up for the lack of care (thoughtlessness) and indifference that employees now experience. As one participant said:

> Care is what you miss from the organization regarding how you are going to do this and how you want to do it and why you do it in a certain way and could you do it another way instead of it all being individualized like, um, you have to do it all by yourself, it is up to you. (FG1)

Caring implies sharing responsibility over how to shape the final years of one's career. The interviewees came up with many concrete ideas of what sharing responsibility could look like.

They suggested the yearly appraisal interview could systematically reflect on how to transition into retirement and how to develop an exit strategy, including a discussion of the final goodbye. From the focus group interviews it follows that the participants value an ongoing dialogue with the people who supervise their performance and employment (head of department, HR advisor, etc.) as well as consistency in approach (i.e., no random and ad-hoc decision making that creates asymmetries between employees). Some people know from friends or family members that other larger corporations, such as Philips or DSM, organize courses for future retirees. These courses are not only offered to the employees themselves but to the partners as well. They often take place at locations like Kasteel Vaalsbroek and underline the importance of the life event that the participants are dealing with. Not everyone feels the need to attend such courses, but some think they may be fun and would like UM to start something similar.

Phasing out to "transform work addiction into something else"

Numerous interviewees would advise other people to gradually stop working in a process of what they call "phasing out," which Cahill et al (2019, p. 15) describe as "gradual disengagement." This comprises measures such as no longer working at the weekend or reducing working hours and days to "transform work addiction into something else," as one interviewee put it quasi-ironically. There are several reasons why phasing out is presented as the best way to end one's career. For some, it helps them to plan a sustainable continuation of some of their tasks and responsibilities (e.g., preparing a successor). Others indicate that it helps one find closure now that a long-term commitment is coming to an end. Also, already figuring out what other activities could be rewarding prevents people from ending up in a "dark place" (FG1) once retired. A new work pace with less pressure because of lower expectations and less urgent deadlines are other advantages of winding down. The latter may result in a higher consciousness of being in the world, as the following quote from a participant illustrates:

> Once I was early for an appointment and it was very windy and a tree was swinging back and forth, which totally fascinated me like, wow, it's not breaking. And, then, I thought, I'm actually really fortunate to be looking at that tree and, before, I would never have allowed myself the time to look at the tree, you see. So, it allows for a deeper experience. (FG2)

A few interviewees suggest that opting for part-time employment at the end of their careers enabled them to leave with dignity. They could hold their head high and were not forced out in unpleasant ways by others. It is, however, the case that gradually slowing down is not as self-evident and pleasant for everyone as it may sound. A participant confesses that he sought help from a coach to find meaningfulness again in his new professional identity as a part-timer:

> I entered retirement in a period where I have worked, uh, I think 33 years at, uh, at the faculty. There wasn't a day that I did not enjoy going to work. Always enjoyed it. And for the first time, I really... It was difficult. It's not a... I'm not a depressed person. Not at all. Privately and physically, I'm in very good shape. But for the first time, I just had

> nothing to go to, no challenge. I asked myself 'What have I done?' So, I looked for a coach and I found a coach who helped me to overcome this period. (FG3)

This example illustrates that a mutually agreed upon exit strategy may include the option of consulting a coach to find a sounding board separate from colleagues, family members, and friends.

The importance of a good farewell

The interviewees agree that the moment of saying one's final goodbye is an important transitioning ritual. One participant calls it "the icing on the cake" (FG3) and another one points out that lows in a career wear off or can be compensated for by new developments, but an inadequate exit can never be made up for because the employee is gone forever (FG1). As such, it matters a great deal how the final departure is organized. There is great discrepancy between full professors and other academic staff. The first are expected to give a valedictory speech, often combined with a symposium and reception, although several full professors that we interviewed preferred and arranged a more informal farewell. Other academics sometimes disappear without marking the moment properly, as there seems to be no common script for their farewell. This implies that – again – the final goodbye depends on one's own initiative or on the goodwill of an HR advisor, head of department, or well-meaning colleague. There are also financial implications. Full professors often have larger personal budgets that can be spent on their farewell in addition to funds from the faculty and/or the department. There are no clear guidelines or agreements on, for instance, how much a department should put aside to contribute to a satisfactory goodbye of academic staff. All interviewees agree that prospect retirees should be consulted about their farewell well in advance by the head of department or another person in a leading position who can then decide how to arrange it and who should take it on.

"Taking UM's diversity policy a step further": A life course perspective

One of the focus group interviews recommended that "UM should take its diversity policy one step further" (FG1) by considering age as a crucial difference comparable to other identity markers such as gender. Instead of just focusing on how to improve the transitioning into retirement, UM could develop a life course perspective recognizing that people's priorities and ambitions change over the years for all kinds of external (e.g., illness of a loved one, raising children) and internal reasons (e.g., changing interests leading up to developing new projects/programs while leaving others behind). As one interviewee puts it:

> Uhm, look, you don't die when you retire, when you stop working. And so, it also has to do with all kinds of phases […] what place does your work have in your life, how do you cope with work throughout the different stages of your career and the different stages of your life. As such, it is not just a business or management related issue that needs to be discussed but much more of, yes, life development. (FG2)

Although, in other focus groups, this point of view was not necessarily recognized as a call for a life course perspective, they did express similar sentiments. As one interviewee says, for instance, “Various things happen to people in their lives that they did not plan that require different considerations and a different balance” (FG2). In practical terms, a life course perspective could entail that an employee takes stock every five to seven years to reflect on expertise, skills, and tasks and to discuss expectations, desires, and plans. It would give them the opportunity to make career adjustments when necessary, according to their own priorities and circumstances. Postponing this exercise until the final years of a career, as suggested earlier, exclusively emphasizes the final stage of a career. This may not be the most rewarding approach for all parties involved given that change is inherent to lives and careers.

