

A New Chapter

Does everything have to turn grey when we grow old?



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Field

Industrial Design

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Summary

Through this diploma project, I wish to contribute to meaningful experiences and enhance the quality of life for senior citizens living in Norway. Freedom of movement, daily routines and social activities have a huge impact on our mental well-being. Many will in the future experience having these essential elements needed to live a fulfilling life taken away from us. Assistive devices give us the freedom to continue living our lives to the fullest. Unfortunately, some in need of assistive devices decline the offer due to fear of social stigmatization.

Rollators are one of our most visible assistive devices. It's a rather large device, and it's a device you typically would bring with you into the public arena. For many, it's a product that must always be by your side and in your direct visibility. Through this project, I have explored and conceptualized new means we can use in the design process of rollators to motivate more people to see its value and use it, as a tool meant to give the freedom to carry on, with pride.

I hope the project will spark a debate regarding which mindset we should have when designing products for the well-being of elderly people. All our future selves will sooner or later become dependent on some sort of assistive device. We should start debating what we would like our futures to be like, not tomorrow but now.

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Chapter 1

Background and motivation

Why does everything turn grey when we grow old?



A discomfort

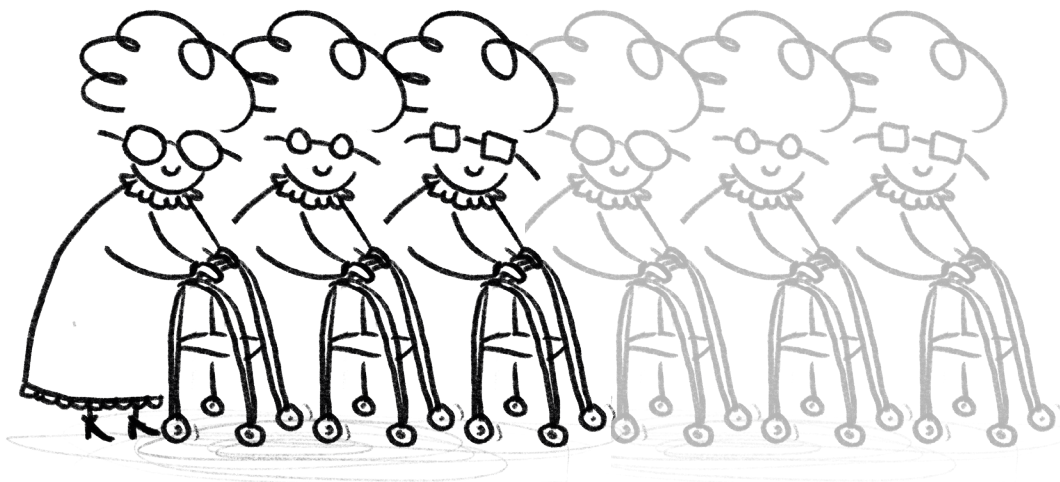
Every time I have visited a nursing home, I have sensed within me a feeling of discomfort. I see people sitting quietly around the TV, blankly staring. They're there when I come and they're still there when I leave. Visiting the following day, I will see the same people sitting and watching. When it's dinnertime they gather around the table and maybe have a nice chat, but something is lacking. It seems to me that the residents of nursing homes lack the tools necessary to initiate social activities. Often they just have access to a TV or a radio, both being passive entertainment. For many, it's a physically demanding process to get out and experience a fresh environment. It's no surprise that the days may feel empty.

A challenge more relevant than ever

There are about 38,000 senior citizens living in nursing homes in Norway today. According to SSB, the number of people above the age of 80 will double within 2040 (Hoen & Abrahamsen, 2023). Such a drastic increase will naturally also have a massive impact on our healthcare services.

2022

2040



The question of population ageing is more relevant than ever and I would argue that today's politicians somewhat are forgetting the social and emotional aspects of eldercare. We must not forget that this is not about numbers, but about people.

UN's sustainable development goal no. 3 says we have to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (United Nations, 2023). If this is to be realized, we will need to improve a lot. It has been reported that one in four Norwegian people above the age of 60 experience loneliness (Hansen, 2023). For many, the days may go by with little or no social stimulation and physical activity. How can we as designers make a difference? How can we contribute to meaningful experiences? Not only for the generation that needs it now but also for us who might need it in the future?

Change of mindset

Industrial design usually reflects a mindset. When looking at the design solutions we typically find in nursing homes or other eldercare services in Norway today, it could seem like we have the mindset of designing for someone's final chapter of life. But this can be a dangerous mindset since it can result in people not receiving the dignity of care they deserve. I have chosen to name this project *A New Chapter* to reflect the mindset I believe we should embrace instead.

When kicking off my diploma project in January my primary goal was to figure out how I as an industrial designer could contribute to more meaningful experiences for the many senior citizens living in Norway.



Far det vert like alle som le under?

Chapter 2

Research

How could I as an industrial designer have an impact?

Observasjon

De som går fort med støkker fremstir mer aktive og mindre redsede



De er faktisk mer aktive også

Det er noe litt "ondt" med fullspens estetikk.

Visit to Bråset

I reached out to a nursing home in Asker, a municipality in the urban area of Oslo, called Bråset bo- og omsorgssenter. This is one of the largest nursing homes in Norway, both by number of residents and by specialized personnel.

As mentioned, my initial approach was to explore how I as an industrial designer could contribute to more meaningful experiences. In other words, I was not searching for new potential practical innovations. This project is about new or enhanced meaning. I was on the search for solutions which would primarily benefit the people living there and their well-being.

I spent the first day roaming around, observing and having casual conversations with the people living and working there to better understand the people and the environment I was dealing with. In other words, I spent my first day getting an overview, so I could prepare myself to go more in-depth for a second visit.

Discussions with specialists

I initiated conversations with three different teams of specialists with three different areas of responsibility. The first team consisted of physiotherapists with the responsibility of following up on every resident at Bråset. The second team consisted of physiotherapists and ergotherapists and was mainly working with the rehabilitation of short-term patients. The final team was responsible for activities and events at the nursing home.

Team 1

Monica Beckmann
Physiotherapist

Elisabeth Rollag Aas
Physiotherapist

Randi Berglund
Physiotherapist

Team 2

Martha Geisner
Physiotherapist

Joanne Noreng
Ergotherapist

Team 3

Ilse de Vos
Activity coordinator

Linda Ulle
Activity coordinator

Insight

Through these conversations, I laid out some building blocks for the further development of my project. A co-student of mine at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Håkon Skorge, is a physiotherapist by training and has extensive work experience both from nursing homes and in the home care services. After I visited the nursing home, Håkon and I had reflections and critical discussions based on my findings. What I found to be especially interesting was how the results I gathered were quite coherent not just between the three different groups, but also with Håkon's experiences from the home care services. I have also had several dialogues with friends regarding their experiences with elderly relatives. The general tendencies tended to correspond. An initially complex problem suddenly felt a bit more manageable.



Chapter 3

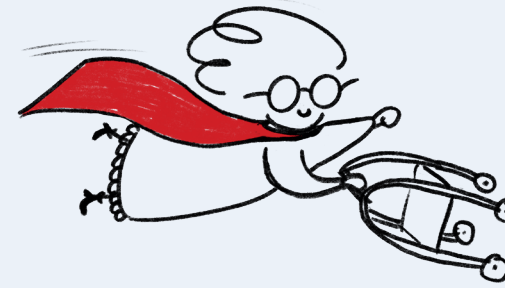
Deciding on a direction

Based on my field research I mapped out three possible directions for the project.

1

Assistive devices = Freedom

As the title indicates, this direction is centred around the challenges connected to mobility and physical senses. A lot of freedom is taken away from us when we lose the ability to do our daily routines and participate in social activities. Assistive devices give us the freedom to continue living our lives to the fullest. Is there anything more meaningful than finding the strength to continue living the way you enjoy?



2

Activities and Games in Nursing Homes

People living in nursing homes lack the tools to initiate social activities. Due to weakened physical capabilities or cognitive senses, we need to design solutions adjusted to meet their abilities. Many also lose the ability to initiate activities themselves. With this direction, I wanted to have a look at existing games and activities and figure out how I could redesign them to fit our target group.

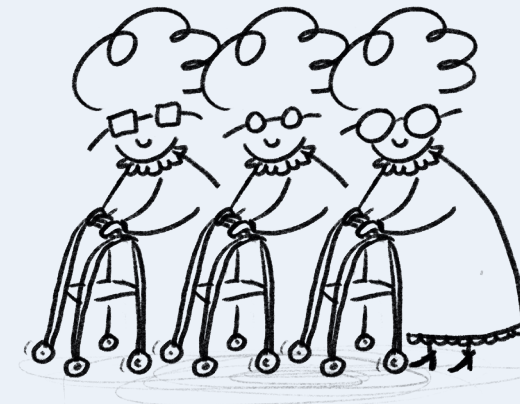


(With this direction, I would work on a topic that is already concerning personnel and activity coordinators in nursing homes globally. Communities exist where they share their experiments, like the Dutch Instagram account: «bewegen.is.leven». It is a direction where many great minds are already at work.)

3

Nursing Homes as a Social Meeting Point

If someone is moving to a nursing home against their will hopefully it will lessen the blow to offer them a welcoming atmosphere. The bedroom in a nursing home has many roles, among others being a social room for when you have visitors. Some residents are bedridden. How is it to have visitors when you are bedridden? And how would you entertain? With this direction, I wished to explore how we could make the most out of these resident rooms so they can fulfil the different roles in the best way possible.



Which way to go?

