



# (Im)mobilities and life satisfaction in times of COVID-19: The case of older persons in Switzerland

## Research

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in mobilities worldwide. Physical movement and social contact are shown to be correlated to life satisfaction. In this paper we are interested in how during the pandemic other types of mobilities relate to life satisfaction. The paper draws on a survey (N=643) among persons aged 65+ in Switzerland. Results show that engagement in communicative mobilities are related to higher life satisfaction, imaginative mobilities only partially relate to life satisfaction, and virtual mobilities have no correlation.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, communicative mobilities, imaginative mobilities, virtual mobilities

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## INTRODUCTION

### *The End of Mobility as We Know It*

For long we have taken physical mobility for granted. Most of the research has been focusing on the hyper-mobile society (Musselwhite et al., 2015; Musselwhite & Haddad, 2010). There is an abundance of scholarship looking at various types of physical mobilities and how these are associated to higher subjective well-being for younger and older persons (De Vos et al., 2013; Nordbakke & Schwanen, 2014; Schwanen & Ziegler, 2011; Ziegler & Schwanen, 2011). In relation to older persons in particular, the independence and autonomy of exercising physical mobility contributes to this population's subjective well-being (Schwanen & Ziegler, 2011). But what happens if these taken-for-granted mobilities, from the basic ones of going out for a walk or going grocery shopping, taking public transport to visit friends, all

the way to taking a plane or a train for the holidays are disrupted by a global pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the daily news and invaded our lives since early spring 2020. In Switzerland, the decision was to have a partial lockdown: shops and services that were not providing or responding to basic needs were closed, social gatherings were limited to a maximum of five persons, and people were advised to leave the house only if necessary. Persons aged 65 and over, and those with an underlying health condition were identified as especially vulnerable and were particularly recommended to remain secluded and avoid contact with others. Because of the absence of a complete lockdown like, for instance, the ones in Italy or France, we decided to use the terms partial



confinement and semi-confinement throughout this paper.

The literature acknowledges that there are various forms of mobilities which are not limited to the physical ones. In this paper we draw on the definition of Ziegler and Schwanen (2011), who “conceptualize mobilities as the overcoming of any type of distance between a here and a there, which can be situated in physical, electronic, social, psychological or other kinds of space” (Ziegler & Schwanen, 2011, p. 758). In this paper we look at the alternative forms of mobilities in which older persons engaged during a period of reduced physical mobility or even immobility, and the extent to which these forms of mobility are related to life satisfaction.

We rooted the conceptualization of our survey in the new mobilities paradigm, which approaches mobilities in a broad sense. It considers mobilities as not being only limited to corporeal movement or travel, but also as encompassing other forms of mobility (Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006). According to Urry (2007), mobilities comprise imaginative travel through media, photos, books, and television; virtual travel via the Internet; communicative travel using various technologies, such as text messages, Skype, e-mails, and so on, the physical movement of objects, and corporeal travel.

Confronted with a unique situation, that of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to restrictive measures in most of the world – some marked by recommended confinement, and others by a total lockdown – people were compelled to adapt their behaviors, often reducing physical mobility, and engage in other forms of mobilities. Therefore, our research question is: which forms of alternative mobilities are associated with older persons’ life satisfaction?

The new mobilities paradigm has already been applied to older populations based on the assumption that once they experience a decrease in physical mobility due to old age, they can compensate by engaging in other forms of alternative mobilities (Ciobanu & Hunter, 2017; Ziegler & Schwanen, 2011). Therefore, given that COVID-19 semi-confinement was particularly focused on limiting older persons’ physical mobility to protect them from infection,

studying other forms of mobilities in this context and in this population is particularly pertinent.

The paper is innovative in the following two ways: 1) Most of the literature on the link between mobilities and different indicators of subjective well-being has been focused on physical mobilities, and there is a paucity of research exploring other forms of mobilities – particularly virtual and imaginative – and their relation to life satisfaction, which we aim to contribute to; 2) We draw on an original survey conducted during this unusual health crisis.

The article is structured into five parts: we start with a theoretical anchoring of our paper in the literature on communicative, imaginative, and virtual mobilities and subjective well-being, then we present our data and methods, followed by our empirical findings, the discussion of our results, and finally the conclusions of the paper.

## CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNING

### *On Mobilities and Subjective Well-Being: A Theoretical Framework*

In the following section we discuss the concept of subjective well-being and how it has been linked to different forms of mobilities stemming from the new mobilities paradigm (Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007).