4.3. Post-retirement

In this final section of our findings, we focus on how our participants make sense of being retired and concurrent changes in their social status and daily life. We highlight some of the (negative) stereotypes around retired academics and retired people more generally and how interviewees are positioned and position themselves in relation to these. In addition, we highlight ideal-type connections with UM – both social and administrative – that interviewees have sketched throughout the focus group interviews.

4.3.1. Cultural aging and older academics' positioning practices

Making sense of the connection between chronological age and retirement

Several ideas concerning chronological age (i.e., the years that you have lived) and retirement surfaced within the focus group interviews. There is a tension between the willingness to work for as long as possible (beyond the state-regulated retirement age which is chronologically fixed) and general age-related fears and worries. Even though not all participants agree that the mandatory retirement age is a negative feature of the Dutch labor regulations, some express their discontent with it. One participant articulates their frustration in the following way: "I don't see why I would stop just because there is some legal decision that at 66 years and four months you lose your contract" (FG3). This quote conveys the understanding that age is just a number in relation to intellectual labor; as long as one is capable, one should be allowed to continue working. As Cahill et al. (2019) point out, the wish to continue working beyond retirement results from an enjoyment and fulfillment that these academics experience in connection to their work. This idea may, furthermore, be closely entwined with a strong identification with one's academic identity and, for some but not all participants, with the institution. Differing attitudes towards the mandatory retirement as related to chronological age once again highlight the necessity of a tailored approach for each retiree.

Retiring and the matter of identity

We have previously discussed the multiple ways in which academics identify with UM and their job under Section 4.1.2. Leaving the workplace in retirement leads to changes in one's identity. The potential intensity of such transformation and its implications are reported by Cahill et al. (2019) as well. In our study, some interviewees feel that they have lost or will lose a part of their identity when retiring: "You have to realize that once you don't work anymore, that you lose a part of your societal role, or the way you see yourself" (FG1). This interviewee explains that accepting the loss of their professional role was like a "mourning process" (FG1). Another participant adds that, even before retirement, they felt that "now I really belong to the elderly and not to the 'working' class" (FG1). Upon retiring, this participant lost a sense of belonging to a certain high-status societal group and became part of another group with less stature in their view.

Other participants view this differently and did not experience difficulties in (re)defining their identity after retiring. They believe that people often care too much about academic titles and the social status that comes along with an academic profession. They want to distance themselves from this prioritization of titles and rank: "If there is going to be an advertisement [announcement] when I'm dead, no professor and no doctor or M.D., medical doctor. Just the name. That's enough" (FG3). Some interviewees articulate explicitly that their titles or their professional roles are not an important part of their identity: "It's not my identity. There's quite a few of my friends [who] have no clue what I do" (FG3). As such, it is not the status coming with an academic position that informs their identities, but rather their fields of study and their own contributions to these fields. One participant puts it: "I was really scared to lose my identity when I retired. And that turned out to be not a problem at all […] No. I would like to be remembered as someone who really meant something in [my] field of [expertise]" (FG3). This participant summarizes what other interviewees have expressed in similarly poignant ways. They do not feel that they have lost a part of their identity upon retiring. They would rather be remembered for their scholarly contributions and it is this devotion to their field that they identify with.

Several participants are puzzled by the idea that there is a difference in retirement experiences of academic versus non-academic staff at the university. One interviewee points out: "When a secretary or a professor worked in a place for 40 years, they both had a lot of impact; a secretary maybe even more than a professor who was only there for five years" (FG1). It follows that one's significance in the workplace does not depend on one's position in the hierarchy. Rather, it is the contribution that matters. Given that any member of staff, both support and academic, can be heavily invested in their job, it would be unfounded to assume that arranging retirement and adjusting one's mindset and life to it will be easier for support staff at large.

Being old in the eyes of the other

The participants express awareness of some stereotypes associated with older people and, to a lesser extent, with retired academics. While they have barely encountered overt negative attitudes related to their age, they are reflexive about how others (their younger colleagues especially) may view them. Several interviewees notice that they may be perceived as a "grey plague" and looked down upon (FG6). For some of the most self-conscious interviewees, this results in refraining from frequenting their former workplace. Some recall that, in their college days, they looked up to their professors who functioned as real intellectual "heroes" (FG6). This is not how they feel current students approach them. Others remember that, at the beginning of their careers, they felt frustration when older colleagues did not want to relinquish or pass on their positions. As one interviewee expresses it: "You feel like – come on" (FG4)! These past experiences may color how participants believe that they are looked at on the work floor now and become a trigger for their decision to retire. Although the interviewees suggested that older employees are seen as more rigid in their approaches to work, they agree that this is not necessarily the case. General ideas about what it means to be older are rather negative, and the interviewees do not find it pleasant to be perceived as a retired colleague. This finding is supported by Cahill et al. (2019) who report the prevalence of ageist attitudes in academic environments, also amongst older employees themselves. However, in their retirement trajectories, most participants have reached the point where they have come to terms with this. As one interviewee says: “you learn to live with that” (FG6).