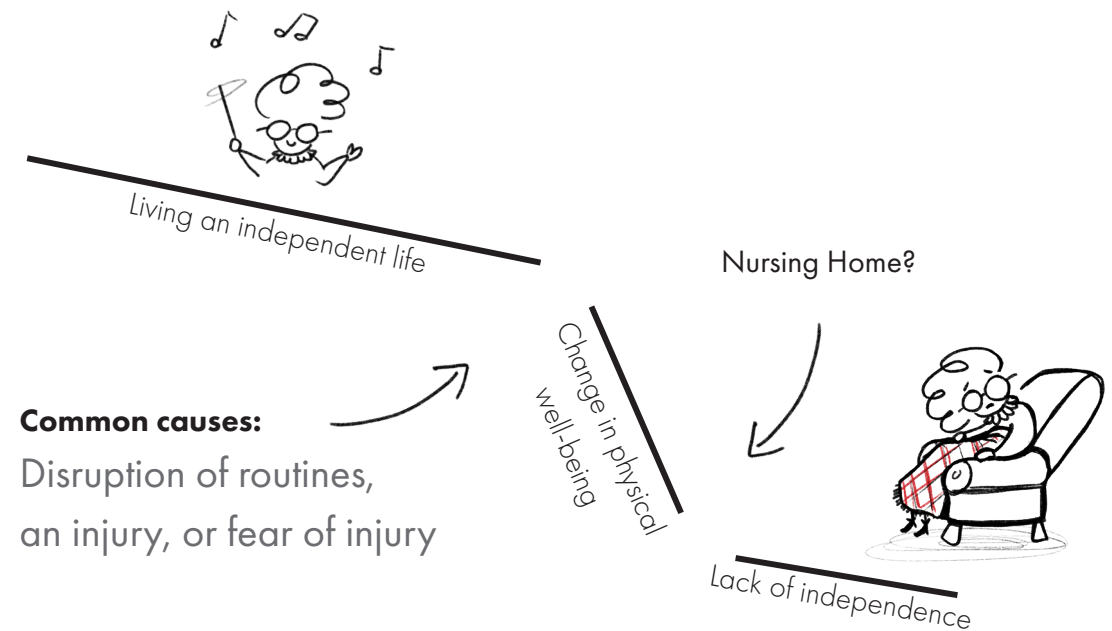
These are three directions that all could contribute to more meaningful experiences among the elderly. To make the best possible choice, I spent a couple of days mapping out possibilities and restraints connected to each of the directions as well as having sessions with thumbnail ideating for each of them.

The no. 1 insight

If I were to highlight one insight as the most important from my research phase, it would be the importance of routines for being active and social. Those who are in the best physical and mental shape at nursing homes are often the same people who have lived active lives and had good routines for socializing and physical exercise.

People often imagine that becoming dependent on a more comprehensive healthcare service is a long and slow process. But to my surprise, this is something that often can happen overnight. Usually, an incident occurs in our lives that lead to a change in physical well-being. If we look at this from a point of view where industrial design could have an impact, there are typically two main reasons which can lead to this.

It could be a disruption of routines, either social routines or activity-based ones, or an injury or fear of injury. There are of course many other possible reasons for why a change in physical well-being can happen, but from an industrial design perspective, these two reasons are highly relevant. According to the physiotherapists at Bråset, the greatest danger could often be fear itself. To put it into context, if you don't feel steady anymore and fear falling, this might be what puts a stop to your daily routines. It's not always the fall that gets you, it could be the fear of falling.



Common causes:

Disruption of routines,
an injury, or fear of injury

If we stop moving, it will lead to us living a more inactive life and thus becoming even more unstable. So in other words, the disruption of routines, and injuries or fear of injuries are often closely connected. Whether it's the fall itself that gets to you or the fear of falling, you will lose anyway.

With this project, I wish to contribute to more meaningful experiences for senior citizens. Hopefully I as an industrial designer can give a contribution to prolonging the timeline where a senior citizen can live independently in his or her own home. Therefore I chose to go further with direction 1: *Assistive Devices = Freedom*. This meant I would take the project in a much more preventative direction than what I first expected.

Physical abilities and social stimulation is often connected. The residents here who are physically fit are more on the move and participate in group activities. They keep track of time and take more often initiative.

Monica Beckmann

Physiotherapist

I see signs that the residents here who are in the best physical shape also receive the best social stimulation. However, how well one can participate depends of course on cognitive abilities.

Marta Geisner

Physiotherapist

The no. 1 insight

Freedom of movement, routines and activity has a huge impact on our mental well-being!



The untapped potential

Assistive devices leading to freedom is a too broad approach, but through my mapping and ideation process on each possible direction, I came across a subpath within this direction that I believed to have a great deal of untapped potential. During my visit to Bråset, I observed something rather interesting in the hallways. I observed how much humour and irony people had regarding their rollators and from what I understand, humour has a great way of rendering assistive devices harmless. This was confirmed to me by all three of the teams I spoke with.

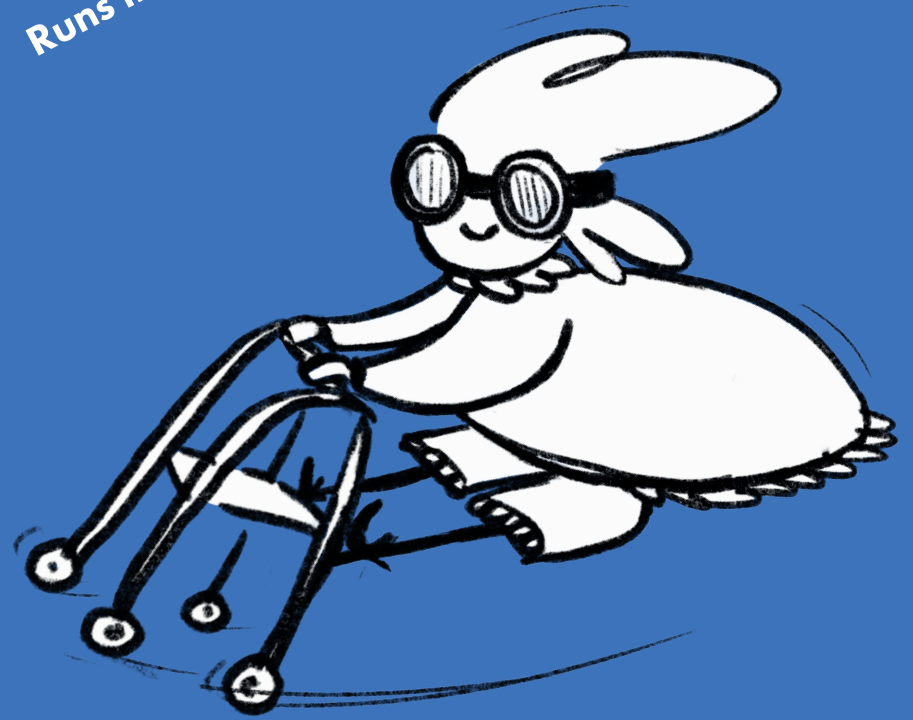
I would walk down the hall alongside a physiotherapist passing people using rollators. The physiotherapist would ask if they were «taking the car for a spin?». The rollator-users would answer joyfully. Something like «Yes, it runs like a dream today!».

When I asked why the physiotherapist referred to rollators as cars, she told me that people working in their business use humour all the time as a tool to motivate people who are a bit reluctant to use assistive devices. Håkon, my co-student with a background in the home care service had mentioned on several occasions that the rollator users he encountered had a great sense of humour regarding their rollator, and would typically give their rollators car-related nicknames. When visiting a 78-year-old rollator user living in an apartment in Oslo I heard her name her rollator «The Oldsmobile».

Out taking the car for a spin?



Runs like a dream!





I call mine "The Oldsmobile"!

Woman (78)

Living in an apartment

Rollators are one of the most visible assistive devices. It's a rather large assistive device, and it's a device you typically would bring into the public arena. The fact that many people avoid using rollators due to fear of social stigma is quite known. A point of interest is that NAV (the Norwegian public welfare agency) doesn't keep a record of how many people decline their offer of a free rollator or how many receive it without taking it into use. I reached out to two Norwegian rollator producers to hear whether they had any statistics concerning this topic, with no luck. This is in other words a grey zone.

Since humour is a tool that possibly could motivate people who are reluctant to start using one, I was eager to see whether this could be reflected in the product. Looking at today's solution, it doesn't exactly show any personality or attitude.

Aesthetics or function?

To work with humour as a tool I explored two possibilities. Aesthetic appearances and features. I spent again a few days mapping out the possibilities within both approaches. Joanne Noreng, the ergotherapist at Bråset reminded me that the person receiving an assistive device for the first time could quite possibly be in a vulnerable situation. The last thing they want is to feel humiliated.

To learn more about the product, I visited NAV's office in Oslo responsible for assistive devices to ask if they had a rollator beyond repair they could lend or give me. I was given a perfectly usable rollator without a single scratch. It was a surprise to hear that much of what is returned to NAV would be discarded. I did some research and found a news article regarding the use-and throw mentality at NAV made a point about rollators not getting a second owner (Larsen, 2012). The article was from 2012, and a lot could have happened since then. Anyhow, the use and discard issue at NAV isn't a main objective of this project, even though I wanted to highlight the matter.

The standard rollator I received from NAV.



Now I had access to a rollator I could test and study, making it easier to conceptualize on both aesthetics and potential features. I discussed the possible approaches with my supervisor Hilde Angelfoss. Regarding the aesthetic approach, Hilde asked me what a rococo rollator would look like. I found the idea of a rococo rollator to be fascinating. It would break every norm that we associate with an assistive device. It would tell the world «Here I am», showing pride and identity. I had to sketch it to see what it would look like. When the sketch was finished, I knew I wanted to go further with the aesthetic approach.



Chapter 4

Breaking a Norm

Today's solutions are meant to fit all. Is it therefore they end up fitting no one?