Subjective well-being is defined as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life as a whole” (Oishi et al., 2018, p. 1). This includes the personal perceptions and experiences of positive and negative emotions, as well as global and specific cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction (Proctor, 2014). Although the literature on subjective well-being and alternative mobilities types is scarce, the research that does exist largely focuses on the cognitive dimension (Chai & Kalyal, 2019; Heo et al., 2015). Therefore, we opted to use the concept of life satisfaction, a cognitive component of subjective well-being. Throughout the text, we use the terms life satisfaction and subjective well-being interchangeably.

There are two approaches to subjective well-being: the universalist and the contextualist. The former holds that subjective well-being is stable and



independent of time and place. The latter holds that subjective well-being is rooted in people's past experiences, aspirations, culture, and more generally context (Nordbakke & Schwanen, 2014). Given the existing research on the relationship between different factors – like health, social contact, physical mobility, etc. – and subjective well-being (De Vos et al., 2013; Deaton, 2008; Kööts-Ausmees & Realo, 2015; Nordbakke & Schwanen, 2014; Pinguart & Sorensen, 2000; Revord et al., 2018; Schwanen & Ziegler, 2011; Ziegler & Schwanen, 2011), we adhere to the contextual approach.

Studies exploring particularly the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on subjective well-being have also adopted this contextual approach. Pedraza and colleagues (2020) for instance, found that state-mandated measures aimed at restricting physical mobilities were associated with increased life dissatisfaction and anxiety. These state-mandated measures were also perceived as a type of social isolation, which had important negative consequences for individuals' subjective well-being (Anastasiou & Duquenne, 2021; Brooks et al., 2020; Clair et al., 2021). Some research has studied how, despite the negative correlation between reduced physical mobility and subjective well-being, individuals – and older adults in particular – were able to cope with this period. It was found that the most common coping strategies among older adults included outdoor activities, exercise, adhering to COVID-19 precautions, hobbies like reading, cooking, or listening to audiobooks, and social connection through various forms of communication (Finlay et al., 2021; Whitehead & Torossian, 2021).

### **Communicative Mobility**

If physical mobility can be used to reach out and meet others (Ziegler & Schwanen, 2011), similarly communicative mobility is a means to establish and maintain contact with friends and family. Both telephones and internet-based communication appear to be key in maintaining contact. Looking at Internet use, Heo and colleagues (2015) observe that this constitutes a tool for older persons to be in contact with others and exchange emotional support, which in its turn can lead to higher psychological well-being and life satisfaction. It is particularly the social component of Internet-mediated communication that brings about well-being and happiness (Chai &

Kalyal, 2019), and this even among the oldest-old (Sims et al., 2016). In this sense, the use of telephones also increases social connectedness and subjective well-being (Chai & Kalyal, 2019). The importance of communicative mobility has been studied also for older international migrants, for whom communication at a distance, mediated using technology, has been positively linked to quality of life (Zhang, 2016).

When comparing active to passive Internet use and their relation to life satisfaction, researchers found that active use for communication purposes is positively correlated to life satisfaction after the age of 63, while passive use for non-communicative activities like looking at content on a smartphone is negatively correlated to life satisfaction, and these relationships remain significant after controlling for social network size and interactions (Stevic et al., 2019). Stevic and colleagues (2019) explained the positive effect of the use of smartphones for communicative purposes among retirement-age individuals through the social compensation hypothesis and the social convoy model. With retirement, individuals experience a reduction in their social convoy, that is the various social relations (partner and family relations, friends, and neighbors and work colleagues) that accompany a person throughout their life course (Antonucci et al., 2013). The social compensation hypothesis holds that “individuals compensate for the lack of face-to-face friendships by extending their online social sphere” (Stevic et al., 2019, p. 3), with positive implications for their life satisfaction.

Moreover, a study particularly relevant for our research shows that the use of information and communications technology (ICT) for older persons aged 75 and over can increase subjective well-being through its facilitation of contact with family, which is especially important for frail persons (Fang et al., 2018). Specifically, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased interaction with friends and families through various forms of communication like phone calls, text messages, and video calls, was shown to be an important coping strategy for older adults (Finlay et al., 2021; Whitehead & Torossian, 2021). In fact, a study on older persons in Germany revealed that, during the first period of the pandemic, individuals who used the internet less frequently to stay in contact with friends and family reported lower



life satisfaction, increased loneliness, and more depressive symptoms than daily users (Hajek & König, 2021). Nonetheless, the relationship between different forms of communication and life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic is still not widely documented, and our research aims to fill this gap.

Following from this literature review, our first hypothesis is that frequent engagement in communicative mobility practices is associated with higher life satisfaction because it allows persons to stay in contact with others.