Resisting the “Zwitserleven” feeling with its notion of perpetual holiday

The focus group participants extensively discussed the equation of retirement with “compulsory” leisure in their conversation about stereotypes related to retirees. A view of retirement as the time to devote oneself to leisure is widespread according to the participants. The children of one interviewee, for instance, joke that they can watch TV all day now that they no longer have to work. Another participant notes that people tend to think of retirees as persons who are affluent and use their money and spare time to travel the world. These “Zwitserleven” (FG6) imaginaries do not resonate with most participants – some even despise them. One interviewee observes that, in the media, “you see [older] people with stupid smiles on their faces” as a result of “empty enjoyment” that offers “no fulfilment” (FG6). They are convinced that only productivity (i.e., generating social, economic, or cultural value) can offer a deeper sense of satisfaction. Those more moderate in their view about this subject also feel uncomfortable with the stereotype of the retiree who indulges in a third age lifestyle of consumption and perpetual holiday (cf. compulsory everlasting youthfulness as one part of the Janus face, mentioned in the introduction). The participants point out that, paradoxically, older people are both encouraged and discouraged to engage in productive activities. Some feel a certain pressure to turn towards volunteering, which they do not fully appreciate, as they opted for other occupations. Some participants eloquently explained the connotations volunteering has for them and their refusal to take on tasks and responsibilities similar to their academic work without getting paid. Furthermore, the full professor who refuses to retire is a stereotype that emerged in the focus group interviews to illustrate what it means to be overly attached to the idea of making oneself useful and valued through intellectual work. The connotation of this type is not a positive one since an older person’s fixation with the job is said to jeopardize access to positions for younger colleagues. There is also a risk that these people reproduce knowledge that is obsolete. To sum up, it is all about striking a balance between engagement and disengagement after retirement.

Positioning towards SenUM: An organization for “the very old”

In relation to SenUM and the activities it organizes for UM retirees, the participants express cautious interest. Several have never heard of the organization and some are rather skeptical of its function. One interviewee formulates it as follows: “SenUM [is] an excuse for UM not to develop a policy on retirement. Because SenUM exists, the university can refer to it to show care of retirees” (FG5). Several participants believe support staff are more interested in SenUM activities than faculty are. Most retired academics think that they might perhaps join in the future. This helps them to delineate their identity in relation to age: the time has not yet come to be part of this organization. Several interviewees describe SenUM members as older than themselves and already living with vulnerabilities that tend to come with aging, such as the inability to drive because of weaker eyesight. They would not enjoy what they perceive as typical SenUM excursions like a bus trip to Roermond. In differentiating and distancing themselves from the SenUM population, these participants create a hierarchy between the younger old and "very old" people (FG4). One interviewee succinctly describes this positioning as the "resistance to grow older" (FG4). Or, as another participant puts it: "I don't like to be a senior... It's how I'm labelled now. I'm not ready for that" (FG3). They deem the name SenUM rather unappealing since it can be read as "senile" UM instead of "senior" UM (FG4). Therefore, they think a different name could avoid these negative connotations and increase the visibility of SenUM. Yet, negative statements about SenUM are often immediately countered by expressions such as "but it's less bad than I thought." Thus, exchanges with SenUM members seem to help certain participants to reconcile themselves to the fact that they are retired and become older themselves, which in itself is not a negative experience.

4.3.2. Rethinking relations and activities after retirement

The academic community as part of social life

For a number of participants, social contacts with colleagues are an essential part of their social lives, as already mentioned in Section 4.1.2. Many experience the intellectual stimulation and exchange with peers at the university as positive aspects of their profession: "In the end, it's the interesting life, it's the discussion with colleagues who are equally interested [...]" (FG6). Retirement brings about changes in this particular social fabric. Scholars who are set to retire soon anticipate that they will have to put more energy into keeping up their social contacts with peers in the future. People that already retired explain that they indeed miss the effortless social contacts that they had while working at the university. Although some make a conscious effort to frequently meet with colleagues, "something negative is that you run less into people whom you would have a casual conversation with" (FG1).

For certain participants, retirement causes anxiety about social isolation. Similar to what Cahill et al. (2019) report, they fear losing their contacts with students and younger people more generally. One interviewee, who lives remotely from Maastricht, is concerned they will become lonely. The participant fears that meeting friends will become cumbersome, as most of their social life takes place around Maastricht, meaning they or their friends will have to begin to travel in order to meet. In contrast, other interviewees experienced academic life itself as lonely: "Individuals doing their own thing and there was no feeling of community" (FG5). Some did not feel they were part of the academic community at UM because they had closer bonds with colleagues within the same field but at different universities or – in a rare case – because they had not been there long, before retiring.