A norm of hiding

For many, using a rollator may feel like you're carrying a mark. The word stigmatizing means to mark something (Malt, 2020), as if you were being targeted by society. If we receive a mark, it's understandable that our instincts may tell us that the best thing would be to hide it.

It can seem like we have a norm of what a rollator should look like. It needs to be as discreet as possible, take little to no attention and blend in. One might get the assumption that preferably a rollator should be invisible.

I believe putting every person with a need of an assistive device in the same box, offering solely the same generic product to everyone, is further contributing to the rollator being a social marking. If we look at "The Eight Factors to Dignity", the first factor is to offer people choices and impact on how people wish to live their lives (Higgins, 2023). A British charity organization called the National Dignity Council has listed seven core principles of dignity where no. 1 is to value the uniqueness of every individual (National Dignity Council, 2014).

Dignity Factor No1:

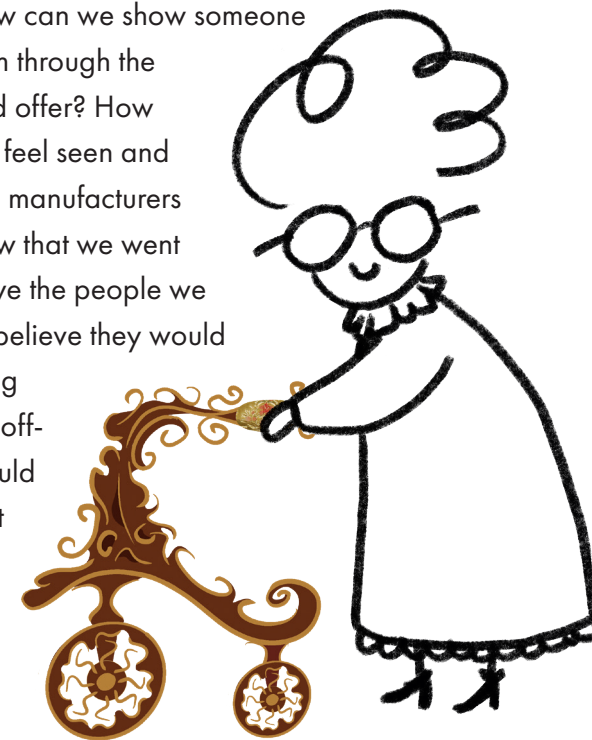
Choice and control - Enabling people to make choices about the way they live and the care they receive.

National Dignity Council Core Principle No1:
Value the Uniqueness of every individual.

Unfortunately, today's solutions seem more like something that is thrown at us rather than something we have chosen ourselves. When not offering a choice, it's no surprise that many may feel labelled by society and placed in a box.

And if the option we offer is designed with an intent to visually hide, we only further contribute to the idea that assistive devices are something we should be ashamed of.

One of the specialists at Bråset disliked the idea of design as the solution to everything. She argued that the most important thing is people, social relations and showing that we care through actions. As a designer, I interpreted this in another way. How can we show someone that we care about them through the products we design and offer? How can we make someone feel seen and understood? Designers, manufacturers and sellers need to show that we went through a process to give the people we care for something we believe they would enjoy, instead of offering some standard generic off-the-shelf product. It should be interpreted as an act of love for the person in need of it.

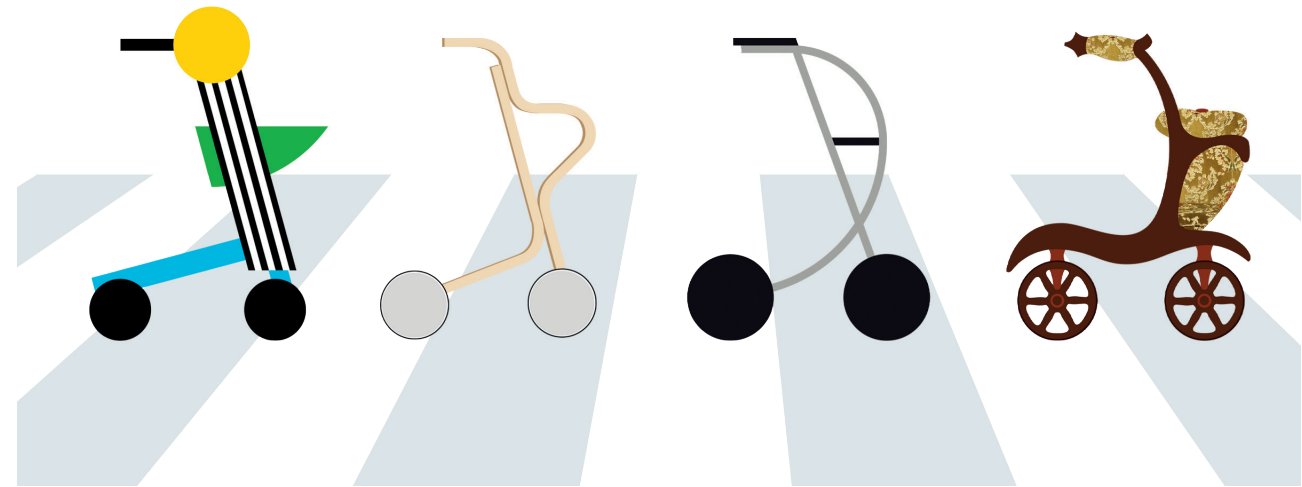


Why I found the idea to be so intriguing

The idea of a rococo rollator opened my eyes to what was to become my hypothesis. Of course, a rococo rollator it's not to everyone's taste and it would probably not become a best-selling product, but it has something today's rollators lack: A consciousness of style, personality and identity. It has an attitude and it is something you would wear with pride. I know for certain that if I saw someone with a rococo rollator pulling it off with style and attitude, they would be the coolest person on planet Earth. Based on this, I crafted my hypothesis.

Hypothesis

By designing more expressive assistive devices that show style and attitude, as well as providing people in need of assistive devices with a choice, it will be easier to embrace the product and use it with dignity and pride.

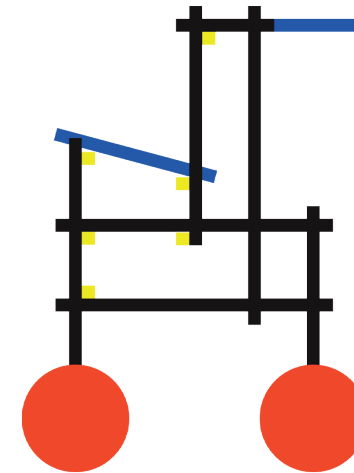


Context

Hearing aids are an example of assistive devices that historically have been hidden (using colour tones meant to resemble skin). Imagine if we applied the same mindset to glasses. Wouldn't that be strange? Now, in more recent years you can get hearing aids in all types of colours and patterns.

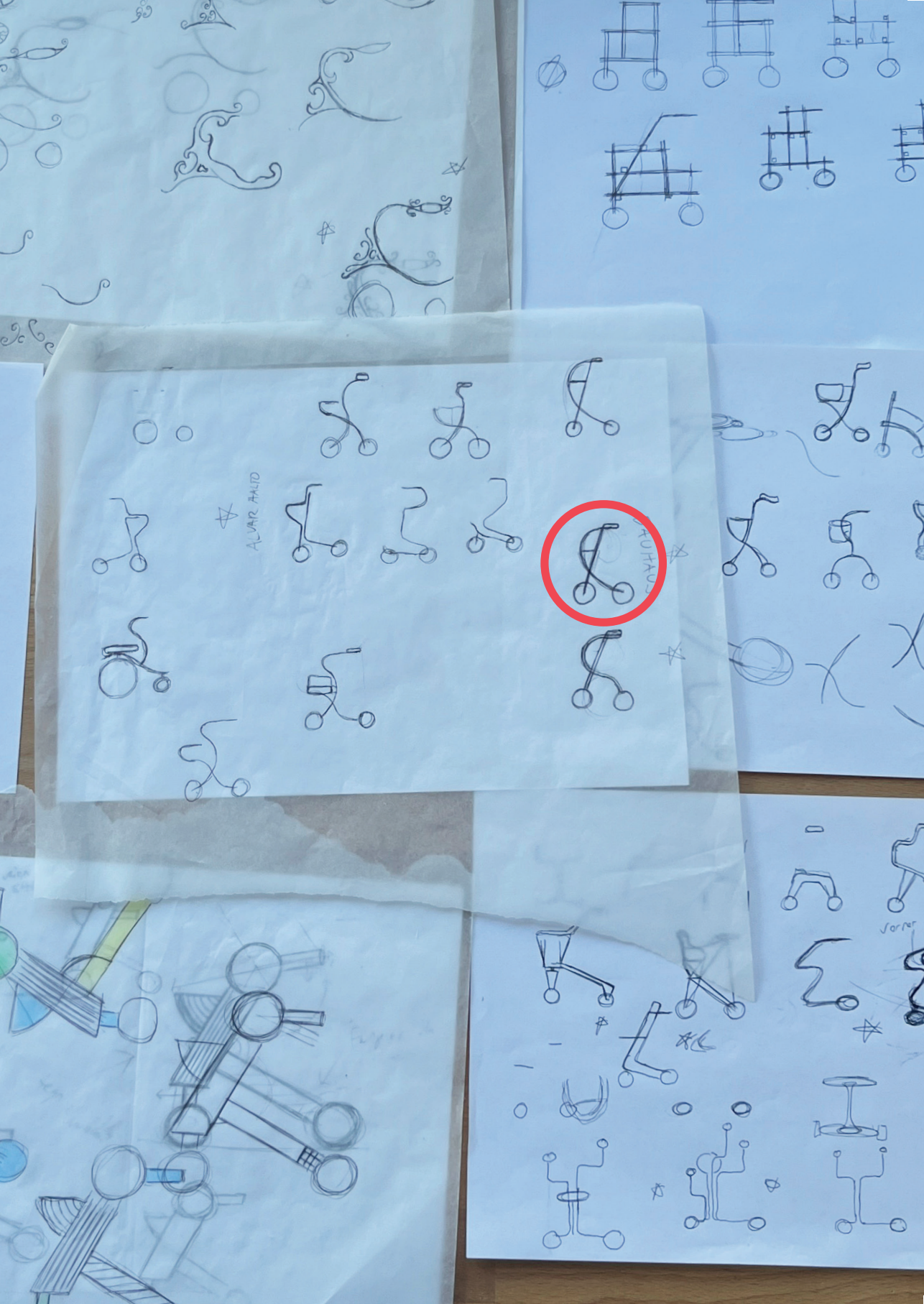
Rollators being generic also tends to create some chaos. At Bråset, I was invited to observe the chaos that would occur during events. People carry all their personal belongings in their rollators. Glasses, wallets, phones, etc. People therefore don't want to leave their rollators out of sight. When dozens of rollators end up in the same room, chaos is bound to happen. It's not unusual to see people trying to personalize the rollator in some way. Stickers are quite usual. The most extreme example I have seen was a rollator with a «sweater» knitted to fit its frame.