### *Imaginative Mobility*

In the category of imaginative mobility, one can include looking at photos, looking outside the window, media consumption, reading literature, and so on (Urry, 2007). Looking from the window appears to be a very important activity, particularly for those unable to leave their homes and for those whose physical mobilities are very limited (Musselwhite, 2018; Rowles, 1981). Drawing on qualitative interviews, Musselwhite (2018) shows that older persons with physical mobility impairments engage and indirectly participate in the outside community through window watching. Musselwhite (2018) investigates how this view from the inside to the outside helps these individuals “stay somewhat connected to the outside space that they cannot physically inhabit” (p. 274). The view from the window – whether rural or urban, whether marked by the presence or absence of passers-by – “served as a way of creating representations of life and help [individuals] engage and reflect on changes in lifestyles, it kept them part of society” (Musselwhite, 2018, p. 280). At the same time, looking from the window can also allow for indirect contact with nature, which enhances well-being (Kaplan Mintz et al., 2021; Kaplan, 2001). In fact, a quantitative study conducted during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Israel on adults of all ages demonstrated that individuals with high levels of nature views from windows reported higher subjective well-being than those with less nature views (Kaplan Mintz et al., 2021).

In a similar way, as physical connections to the outside world become more difficult with old age – and were restricted during our study’s period of partial confinement – they can be replaced by

memories and imaginative connections, which can also be formed through looking at photographs (Musselwhite, 2018). These feelings of inclusion in society enable people to experience a sense of belonging, even at a distance (Gehl, 2011), which in turn contributes to their life satisfaction (Massey et al., 2021). Despite this concept of belonging from a distance, and the importance of window views for individuals’ well-being (Kaplan Mintz et al., 2021; Peters & Halleran, 2021), not many studies have investigated the role of these imaginative mobilities in older adults’ life satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our second hypothesis is therefore that frequent engagement in imaginative mobility practices is correlated to higher life satisfaction.

### *Virtual Mobility*

To the best of our knowledge, there is no research linking virtual mobility using virtual travel or virtual museum visits to subjective well-being. While not focused on measures of subjective well-being, Winstead and colleagues (2013) looked at how social and spatial barriers are affected by the use of ICTs in assisted and independent living communities. They observed that physically bound participants who enjoyed visiting museums earlier in their lives appreciated having the newly discovered ability to look at art on the Internet. Moreover, older individuals used Google Maps to travel back to their hometowns and visit places they were attached to and described these activities in a positive manner. Because of these positive experiences among research participants, we can infer that virtual mobility may have a positive impact on life satisfaction. This therefore leads us to our third hypothesis: frequent engagement in virtual mobility practices is associated with higher life satisfaction.

## **METHODS**

The paper draws on an original survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the situation of persons aged 65 and over in Switzerland. We developed a survey in French and put it online through the platform LimeSurvey. The questionnaire was submitted and accepted by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Geneva. To obtain informed consent, we inserted one



question asking respondents if they accepted to have their answers used for scientific publications and presentations in conferences.

We applied a convenience sampling method and distributed the link to the questionnaire through the Platform of associations for older persons in Geneva, the University of Geneva website, one of the local newspapers in Geneva, and widely in our personal and institutional networks. The reason for the adoption of a convenience sampling method is the coronavirus health crisis, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to recruit and talk to participants in person, as well as the time constraints to gather information while the pandemic restrictions were still in place.

Data were collected from April 18 to May 19, 2020, which fell within the period of recommended limited mobility in Switzerland, during which a semi-confinement was in place. The resulting data were cleaned and analyzed with the use of SPSS statistical software.

In total, 787 individuals 65 and older participated to the research, either by completing the questionnaire themselves ( $n=748$ ) or with the help of a friend or relative with internet access ( $n=39$ ). Among these, we excluded from the working sample 74 people who did not respond to all the Satisfaction with Life Scale items, and an additional 70 who did not respond to other interest variables included in our analysis, leaving us with 643 participants. Out of them 67.3% are women and 32.7% men. The mean age in our working sample is 73.3 years old, with a standard deviation of 5.75.

Because of the convenience sampling method, our sample of individuals 65 and older is composed of an overrepresentation of individuals with a tertiary level of education (65.6% had a tertiary level of education and 29.9% a secondary level, in comparison to the Swiss population of 65 and over, with 20.2% at a tertiary education level and 49.1% at a secondary level) (FSO, 2018). See [Table 1](#) for more descriptive statistics on the composition of our sample.