As scholars are differently embedded into the UM community, the changes in relationships after retirement are divergent. While some crave deeper and more frequent contact with former colleagues and students, as well as invitations to events such as the Dies Natalis or the opening of the academic year, others do not wish to keep up to date nor attend events of this kind.

Finding a new balance at home

Participants who live in a shared household appreciate that retirement enables them to spend more time with their partners. One person says:

> I really enjoy being able to do more things together with my partner […] I always had to do stuff in the weekends. Now, when the weather is nice, I can just say: well, let's go for a walk. (FG1)

Some participants started regularly going to the gym with their partners, while others enjoy going on holidays more frequently and for a longer period of time (partly enacting the Zwitserleven idyll). However, interviewees also point out that there is a transition period during which they had to find a new balance in their home arrangement. In some cases, partners had already retired, which implies that interviewees had to find ways in which they would not disrupt their partner's habits too much now that they were at home too. One person describes this dynamic in the following way:

> My partner had already been at home, for ten years, so [they] really had to get used to me being at home full-time all of a sudden and not being away all day. We had to find a mode for that. Also, because I'm very much a 'do-er.' So, in the morning, while having coffee, I would say: well, what's on the program for today? Then [they] would say: oh, please (laughing). (FG1)

Advice from their already-retired partner helped one participant to make the decision to phase out of work rather than fully retire at once. In other cases, interviewees retired before their partners. One person said that, because of the impact of the transition, they are happy that they did not go through the process of retirement at the same time as their partner did, even though they do not rule out that their partner would now decide to retire earlier (FG1).

There is a gendered dimension to the findings around the relationships of female scholars. Women academics are more prone to speak about the advantages that retirement brings in relation to their partners and families, and often mention their children and grandchildren. Many express that, throughout their careers, they were struggling to maintain a work-life balance. While work-life balance also concerns male scholars, it is brought up more by women, as they tend to have more obligations around the household and family. This is also illustrated by the findings in Section 4.1.2., as men tend to identify more with their professional roles than women. Women, thus, generally seem to attribute a higher importance to their relationships with partners and family than men do in their retirement decisions, and this is in line with the findings described by Cahill et al. (2019).

Continuing paid academic activities/employment beyond retirement

A number of the retired scholars, especially academics who combine a position at UM with another profession, decide to stay in one of their employments, although at reduced hours.

Resonating with the description of the "opportunists," proposed by Cahill et al. (2019), these scholars discard the tasks of their professional lives that they enjoy less and continue enjoyable activities. One participant explains that they opted to keep working in their function as medical doctor in private practice for 12 hours per week and that they very much enjoy this decision. Without the work pressure formerly present, the interviewee feels that they experience life in a more positive way. Another participant chose to keep working for 12 hours a week as a scholar after retiring early in their other function. Similarly, another retiree plans to keep getting hired to write papers together with co-authors; their official retirement date would not refrain them from pursuing this joint activity. They point out that "it's really a natural feeling" to keep collaborating this way (FG3). One participant explains that they were offered a part-time appointment by UM when they retired because the department did not have the necessary spare capacity or the resources to hire an instant replacement. Several retirees would initially like to keep contributing in functions in which they feel needed but they stop short of offering their help without being asked. As a result of a rather negative experience with university administration while retiring, one interviewee describes that they felt unwelcome and an impostor, which made them distance themselves more and more. Also, others testify to holding back because they do not want to offer their help when it is not welcome: "Sometimes, I hear that there is a shortage of people to supervise theses. But, then, I think, I'm not going to offer myself" (FG1). Another participant adds: "I find it bizarre that if you want to continue to work, it's like asking for a favor. Whereas, in fact, you are contributing to the balances of all sorts of financial mechanisms" (FG3). This quote illustrates that older academics oppose the idea of being a burden – also in economic terms.

Enjoying new-found freedom

Another approach to retirement adopted by interviewees is to refrain from taking on too many obligations and to dedicate more time to self-care and to explore new things. These scholars are what Cahill et al. (2019) have denominated "avoiders," as they do not engage in any continued professional activities within academia. Without the work pressure and the full schedules of their previous lives, retirees experience the world differently. This is illustrated, for instance, by a change in sleeping pattern:

> I do notice that, indeed, as you said, it is really calming. For the first few months, I barely slept. I used to still set the alarm but, now, I don't do that anymore either. I used to go to bed differently. I used to always go to bed with questions on my mind. (FG1)

Especially female academics mention that they take more time for themselves and enjoy having less obligations, also at home:

> But, indeed, as you said, I don't *want* anything anymore. No obligations. Because at home I have always *had* to do a lot. And, I also realize, I *don't have* to do anything anymore. For anybody. That was a strange realization. That I didn't have to do anything anymore. (FG1)

One participant mentions that they do not watch time as closely as before. Having worked hard their entire lives, taking care of themselves and exploring new things without external pressure and internal obligation seems luxurious to the participants. One interviewee recounts their experience of taking a course and not enjoying it. They quit without guilt or a sense of failure, which felt liberating. For others, however, life-long learning is one of the main activities that they take very seriously. While many study at home at their own leisure, some even decide to follow an educational program (a bachelor or master, for instance) at another UM faculty. One participant says that, when reading, "you need a theme, because otherwise you are overwhelmed with all the possibilities and, then, it can drain rather than boost your energy" (FG1). Some find a new sense of purpose in volunteering (at their own initiative and pace) or joining organizations or clubs. Others, however, explain that they no longer feel the need or wish to learn new things. Contrary to what they anticipated, they enjoy the feeling of boredom and of living in the moment.