I could focus on the function or ergonomics of a rollator, but this is a matter that already concerns most rollator producers. Rollators are fantastic tools, and they work well. What is lacking is the aspect of meaning and affiliation. Therefore I chose for this project to turn a bit of «a blind eye» to the aspect of function and ergonomics. Of course, it would be in the back of my mind through the process to avoid making unrealistic suggestions. But functional or ergonomic innovation won't be a goal for this project.

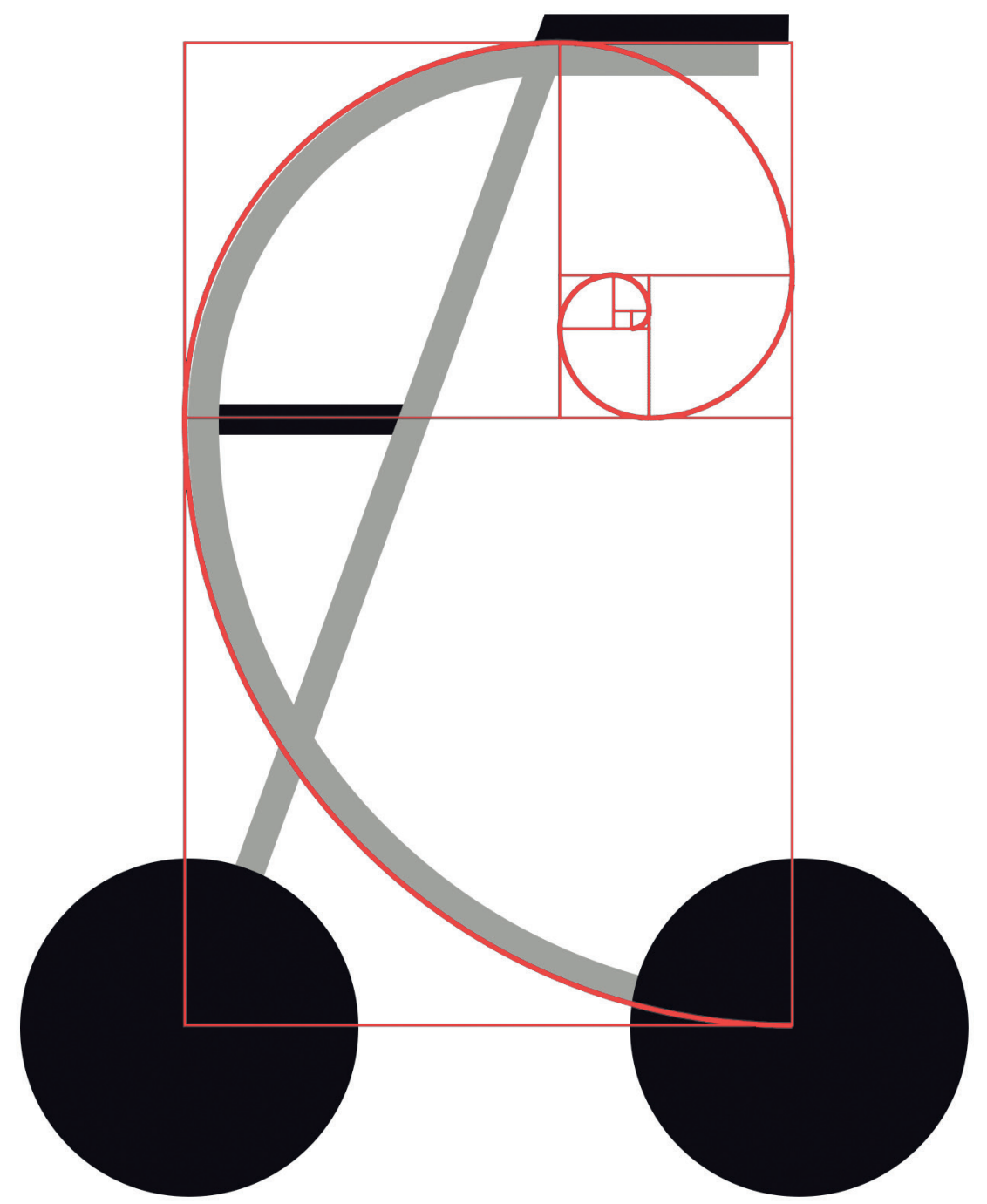


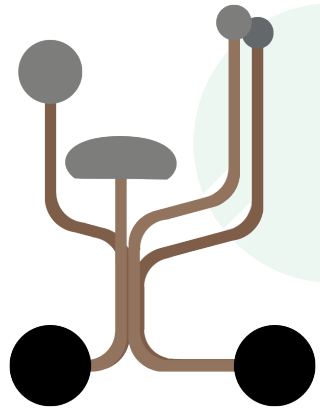
Putting the hypothesis to its first test

I had such a joy illustrating a rococo rollator, that I decided to illustrate a few more. I drew in total 16 different rollators in 16 different distinctive styles that many senior citizens living in Norway probably would have a relation to or knowledge of. Some would represent harmony while others would visually stand out. Some would be fairly conventional and follow the norm, while others would be a bit more avant-garde.

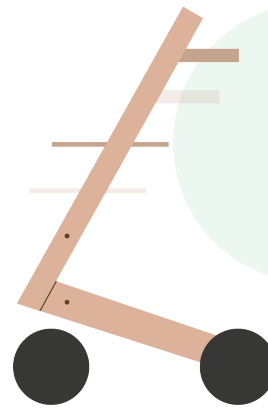


Thumbnail sketching, for then to define the most promising concepts digitally.

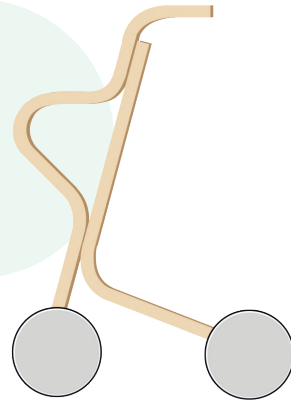




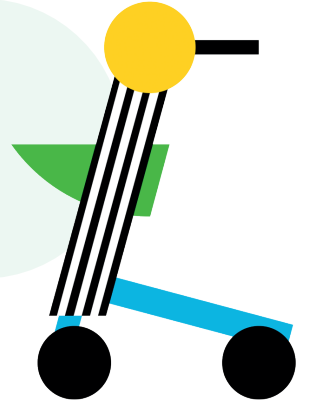
Inspiration:
Peter Opsvik's Garden
Visual intent:
Avant-garde



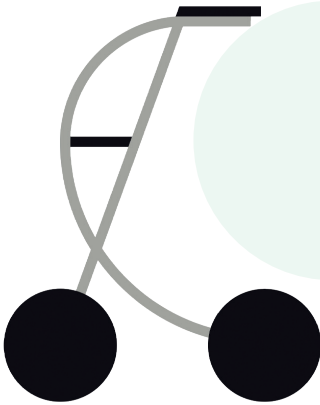
Inspiration:
Peter Opsvik's Tripp-Trapp chair
Visual intent:
Familiarity



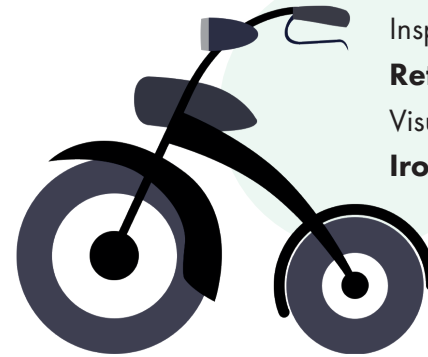
Inspiration:
Aalvar Aalto/Artek
Visual intent:
Harmony



Inspiration:
The Memphis Group
Visual intent:
Playfulness



Inspiration:
Bauhaus
Visual intent:
Traditional



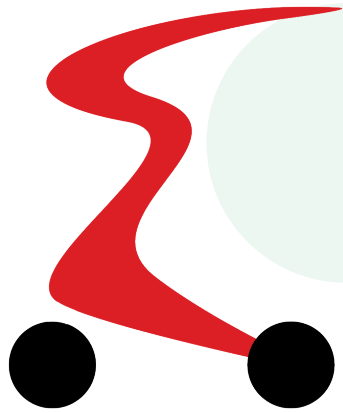
Inspiration:
Retro motorbikes
Visual intent:
Irony