### Measures

Our dependent variable is life satisfaction, measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), a 5-item scale assessing the cognitive

dimension of subjective well-being, and one of the most frequently used scales in subjective well-being research (Maddux, 2018). The scale is composed of the following items:

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Participants were instructed to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a 7-point scale, ranging from “1=strongly disagree” to “7=strongly agree”. The answers for each item were then added to create an individual score, ranging from 5 to 35. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.87. Our sample had a mean life satisfaction score of 28.8 and standard deviation of 5.0. These results were not very different from the Swiss population of 65 and older as another study on a representative sample of the Swiss population of 65 and older showed a mean life satisfaction score of 26.8 and standard deviation of 5.4 (Baeriswyl & Oris, 2021). The slight difference between the mean life satisfaction of our sample and that of the Swiss population 65 and older can be attributed to the composition of our sample: we had an overrepresentation of healthy and highly educated individuals, and these aspects tend to positively influence life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999).

Our key independent variables are indicators of communicative mobility, imaginative mobility, and virtual mobility during the partial confinement period. We used two separate questions for each type of mobility.

Because for the independent variables that we study – alternative forms of mobilities – there are no validated questions, to the best of our knowledge, we therefore elaborated ourselves the questions, taking inspiration in the existing literature (Ciobanu & Hunter, 2017; Urry, 2007).

For communicative mobility we asked, “In the past week, how often have you spoken on the phone?” as well as, “Last week, how often did you use digital means to communicate with friends or family?”. For imaginative mobility we asked, “People sometimes



spend time looking out the window. This may be looking at passers-by, street life or nature. In the past week, how often have you done this?" and, "In the past week, how often have you looked at photos?". Possible answer categories for these questions were "Never", "Once during the week", "Two to three times during the week", "Four to six times during the week", "Every day, less than three hours" and "Every day, three hours or more". We then recoded the first two answer choices as "Once a week or less", the next two as "Several times a week" and the last two as "Every day". For virtual mobility we asked, "In the past week, have you visited any museums and/or exhibitions on the Internet?" as well as, "In the past week, have you researched possible travel destinations on the Internet?". Answer choices were "Yes" or "No". See [Table 2](#) for descriptive statistics of these variables.

Basing ourselves on the life satisfaction and mobilities literature, we controlled our analyses of the links between life satisfaction and alternative mobilities for the following sociodemographic variables: sex, age, education level, relationship status, whether the participant has children, and self-rated health. We coded education level into three categories: without post-compulsory training, secondary, and tertiary. We coded relationship status in two categories: single individuals, and individuals in a partnership (whether married or in another form of relationship). We measured self-rated health by asking participants, "How do you rate your health in general?". Answer choices were "Very good", "Good", "Fairly good", "Bad", and "Very bad". We then created a dichotomous variable with the first two categories signifying good health status, and the last three representing average/bad health status.

In addition, we controlled our analyses for the two following personal resources variables: praying and interaction with neighbors during the partial confinement period. We included the act of praying because religiosity has been found to positively impact life satisfaction (Amit, 2010), and we measured it as a dichotomous variable (has not prayed the previous week, has prayed the previous week). We also included interaction with neighbors as a form of social contact during a time when contact was limited due to partial confinement, as social contact has been found to be positively correlated with life satisfaction (Warr et al., 2004). We measured

this by asking participants which of the following interactions they have had with their neighbors: "None", "Said hello", "Courtesy visits", "Helped each other". We then created a dichotomous variable by grouping the first two categories in "Minimal to no interaction" and the latter two in "Strong interaction". Moreover, we controlled our analyses for self-related health and level of education.

We did not control for physical mobility because most of our participants (92.7%) went out of the house at least once during the semi-confinement, whether it was to walk the dog, go to the garden, or go grocery shopping. Despite this ability to go out, the restrictions on physical mobility were undeniable, as nonessential businesses were closed and face-to-face meetings were strongly discouraged.

### Data Analysis

We ran two linear regression models on the life satisfaction score. In the first model, we tested the 6 mobility variables, and in the second we added the sociodemographic and personal resources variables as control variables. See [Table 3](#) for the final models of the regression results.

## RESULTS

Most of our working sample engaged in forms of communicative mobilities during partial confinement: 53.8% reported talking on the phone every day, 42.6% did the activity several times a week, while only 3.6% did this once a week or less. Moreover, 68.6% of our sample used digital means to communicate every day, 26.0% did so several times a week, and 5.4% did so once a week or less.

Engagement in imaginative mobilities during partial confinement varied: 36.4% reported looking out the window every day, 32.3% did this several times a week, and 31.3% did this once a week or less. The other measure of imaginative mobility – looking at photos – was less prominent among our participants: 8.1% did this every day, 28.9% did this several times a week, while 63.0% did this once a week or less.