4.3.3. Recommendations regarding the post-retirement period

"You deserve that, after you retire, UM cares for you": Staying in the UM family

The idea of care surfaces again in the context of post-retirement affiliations with the university (cf. Subsection 4.2.4.). The participants of one focus group interview pose the following rhetorical question: "should the love be one-sided" (FG2)? Taking a broad, career-long perspective, these interviewees conceptualize the way in which UM has treated them, particularly beyond retirement, as unrequited love. This applies more to academics at the UD- and UHD-level than to full professors, even though some of the latter also had to invest substantially in negotiating and renegotiating their post-retirement facilities. Many participants view their post-retirement period as an extension of the relationship between the employer and employees and not its end. They believe that the university has to care for its retirees as a return for all the efforts and attention that the former employees invested in the university throughout their career. As such, they seek a "symmetrical" (FG2) relationship with the university both before and beyond retirement. Articulating this idea in a familial rather than a transactional way helps to understand how some participants internally frame their relationship with the university. This thought is expressed most eloquently in the following way:

> University and faculty are family: it includes children, adults, elderly, and sick persons. But, in a family, you care for each other. And, so, I think you deserve that, after you retire, UM cares for you. (FG2)

UM should, in the participants' opinion, be more proactive in building this (caring) relationship with its retirees and invest more in showing how they care for their employees, also post-retirement. They had concrete suggestions as how to do this more successfully, as the next paragraphs show.

Post-retirement contributions based on specific skills and experience

The interviewees highlight the divergent need for choice in arranging their post-retirement life in connection to UM and in deciding how much they would still like to be involved and in what form. One participant claims that "being a researcher is a way of life," (FG1) which does not allow for a quick and easy readjustment of the latter, if there is any willingness to do so at all. The participants realize that, without a proper institutional framework, it is challenging to make a satisfying arrangement for their post-retirement life. Together, the interviewees come up with ideas about their possible involvement in the activities carried out at UM after retirement. It matters a great deal to them that the expertise of each retiree is known to the university and can be built on. Some recommend that UM builds a database listing the retirees who are willing to offer their services to the university. This suggestion is strikingly similar to the blueprint for a UM Expertise Zone, a platform for exchange between retired UM staff and current staff and students (see literature overview Section 2.3.) that would enable intergenerational learning.

Our participants identify specific experiences that the university could still build on in their post-retirement: management experience, academic experience, and mentoring and mediation experience. While they are aware that their knowledge of their field might become outdated and that "the new generation should set the agenda" (FG4), as already cited above (Subsection 4.2.1.), their insights into management issues at the university and knowledge that transcends disciplinary boundaries could be complementary and prove useful. These are the areas where experience that has been accumulated over the years is particularly relevant and helpful. Returning to the notion of a life course perspective, some participants note that retirees could help relieve some employment burdens of academic staff in their mid-career, who are potentially building a family. This could take the form of mentoring younger colleagues or even taking up some of their responsibilities temporarily. Additionally, the authority and the practical "wisdom" (FG4) of the retirees can be successfully engaged in such roles as confidential advisor or conflict mediator. In the phrase of a participant, "an old sock" (FG2), or a person with extensive experience and networks as well as authority, is particularly suitable for this task.

It is clear, then, that the interviewees envisage space for themselves within the university beyond retirement. The initiative, however, should primarily come from the university, as the participants are careful not to overstay their welcome. They strongly emphasize that their continued presence at the university after retirement can be problematic and harmful to the work environment and to the legacy and the image of the retiree.

Email addresses "for everyone, from the person in the mail room to the full professor"

Prolongation of their email addresses is one way to acknowledge the existence of retirees as part of an academic community. The interviewees are very vocal in explaining its importance. The email address is metaphorically described as "one's passport to the academic environment" (FG2). It is how their peers across the globe can reach them and it also is an archive that maps all the important contacts and exchanges over the years:

> All my international colleagues know my email address, [...], of course, I can change it, but I have about 200,000 emails in my inbox which are in different sections. So, of course, I can inform all colleagues that [I] have a Gmail address [of] but, then, I don't have access to my archives, and for me this is such a big shift really. Of course, I want to reduce that gradually, but now I'm still in the whole process of working on scholarship. (FG4)

In addition, the email address enables them to stay informed about new developments at faculty and UM level. People who have retired remain updated on, for instance, PhD defenses and who is working on what kind of research, through internal newsletters. Invitations for the Dies Natalis and New Year wishes also reach UM staff through internal communication channels that retirees are cut off from. In comparison, one interviewee mentions how the company that his wife worked for kept sending a Christmas gift after her retirement. It is not so much the gift as the thought that matters. Just like alumni have a UM email address, it should be possible to arrange something similar for all UM staff:

> I'm thinking along the lines of what happens with students once they become alumni. They keep their email account. They keep their addresses to stay in contact with them. Along similar lines, you could organize for staff retiring as well. That would be the bottom line. (FG5)

The continuation of the email address should be for a longer and substantial period of time (5-10 years was suggested) to make the administrative burden of begging every two years for extension (which is now the case) less complicated. Participants experience this as very humiliating anyway. Since no costs are involved, they wonder why this is so difficult to implement. One interviewee hopes that the publication of this very report will make email available again "for everyone, from the person in the mail room to full professor," "with one stroke of the pen" (FG1).

The matter of the UM card and zero-hour contracts

Next to the email address, several participants wish to keep their UM card. Such card gives access to UM buildings which is relevant when a retiree, for instance, would like to attend an internal research colloquium, to pick up a hard copy of *Observant*, or to use print services. What seemed vital, though, is that the card implies that one can make use of library services, which is essential to people who want to keep reading academic journals and other publications. Given that the UM library does not have the most extensive collection, a few interviewees mentioned the importance of the possibility for continued participation in Inter Library Loans.

The participants have diverging opinions as to whether the zero-hour contract should become an option for all retired academic staff. On the one hand, they agree that it is unfair to offer it almost exclusively to full professors because academics in other ranks also make valuable contributions to academic life at UM that go beyond the pension date. On the other hand, some voice the necessity to protect people against themselves, given that not everyone understands when it is time to go. As one interviewee formulates it: "you are not going to put it down in black and white that everyone gets the opportunity" (FG1). Even some full professors may not be fit to continue their involvement in academic life and, therefore, are not very suited for zero-hour contracts, which they almost get automatically at some faculties. While, overall, it seems possible to discuss the prolongation of such facilities with people in leadership positions, such as the dean or head of department, there is a perceived discrepancy between the willingness of peers and the unwillingness of HR managers. There is no understanding of the lack of flexibility on the latter's part, expressed, for instance, in the following quote: "We had this talk with the HRM, nothing, really nothing was possible. Really nothing!" (FG6). We already mentioned how many interviewees experience HRM support as increasingly impersonal.

5. Concluding reflections

5.1. Changing the cultural climate at UM

As indicated in the introduction and the literature overview, scholars (Talmage et al., 2016; Montepare, 2019) have pointed out that the road towards a more age-friendly university is not an easy or self-evident one, as it requires a cultural transformation of its youth-oriented work environment. The first step towards this transformation is "determining the degree to which a campus is inclusive of aging, both explicitly (e.g., through its policies) and tacitly (e.g., in its cultural climate)" (Silverstein et al., 2019, p. 214). Our project focuses specifically on the population of academics who are transitioning or have recently transitioned into retirement. The findings show that our participants are sensitive to the multiple ways in which they are positioned and position themselves, not only vis-à-vis younger colleagues, but to even older retired colleagues as well. Although they may not report overt systemic ageist practices at UM, it is clear that they are aware of the negative stereotypes connected to older age that are free-floating in their work environment (and beyond). They are also aware of how these may result in 'microaggressions' (verbal or behavioral indignities communicating negative and derogatory attitudes to a group that is perceived as Other) that, for some, have significantly impacted the pleasure and satisfaction of the final stage of their career. The stories of not feeling heard and feeling humiliated were quite frequent. It would be naïve to only understand these experiences as direct results of bureaucratization processes and not to connect them with the unspoken biases and prejudice regarding old age and the final career stage that often lie beneath microaggressions. Our interviewees wish that the university would show them more care and, unanimously, they want the option to remain part of what they perceive as 'the UM family.'

Older people in academia risk being positioned as a burden to the organization in multiple ways, for instance in terms of jeopardizing the chances of younger colleagues or no longer being able to catch up with the developments in one's field of expertise. And, if a change in their performance occurs for whatever reason, an open conversation about wishes and possibilities is often avoided. As such, it is not surprising that the participants are eager to stress that they are willing to pave the way for the next generations and are conscious of the controversial full professor who refuses to retire and find meaning in things other than academic work. Also, they are inventive in formulating counter narratives to these stereotypes that emphasize the value of the experienced employee for other colleagues, students, and the institution at large. They come up with numerous post-retirement roles in which employees could make themselves useful for the organization if so desired. Outside the world of academia, the interviewees question the leisurely "Zwitserleven" phantasy that has become a prime example of the successful aging paradigm in the Dutch context. Many retired academics looks for meaning in different directions, for instance in volunteering work and lifelong learning activities. This is very much in line with the results of Cahill's 2019 review that show how the personal expectations of academics as to what their role should be differs from societal expectations. Still, our participants also recognize that not having to do things is a positive thing, i.e., not to be productive and to be free from assessment. Often, women talk more elaborately in the focus group interviews about the sense of liberation that retirement and aging bring from earlier duties in relation to work and family life.