Inspiration:
George Nakashima
Visual intent:
Exotic/nature



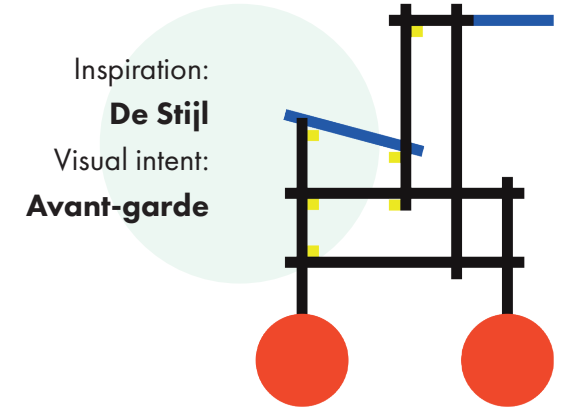
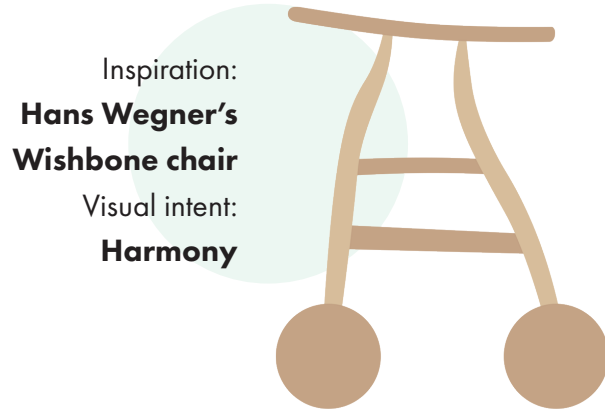
Inspiration:
Classic furniture
Visual intent:
Familiarity



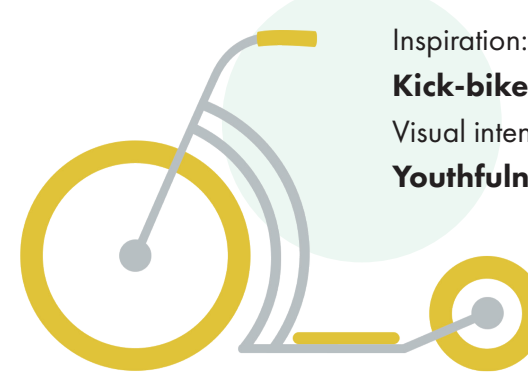
Inspiration:
The Panton Chair
Visual intent:
Aerodynamic



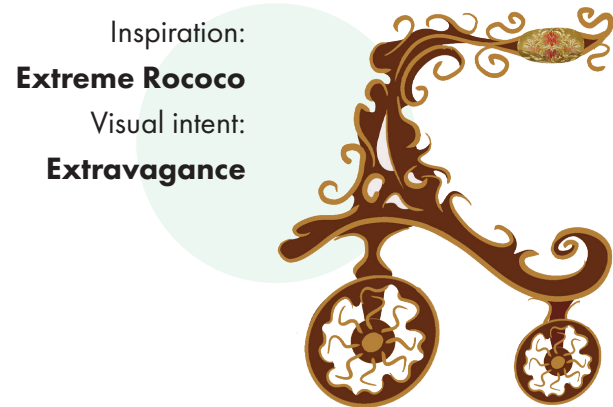
Inspiration:
Space Age Design
Visual intent:
Futuristic



Inspiration:
Retro motorbike
Visual intent:
Irony



Inspiration:
Kick-bikes/kick-sleds
Visual intent:
Youthfulness



After drawing 16 rollators in 16 distinctive styles, I made a catalogue out of them. The catalogue contained the illustrations themselves, their titles and photos found on the internet, to create a setting. My wish was to use this catalogue to quickly test the relevance of my hypothesis. This would be an unpolished experiment.

I wanted to put my hypothesis to a more proper and thorough test, but to find out how to best possibly do this, I had to do a quick pilot experiment. For the final test, I wished to make models of a selection of rollators. The test based on the catalogue would work as an indicator of which rollators I would model. From experience, I knew a test like this might become a bit of a mess. With 16 different rollators and a pilot experiment built up around them, I knew it possibly could demand a lot of concentration from participants. I therefore chose not to reach out to people who might have weakened cognitive or sensory abilities. I started out testing it with friends in their 20s and 30s before I moved on to test it out with people above the age of 60.

I wished to see how diverse the preferences would be and how the ones that visually stand out would fare against the ones that visually blend in. I printed several different charts where the participants would place the different rollators according to different parameters. I also asked which they would bring to the supermarket, have in their living room, bring on a leisure trip, or to a social gathering.

When presenting the models in the catalogue, I could have presented all models in a uniform colour scheme and with no indication of what materials were used. But since this is an exploration of aesthetic preferences and whether the participants would like to blend in or stand out, I found it to be highly relevant to include these visual tools.





I tested out the workshop aspect with co-students at AHO...

...for then to present the catalogue to a variety of participants.



Result

The test made me further confident in the idea that we need more variety in the market. I noted a lot of laughter, joy and engagement when the participants scrolled through the catalogue. The spectre of preferences was also wider than I thought it would be. Below I have included a few quotes that highlight the general tendencies from the experiment.

The most realistic rollators are also the most boring.

Man (65)

If you're a person who struggles with mobility and you're out on the street, you need to be seen! The more bright colours the better!

Woman (64)

I would prefer more playful expressions at home or around friends than I would outdoors.

Man (60)

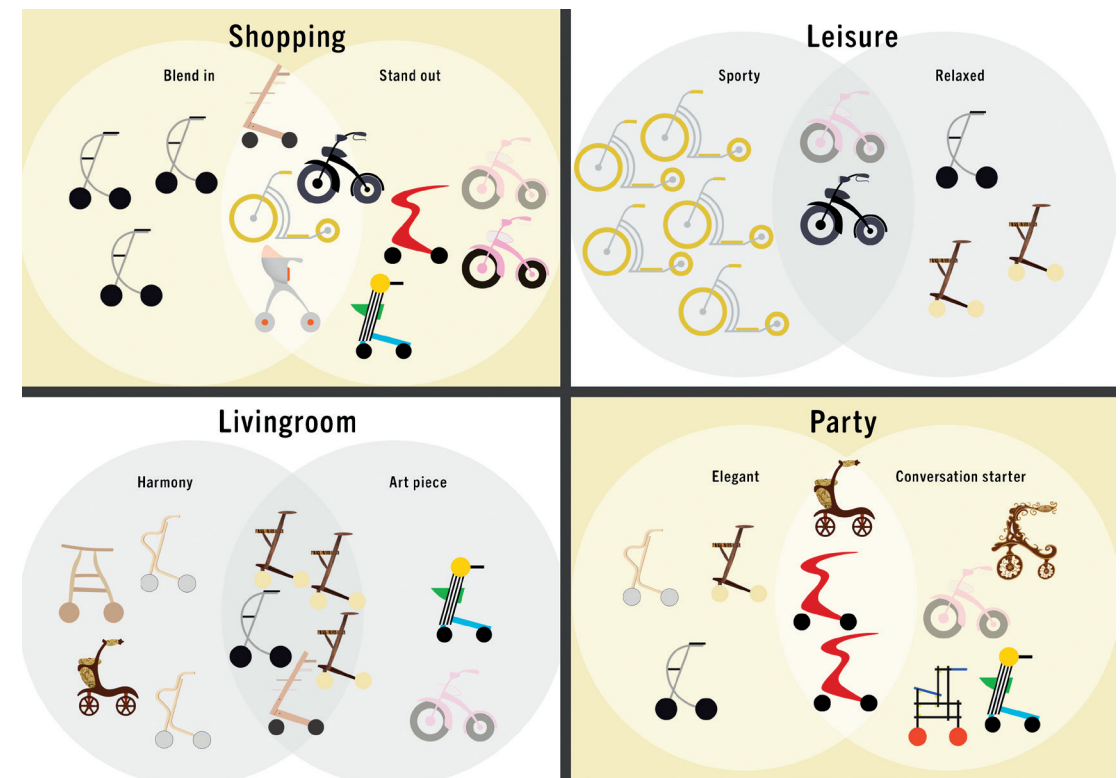
I like the idea of changing the rollator between settings. I don't have the same style when I'm out grocery shopping as I would have when going to a party.

Woman (27)

This yellow kick-rollator seems like a fun experience!

Man (65)

The questions regarding different rollators for different uses proved to be quite an interesting test. I arranged all the preferences into a single map, and then further into sub-categories. The ones that were chosen for the living room, were they chosen because they would be in harmony with the interior or because they would stand out as an art piece? I used these sub-categories as a guide to decide which rollators I would end up modelling.



I used this test to prepare myself for a grander final test of my hypothesis. Therefore it was important for me to have a thorough critique of my method and execution, to find out which parts of the experiment intrigued interesting conversations and possible insight, and what led to confusion.

Critique

There was some confusion regarding how some of the rollators would work. I should have included sketches of a greyscale silhouette of a person using it. I found it important to create models for the final test to give the participants the best possible chance to see and understand each product.

Even though I tried to make it clear that this was a matter of aesthetic preferences, many of the participants would be choosing one over the other and reasoned their choices based on functional aspects. I realized I would have to make the rollators functionally equal to the greatest extent. Also, for the more colourful rollators, I should have included a few colour variations.

Since I was testing humour and playfulness as a tool, I wanted to see if names could be used to emphasize it. For example, I would call the one inspired by Hans Wegner's Wishbone Chair for «The Dane». Some participants didn't get the different references and were slightly confused by them. On several occasions, the name turned out to have a positive effect, but I still chose to drop the nicknames for the final experiment.