Now that we know the experiences of UM's first cohort of retirees, how they understand transitioning into retirement, and what they value in their later professional life and past retirement, it is time to act and develop an integral retirement policy. To do so efficiently, it is advisable to take the pitfalls into account that scholars (Silverstein et al., 2019), focusing on the development of more age-friendly universities – in which a retirement policy should be contextualized –, have identified.

Tokenism. A first pitfall is tokenism (Silverstein et al, 2019), which refers to superficial actions taken only to give the appearance that older people – academic retirees in our case – are being treated fairly. Some of our participants suggest that SenUM currently serves as a token organization to veil the institution's lack of comprehensive support for retirees. Put more positively, SenUM, the only retiree organization affiliated with UM, is an already existing structure that could develop further and establish even more meaningful links between the retiree and the university.

Siloing. A second potential pitfall is age-based siloing (Silverstein et al., 2019): when a group is set apart from other groups because of chronological age in ways that hinder collaboration and communication. This means that UM should be wary of installing policies that single out older academics in ways that not just differentiate them from other groups but that create inequalities and undesirable hierarchies. Choices need to be made as to whether the university wants to focus on developing a wide-ranging retirement policy that is tailored to the group that our research focused on or whether it wants to take a step further and design policies from a life course perspective (cf. section 4.2.4.). The latter would not start from the assumption that older academics have specific needs and desires just because they are older in the chronological sense (which risks essentializing identities). Instead, it would acknowledge that people and their circumstances change throughout their academic career, which implies that career paths should become much more flexible, independent of chronological age. Think of a person who would like a sabbatical in their fifties to change their academic profile and invest in self-education; an individual in their thirties who needs to take care of a partner who has fallen seriously ill; a colleague in their forties who desires a time-out to reinvigorate, etc. Such life course perspective is in line with Brüggen's et al.'s call (cf. Section 2.3.) for early retirement planning and timely focus on continuing financial health, which is now taboo, just as thinking about the finitude of a career and of life itself is often unthinkable when one is younger.

Multigenerationality. A third potential pitfall is to enhance multigenerationality within academia instead of intergenerationality (Silverstein et al., 2019). Ideally, people from different generations do not just co-exist but interact in mutually beneficial ways. Involving younger and older people in co-designing age-friendly initiatives (as we modestly did in our project) is an example of such intergenerational collaboration. Moreover, the intergenerational exchange and sharing of experiences is the only way to educate all people involved in academic life about "the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that ageing brings to our society" (cf. seventh AFU principle) to fight everyday ageism on the work floor. A university is a micro-cosmos and can hold up a mirror to society at large. When people work together intergenerationally in academia, this mode could spill over to other environments as well, which would gradually and ideally contribute to a more age-friendly world.

5.2. Some golden rules for a comprehensive retirement policy

The participants in our focus groups are a diverse crowd in terms of gender, research discipline (hence faculty), and academic rank. Also, what they desire in relation to the facilitation of retirement and post-retirement connections with UM differs. Nonetheless, the findings illustrate that this population agrees on the importance of five elements that should be considered when developing a comprehensive retirement policy, namely dialogue, choice, transparency, institutional memory, and symbols of long-lasting connections. Together, these elements are constitutive of the care that the participants expect from their employer, as we detail below.

Listening to what retirees need. The interviewees stress that to close an academic career at UM in a satisfactory way, it is necessary that the voice and agency of the academic who is transitioning into retirement is honored. This implies that people in leading positions (ranging from the heads of department, program directors, research group leaders, HR advisors to the dean, depending on the function and rank of the academic and the mores of the respective faculty) enter into dialogue with the person at hand to discuss and negotiate what their plans and wishes are. Since yearly performance reviews are already part and parcel of HRM at UM, it would be easy to systematically and efficiently integrate the dialogue on retirement in the existing structure. Potential topics of discussion could be succession, the event to mark the farewell of the retiree, and how they can stay involved in academia post-retirement if so desired. We know from the literature and our findings that it is taboo to discuss retirement well in advance. It would, therefore, be advisable to have a structure in place that contributes to breaking this taboo. If UM opts for a life course perspective in how it invests in career paths and development, retirement could just be addressed as one type of life event that prompts change during the life course.

Offering possible options. In order to productively engage in such dialogue with the employer, it needs to become clear which choices exist for future retirees. These should entail more than a Vitality Pact or a zero-hour contract. Instead, it could be thought of in terms of a menu – as some interviewees suggest – of ways to retire (retirement trajectories) and ways to remain informed about and engaged in academic activities post retirement. This menu could be conceptualized as a continuum with, on the one hand, the option of a clear break from university life and, on the other, maximal continued involvement. A continuum follows the different modes of engagement that Cahill et al. (2019) and Altman et al. (2019) already have envisioned (see Sections 2.1. and 2.2.). Future retirees could situate themselves on this continuum and negotiate their wishes vis-à-vis the needs of the employer. In the opinion of our participants, UM now largely outsources the information on retirement to the ABP. Developing a catalogue of choices would require claiming back the responsibility of systematically informing and negotiating with employees.

Ensuring transparency. What the options "on the menu" are should be very clear and the same for everyone. Indeed, the participants often point out that better and uniform information assures equal treatment, which is now not always the case because of a lack of transparency. People find it disheartening when they learn that what was not possible for them was granted to other colleagues without a clear rationale. And even when there seems to be a rationale, such as only making zero-hour contracts available for full professors, this rationale is seriously questioned, not in the least by the full professors themselves. Assuring equal treatment implies the acknowledgment of unequal treatment that colleagues may have been faced with in the past. It may prevent them from speaking openly and bringing their needs to the fore. Some women in our focus groups testify that women academics were not promoted at the same rate as their male peers at UM, even when they had similar outputs and responsibilities. Ironically, the older person in the logo of the UM Diversity & Inclusivity Office (see cover page) is indeed an older man. Women academics recounted how they felt unfairly positioned as mothers as if their academic work was just a side activity. Work-life balance and the implications of child-care did not top the university's priority list, in their experience. This still has consequences when transitioning into retirement. The care work done by women, for which they often worked part-time over a period, is unpaid and, consequently, does not contribute to pension accrual. Women report that they were not given the opportunity to grow into the position of full professor and, consequently, they now have less access to zero-hour contracts and their accompanying facilities.

Honoring institutional memory. From the findings, it also follows that, in the great circle of academic life where generations of scholars are succeeded by newer cohorts of scholars, institutional memory is key. Track records and initiatives from the past should remain visible and be integrated in succession negotiations and visions on the future of teaching, research, and administration. Some interviewees, for instance, were unpleasantly surprised to discover that their personal pages with their output and accomplishments had been deleted – as if they no longer existed after retirement. Others recount past initiatives that younger colleagues have now started up from scratch again as if they were new. Not tapping into the achievements from the past, results in a waste of resources in the present and in missed opportunities. It is certainly an obstacle to the development of institutional sustainability.

Making facilities available to all. Finally, some facilities should be made and stay available for all employees who desire so post-retirement. Especially the matter of the email address could easily be solved. Our interviewees do not understand why UM alumni can keep an email address for life while retirees, who may have worked at UM for up to four decades, must beg for it as if it were a special favor. The zero-hour contract also caused concern. Why is it connected to facilities, such as email and a UM card, and almost exclusively offered to full professors? Other facilities that are important symbols of the long-lasting connection with UM that many participants wish for are access to the library (Inter Library Loan included) and remaining in the loop of the achievements and initiatives of UM and the respective faculty. These and other facilities could be integrated in the menu mentioned above. We do not have to wait for UM to develop an integral and well thought-through retirement policy to start implementing small changes, such as keeping email addresses available for retirees. And, let's not forget that such easy fixes have an immediate impact. Email addresses post retirement enable former employees to stay in touch and build the communities that they themselves envision.

Although the literature that we introduced in Section 2 focuses on different national contexts, the numerous initiatives that they describe can be inspiring for UM. These initiatives have been developed professionally and assessed in systematic ways and, therefore, we can learn from these best practices. To conclude, we think it potentially interesting to further investigate the following inspiring example (see also Section 2.3.; Goldwin & Baldwin, 2018). The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) has established an Emeriti/Retirees Relations Center (ERRC) that "serves the retired faculty and staff communities through advocacy, education and personalized services pre- and post- retirement, creates strategic partnerships between the university, emeriti and retirees, and seeks to enrich the quality of life in retirement at UCLA."[9] Several other universities have also brought different services for people pre- and post-retirement together in retiree centers. ERRC's website functions as a portal to point visitors to a toolkit with resources that help with the steps to take towards retirement and paths to follow after retirement. It also helps employees to connect with the Retirement Administration Service Center and Retirement Liaison. The Retirement Administration Center resonates with some of our interviewee's call for an overarching retirement service that is not faculty-bound, as there used to be in the past. The Retirement Liaison is a special "advisor for ladder-rank faculty who are considering retirement. He offers faculty assistance in negotiating pre- and post-retirement arrangements with their chairs and deans, including Pathway to Retirement agreements, and helps to identify common issues and ways for the campus to address them."[10] In a sense, this liaison is the person 'on the side of the retiree' whom some of our participants longed for. The ERRC's portal also hosts the different communities of retirees at UCLA and announces activities. The latter are not just social events but also educational programs and workshops as part of life-long learning endeavors. The Center also circulates an e-newsletter to keep employees informed. In short, when it comes to designing a comprehensive retirement policy, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Excellent initiatives already exist, which could inform UM's retirement policy and organization.

In this report, we have presented the voices of the academics at UM who participated in our focus group interviews on the topic of transitioning into retirement and early retirement itself. We hope that their experiences and understandings, contextualized in the relevant (international) literature, will help the university to design a comprehensive retirement policy and a well-thought-through organization that materializes the ninth AFU principle "To engage actively with the university's own retired community." This is one crucial step on the path to become the more age-friendly university that UM aspires to be and that we want to be part of.

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[9] Downloaded from https://www.errc.ucla.edu, Oct 13, 2020

[10] Downloaded from https://ofew.berkeley.edu/welfare/retirement/faculty-retirement-liaison, Oct 2013, 2020

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