I am glad I decided to do this experiment with a test group that may be a bit younger than you might expect for a project about rollator design with the oldest being 65. Many of the participants found it difficult to make choices, mainly due to there being too many rollators to keep track of. Also, the workshop aspect of it with systemizing the rollators in different charts became a mess with some participants saying my charts needed too much explanation and concentration. The chart that proved to be the best was the one where they could choose their favourite for the four different roles: shopping, at home,

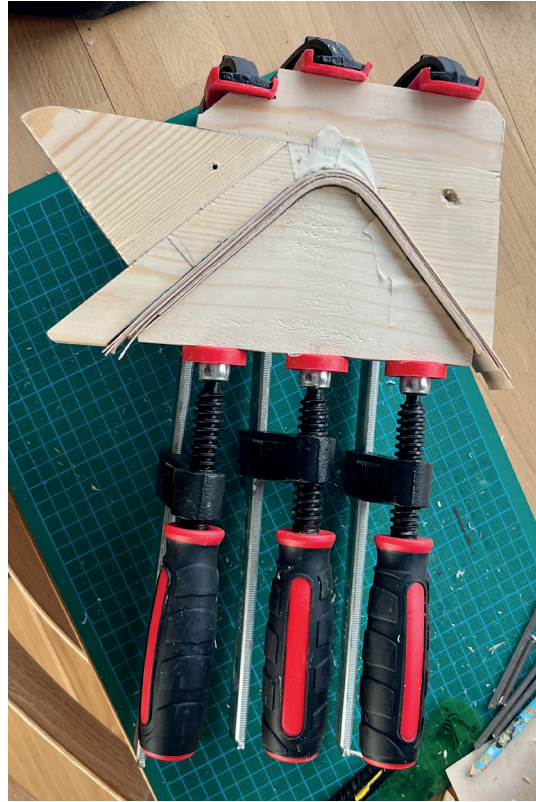
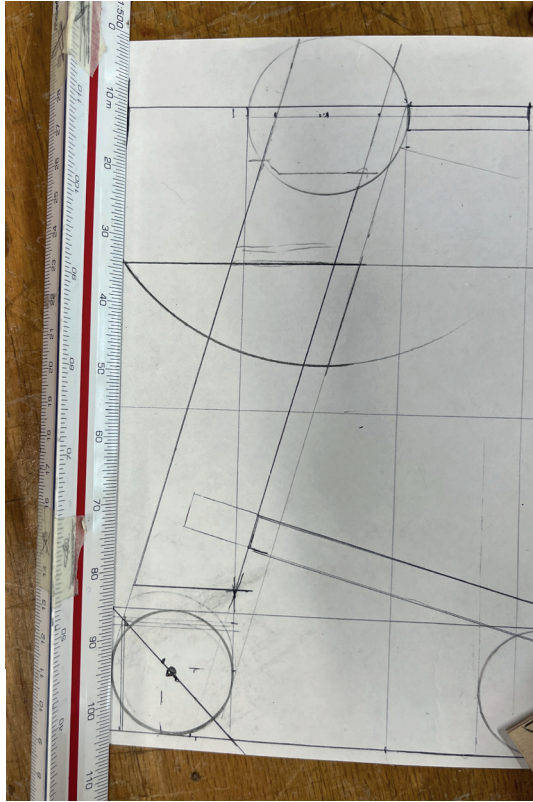
leisure trips and parties. I emphasized on the result from this chart when choosing which rollators I wished to model and bring to the final experiment.

Outcome

This test gave me greater faith in my hypothesis and I felt confident taking this test to the full scale. I chose to model seven 1:5 rollators, and I based them on the ones that had done well in the different subcategories or sparked off interesting discussions. I chose seven rollators who would represent seven design philosophies and styles. I decided to model them on a 1:5 scale for two reasons. For a start, having smaller models made it easier to bring them around to many different places and people. Also, it seemed like this size would give a good impression of what the rollator would look like in full size, and at the same time be so small that I would get away with different aspects of the rollators not being defined.

16 sketches proved to be too many options and I wanted to avoid exposing the future participants to a choice overload. George A. Miller argued that the number of objects the average person can hold in working memory is about seven (Miller, 1956). Due to the high probability of encountering people with weakened cognitive abilities, I decided not to model more than seven.

Again, I could have made them all in the same colour scheme, material and finish, but the models aren't concepts and I'm not looking for a winner. These visual elements was an integral part of my hypothesis. I wanted to hear people's preferences and if all models had a similar finish, then the characteristics would disappear and the feedback would have been more based on the function and ergonomics.



The models

I spent a total of four weeks designing and modelling the seven chosen styles.





Expression:

Harmony

Inspiration:

Nordic modernism and the work of Alvar Aalto

Material and production:

Moulded plywood

Inspired by a movement that has had a huge influence on the furniture we typically can find in many Norwegian homes, from Ikea to a more high-end premium market.





Expression:

Playful

Inspiration:

Italian post-modernism and the work of The Memphis Group

Material and production:

Painted and lacquered

Post-modernism is about breaking conventions and opposing the idea that form has to follow function. Here it has collided with a rollator, a product where function is the primary concern. With a project like this, I believe we have a lot we can learn from the post-modernists.





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Expression:

Nature

Inspiration:

Japanese minimalism and the work of
George Nakashima

Material and production:

Joinery. Wooden slab used as serving tray.

Proved to be quite popular in the first test. I wanted to create an exotic look which draws
an association to nature.





Expression:
Aerodynamic

Inspiration:
Verner Panton's Panton Chair and Ferrari

Material and production:
Moulded plastic

The different rollator nicknames I encountered were all car references. Could this aerodynamic speedster of a rollator become a hit?



4



Expression:

Elegance

Inspiration:

German mid-century functionalism and the Bauhaus movement

Material and production:

Bent steel

This is the one that most resembles the solutions we typically can find today. Contrary to the traditional solutions, I've tried to make this one appear a bit more like a high-end product for a luxury market.



5



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Expression:

Classic

Inspiration:

Rococo and Renaissance revival

Material and production:

Carved wood

This style didn't fare all too well during the catalogue test, but I chose to include it due to many of the participants telling me how their parents or grandparents would love it.





Expression:

Active

Inspiration:

Kickbikes and kicksleds

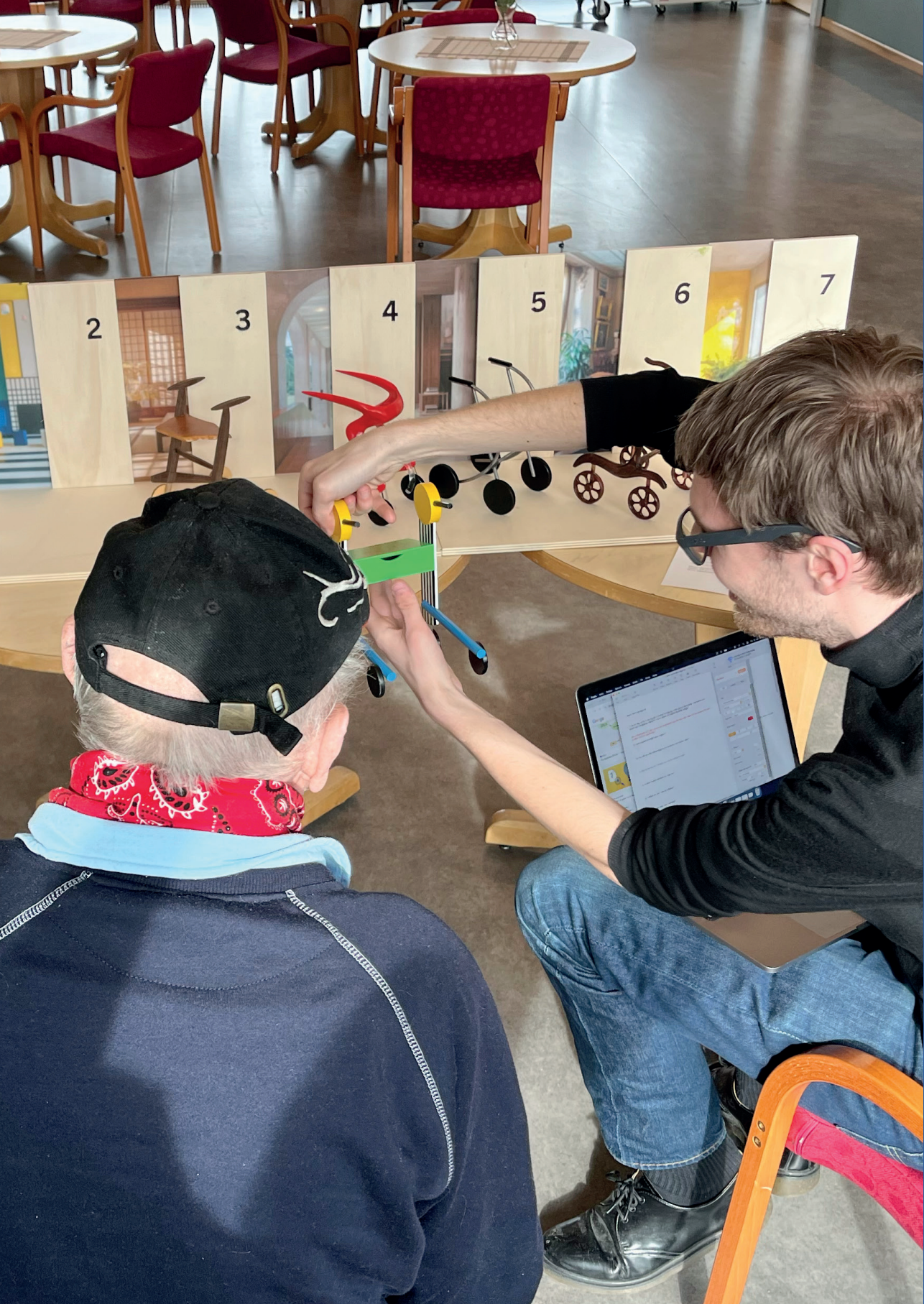
Material and production:

Bent steel

I'm not sure if it's feasible for the target group to use it as a kick-bike, but maybe the idea of it can be tempting. Also, I thought of it as a bit of a fun feature for people with grandkids or other young relatives.



7



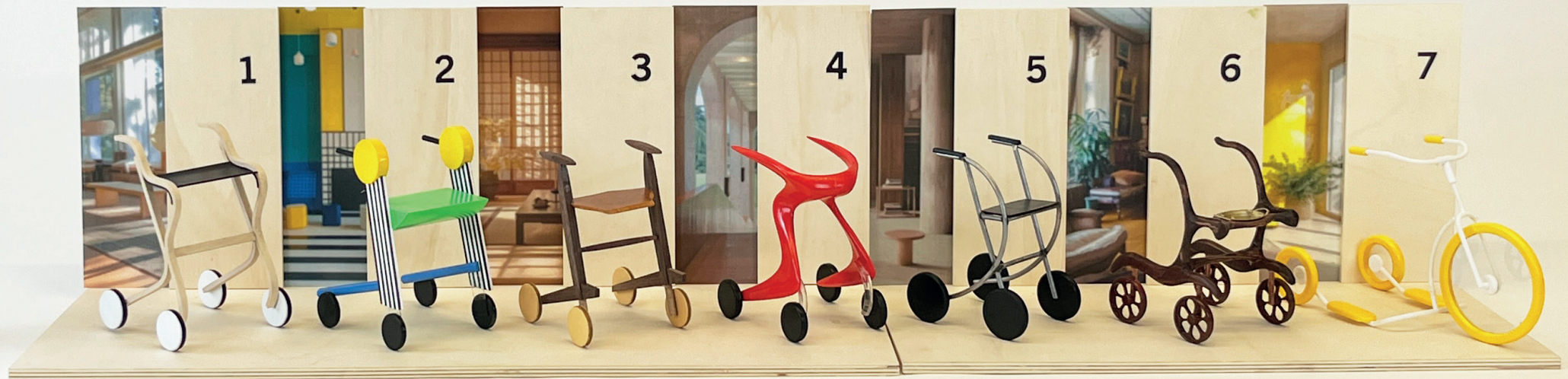
Chapter 6

Designing the exhibition

With as many as seven rollators at play, a good presentation is key.

Before I settled on how I would present the models, I had to be sure of what I wanted to achieve. As said, these models are not concepts and I was not looking for a winner. I was mostly interested in diving into discussions, hearing meanings and different points of view. I value quality over quantity. What I wanted to get out of this experiment was good quotes that could be used in a debate about what we want our eldercare services to be like. I could have visited a nursing home and exhibited these models for people above the age of 80 who already use rollators. But that wouldn't capture the variety of people that might need a rollator in the future. I wanted to hear the opinion of physically fit people at the age of 60 just as much. A key element of this project is the future aspect. How would we like it to be when it's our turn? In 20 years, we will have twice as many senior citizens living in Norway. Therefore it wouldn't make sense not to hear the opinions of people down to the age of 60.

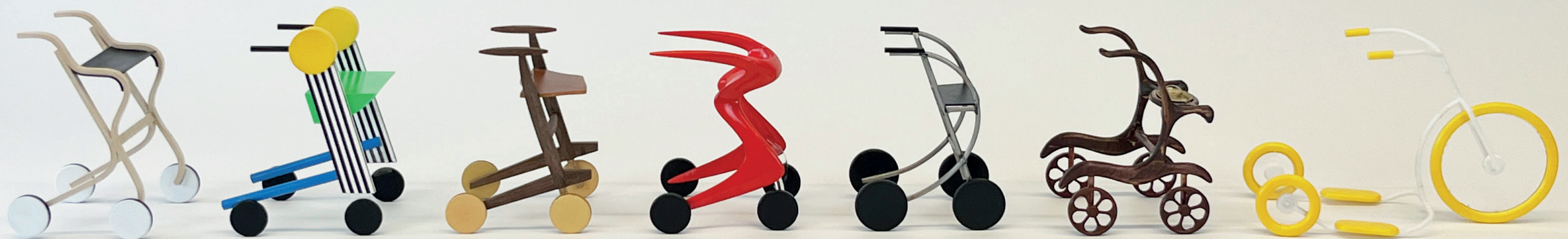
The exhibition had to be easily constructed/deconstructed and mobile. For this, I made a collapsible stand out of plywood in four parts. I didn't want too much visual noise surrounding the rollators and therefore chose to keep the background quite clean. The models were accompanied by a background photo to create a setting. The photos were either taken by myself or generated by the AI program MidJourney. Instead of naming the models, I gave them numbers to make it easier for the people participating to refer to the different ones. I printed out colour variations of a selection of the different models.



The questions

Based on the critique of my previous experiment I made a list of 15 questions which I tested out with friends and family. I narrowed it down to the eight questions that proved to trigger the most interesting reflections.

It felt natural to start a bit on the safe side. With my first question, I tried to create a third-person perspective of us seeing other people using the rollators. This was to get to know the participants, for example, whether they were able to envision themselves in a position using a rollator. I would proceed to discuss what characteristics they would connect to a person using the different ones. This proved to be an efficient way to hear honest opinions. I would then switch to more of a first-person perspective and ask about the different rollators for different situations (shop, leisure, living room, party). Lastly, I asked which one would become the best-selling model in Norway.





I ended up speaking with a total of ten people. It was a mix of rollator users and non-users. The youngest person participating was 58 and the oldest was 97. Three of the people I spoke with lived in a nursing home, while the seven others lived in everything ranging from small apartments in Oslo to farmhouses in the countryside.



Woman (71)



Woman (78)



Woman (78)



Man (90)



Four participants who use assistive devices for mobility.



Six participants without the need for it.



Man (97)



Man (75)



Woman (58)



Man (86)



Woman (70)



Man (59)

The display in the reception of Bråset bo- og omsorgssenter.



Colour alternatives ▲



Result

Presented as a series of quotes.





This wooden one is perfect for having indoors and the material is very elegant. Many rollators are only used indoors. The material could reflect that aspect.

Man (90), rollator user

My reflection:

This is a very good point. Does one shoe have to fit all? We have a great variety of rollators meant for different uses. Still most are made of metals and plastic. There are so many rollators that will never have to face heavy rain or blizzards.





I don't want to stick out of the crowd, but I like to captivate a bit. I wear a neutral-coloured sweater and trousers, but my outfit becomes elegant due to my colourful scarf.

Woman (78), wheelchair user

My reflection:

Not everyone likes to stand out, but many still like to be acknowledged. She told me it was important for her to continue dressing up just as elegant at the nursing home, as she would do back home. It's a reminder that we don't necessarily lose our sense of style when we enter new chapters of life.





I don't mind using my rollator behind closed doors, but if I'm in a social setting I avoid using it. Mine doesn't look good with any outfit or in any interior.

Woman (71), rollator user

My reflection:

Today's solutions are meant to be solutions for everyone.

Then it can quickly become a solutions for no one.





If this red one could be seen around the streets of Oslo, and one day it's my turn to start using a rollator, then I'd ask where I could get my hands on that cool red model.

Woman (70)

My reflection:

I believe this quote is self-explaining. If we first are exposed to a greater variety of options, it would be difficult to go back to the same generic solutions.





*Is it possible to get this one in a proper
bright green?*

Woman (78) rollator user

My reflection:

I hadn't brought any colour variations for this model, but the participant still asked me straight up if it was possible to get it in a bright colour. Naturally, then, I perceived the request to be a result of honest interest. Again, do we wish to visually hide or stand out?





Some of these aren't rollators. I would say they are furniture. That's a good feature for something that is always by your side.

Man (59)

Note:

I photoshopped his favourite rollator into his living room. You can see how it blends in. Unlike the standard rollator, this appears like a piece of furniture that truly belongs in a home.





*I think this one renders the bad reputation
of the rollator harmless. It makes
something fun out of it!*

Man (59)

My reflection:

Even though it didn't prove to be a favourite in the test, it's a rollator that harvests a lot of interesting opinions. This is why I chose to include the model. I do not believe this is everyone's cup of tea, but isn't that one of the reasons why post-modernism has such an appeal for so many?



A quick note of the general tendencies



It proved to be quite popular among all age groups. Many participants expressed their fondness for wood as a material.



Some loved it. Others were appalled by it. Whether people would buy it is another question...



Gave associations to woods, nature and a healthy lifestyle.



It gained many nicknames connected to speed, my favourite being "The Speed Phantom". It gained a lot of popularity from all age groups. Some of the oldest participants requested toned-down colours.



The most "traditional" solution harvested as expected some positive feedback. However, many also found it to be boring when presented with the other alternatives.



My impression is that many of the participants either loved the style or they disliked it depending on which generation they belong to.



Popular regarding outdoor usage. Many said this was the one that least resembled a rollator and mentioned how you would look young with it.

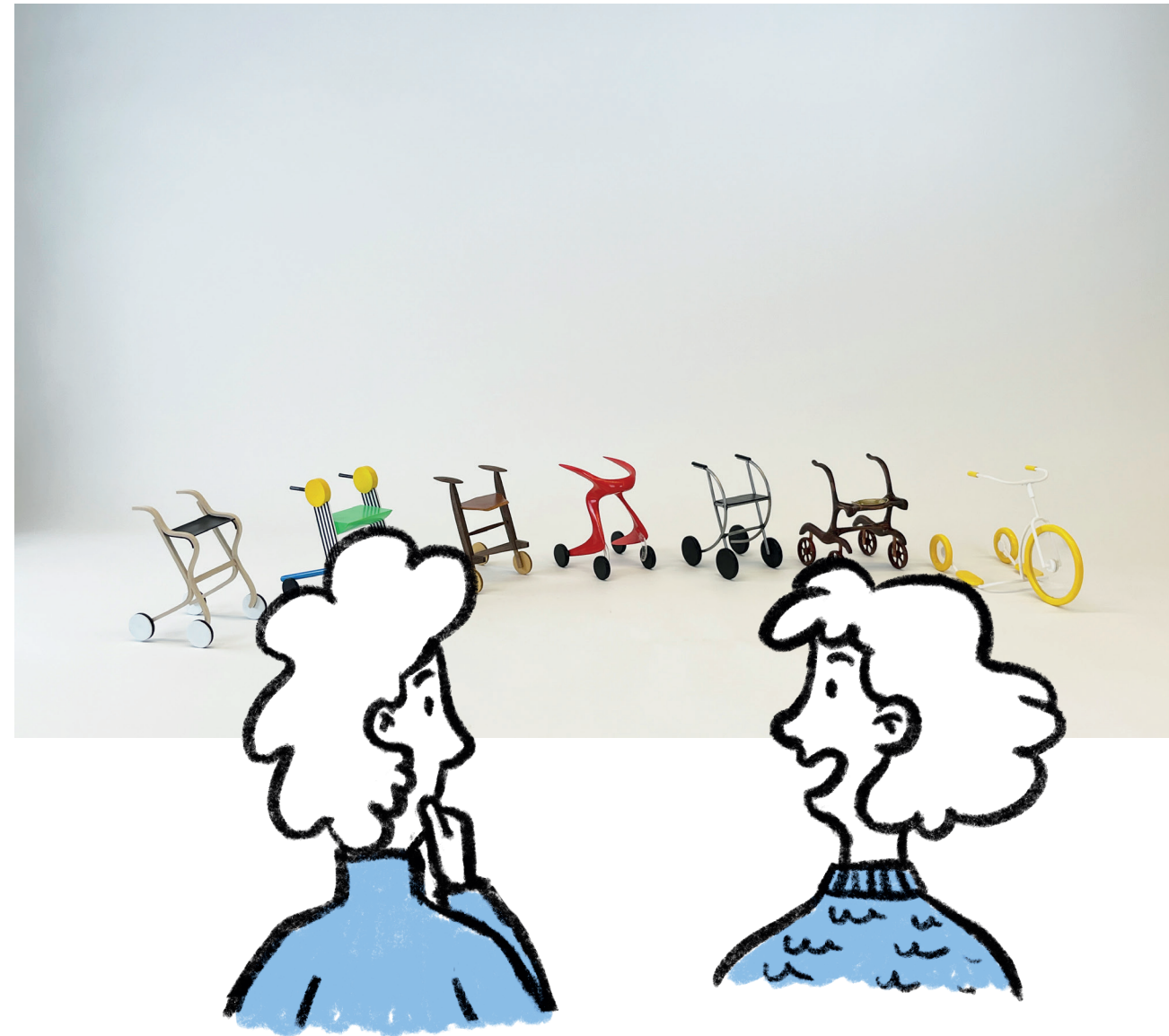
The igniter

One aspect I found to be especially interesting about the experiment was something that often occurred when I left my models out of sight or when I moved them from one place to another. When I walked around with my models at the nursing home a lot of people were intrigued by the models. They would stop what they were doing and start talking to me. If I left the models, I would see people standing next to them, taking pictures or discussing them when I came back.

I asked a pair of young adults what they were talking about and they told me they were speculating about what type of person would use the different ones. They told me they could see quite clearly a stereotype or a character behind each of them.

I've worked on quite a few projects throughout my five years as a design student, and I can truly say that I've never experienced as much attention from strangers regarding a project as I have done now. I believe many people were fascinated to see something they'd never seen before. Seeing how people become engaged when seeing the models has certainly contributed to further confidence in my hypothesis.

But of course, this project would attract people's attention. As far as I know, the use of small-scale models of radically different rollators is something that has never been done before. Many people were intrigued and some were provoked. What I realize now is that you don't need a huge test or a well-planned experiment for these kind of models to spark off a discussion or debate. In theory, you can place them somewhere where people will walk by and discussions will happen. That's something I find truly fascinating in this project.



Added values

Apart from the initial goal of showing the possibilities of diversity through reflecting on one's style, personality and identity, I also wanted to highlight two added values that came forth through these discussions.



"If I inherited this, it's kept as furniture! And I guess my kids would use the red one to make a soapbox car!"

Man (59)

Reflection:

I was concerned about the use-and-throw culture I was met with at NAV. I'm curious if raising the status and emotional attachment of the rollator could have a positive effect on this matter. Some participants expressed that the rollators could get purposeful new lives after they have fulfilled their purpose as rollators.



"You should see the chaos at the day centre! All the rollators look the same. It's not even possible to get them in a colour."

Man (97)

Reflection:

This participant regularly visits a day centre. His immediate thought was that diversity could have a positive effect on what he named «the day centre chaos». He told me stories of how his friends at the day centre could end up back home with the wrong rollator, also meaning the wrong keys and the wrong phone. As we all understand, a bad situation that should not happen.

Visit to Topro

During the second to last week of the project, I reached out to Topro Mobility, a rollator manufacturer headquartered in Gjøvik, Norway. I was curious to hear their thoughts about my way of thinking and results. Would it make sense for them?

I packed up my models and took the train to Gjøvik. There I had a meeting with the head of research and development, Cosmin Cioroiu and product development engineer Arne Olav Eide. The meeting in general proved to be very rewarding. Cioroiu and Eide provided a lot of great feedback regarding the market, my way of thinking and the way forward.

Cioroiu argued that Norway is a great place to start pilot projects like this due to the many people willing to spend money on a premium design. This is in contrast to the southern European countries where cheaper alternatives are more commonly bought or the US where the traditional walker is still the most common solution.

"We could all be using rollators in the future! It's a matter that should concern us all. We should start the debate about how we would like them to be - now!"

Cosmin Cioroiu, Head of R&D - Topro Mobility

They both expressed that the project has a strong story behind it. Cioroiu argued my project acted like a thought provoker and it would be a great addition to the debate about the future of rollators. To take it one step further, he encouraged me to pitch the project to DOGA and try to get it exhibited through them to reach out to a larger audience, catch attention and fire up a proper debate.

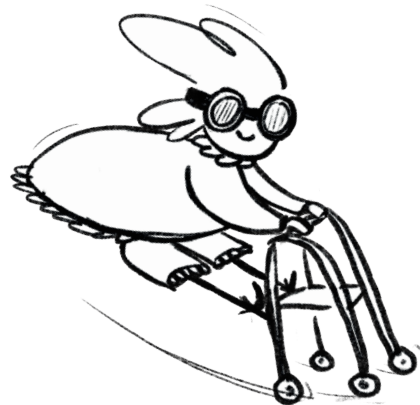


Relevance and importance

One final thing I would like to add before the conclusion. I was surprised to see that the design festival «3 Days of Design» in Copenhagen will this year exhibit a wooden rollator designed by Danish designer, Anker Bak. Much similar to my project, this rollator challenges the norm of what a rollator should look like and how it should be experienced. It is described on 3 Days of Design's website as «The Furniture We Need» (3 Days of Design, 2024).

It's not just in Copenhagen where the topic is on the agenda. In this year's Milano Design Week, Triennale di Milano exhibited a project curated by the Japanese designer Keiji Takeuchi, where 18 designers were challenged to design a walking stick for their future selves (Hahn, 2024). This of course led to some interesting results regarding both aesthetics and features, but most importantly it highlighted an assistive device as a product worthy of being exhibited on one of Europe's most lucrative stages.

These kinds of projects send a loud and clear message to the public about the relevance and importance of the topic and the challenges ahead. Anker Bak's design also showcases that it's possible to challenge the norm of a rollator and at the same time fulfil its functional purposes.



Chapter 8

Conclusion and reflection

Reminder of the hypothesis:

By designing more expressive assistive devices that show style and attitude, as well as providing people in need of assistive devices with a choice, it will be easier to embrace the product and use it with dignity and pride.

Conclusion and reflection

The hypothesis I have chosen for this report is not the easiest to answer, but it is still of great importance. I have gathered clear indications pointing in a direction that consolidates my hypothesis. I've encountered a wide diversity of preferences, and I've seen different designs being adored by some and appalled by others. We are individuals and we have different tastes and preferences. Through my various discussions, I have only encountered people who were living The New Chapter to the fullest. They deserve all the dignity and respect we possibly can offer, and to offer people dignity we have to offer a greater extent of choices and impact.

Cosmin Cioroiu from Topro Mobility encouraged me to reach out to organizations like DOGA to connect the project to a larger audience. As we have seen, the models tend to spark off lively discussions. Similarly to the projects of Anker Bak and Keiji Takeuchi, bringing the project to the public through an exhibition or some other medium seems like a natural next step.

Through my days at Bråset, I came to understand that those who are in the best physical and mental shape at the nursing homes often are the same people who have lived active lives and had good routines for socializing and physical exercise. One will assume that the coming generations will be inclined to live more inactive lives. That will naturally come with its consequences and maybe assistive devices will become a bigger part of our future lives than we might expect. Cioroiu argued that we could all be using rollators in the future and that it's high time we start debating what we would like our future to be like. Not tomorrow but now.



Final thanks

I would like to thank my two supervisors Hilde Angelfoss and Stein Rokseth. Not only for the great guidance through this project but for contributing to the many inspiring moments here at AHO.

Also, for being a great resource for this project, I would like to thank everyone at Bråset bo- og omsorgssenter, both the people living there and the many helpful people working there.

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I am also very grateful for the insight and reflections from Cosmin Cioroiu and Arne Olav Eide at Topro Mobility and your input on how I can take the project further in the future.

And thanks to Håkon Skorge for all the discussions and to all the other co-students who have been a great support throughout the whole project.

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Illustrations

Many of the illustrations shown in this report, I have co-created with Selma Moseng. We wanted to capture the light hearted and optimistic spirit of a person indulged in The New Chapter. The illustrations couldn't have become more perfect.



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