Most of our working sample did not engage in imaginative mobilities during this period: only 18.8% reported having visited museums or expositions on



the internet, and only 12.8% reported having searched travel destinations on the internet.

[Table 3](#) shows that the importance of communicative mobility linked to life satisfaction is confirmed, supporting our first hypothesis. The analysis shows that individuals who talked on the phone once a week or less reported lower life satisfaction in comparison to those who talked on the phone every day. Moreover, those who use digital means to communicate with friends and family only once a week or less report lower life satisfaction than those who do so every day. These relationships remain significant even after controlling for sociodemographic and personal resources variables.

The results for the relationship between imaginative mobility and life satisfaction vary. Looking outside the window during this period is significantly associated to life satisfaction. Those who looked out the window every day reported higher life satisfaction than those who did it several times a week, but there is no significant difference between those who only did the activity once a week or less and those who did it every day. On the other hand, looking at photos during the partial confinement period is not significantly related to life satisfaction. Our second hypothesis is thus only partially confirmed.

In terms of virtual mobility, neither of the two virtual mobility variables are significantly correlated with life satisfaction. Our third hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Other variables that are significantly and positively linked to life satisfaction are being in a relationship and being in good health. Having had strong interactions with neighbors and having prayed during the partial confinement are also positively correlated with life satisfaction, but at a significance level between 0.05 and 0.10.

## DISCUSSION

### *The Importance of Communicative Mobilities*

Whether directly or indirectly, all forms of mobilities are seen as means of connecting to others and connecting to our environment, but our study shows that among individuals 65 and older, it is primarily

communicating with others that positively correlates to life satisfaction during the public health crisis. As Stevic and colleagues (2019) and Hajek and König (2021) found, smartphone and internet use for communicative purposes is positively associated with life satisfaction. Our study confirms this relationship between internet use and life satisfaction, if internet use implies communicative purposes, for we also found that internet use for visiting museums or researching travel destinations has no correlation to life satisfaction.

During a period in which physical socialization was severely restricted and in which older individuals were deemed a vulnerable population at risk of severe consequences due to COVID-19, this study highlights the importance of communicative mobilities that promote social support and social connectedness, whether through Internet-based means or more classic telephone communication. Social support, which can be conceptualized either as “the actual transfer of advice, aid, and affect through interpersonal networks during a specific period of time” (Liang et al., 2001, p. 512) or as “a perception of hypothetical resource availability” (Liang et al., 2001, p. 512) has been shown to be a predictor of life satisfaction in older adulthood and in general across all ages (Aquino et al., 1996; Siedlecki et al., 2014). This paper underlines that, during a pandemic that physically drove individuals apart, social connectedness is still possible using communicative mobilities, and the more frequent use of these mobilities is correlated to higher life satisfaction.

The importance of social interaction for life satisfaction is further shown by two of our control variables: being in a relationship and, to a lesser extent, having had a strong interaction with neighbors during the partial confinement period. This confirms the existing literature stating that having meaningful relationships is important to life satisfaction (Baeriswyl & Oris, 2021; Revord et al., 2018).

To the best of our knowledge, only one study (Kaplan Mintz et al., 2021) has investigated the relationship between window views and subjective well-being during COVID-19, but it focuses primarily on the presence of nature in the window views, rather than on the activity of looking outside the window itself. Moreover, the study does not specify the



frequency of participants' window watching, and it includes adults of all ages instead of focusing on older adults, for which the implications of window watching on their subjective well-being may be different. Our paper therefore adds an additional element to the literature on the subject.

We therefore base ourselves on Musselwhite's (2018) study, which states that older persons indirectly participate in the outside community through window watching. Our results show that those who looked out the window every day reported a higher life satisfaction than those who did the activity several times a week. We can presume that looking out the window more often can be likened to greater social participation, albeit indirect, and since social participation is correlated with subjective well-being measures (Baeriswyl & Oris, 2021), this can explain these results. However, if looking out the window is a proxy for indirect social participation, we would expect that those who looked out the window only once a week or less would also report lower life satisfaction in comparison to those who did it every day, but this was not the case. One way to explain this is to presume that those who rarely or never look out the window do not have a need for this indirect social participation, and this activity is therefore not related to their life satisfaction.

For older persons with reduced mobility, looking outside the window is an important pass time activity. In a period of reduced physical mobility, as was the semi-confinement, it became even more important. According to Musselwhite (2018), it is less important what somebody sees, rather it is important to broaden one's horizon to the space and environment outside one's home, which can be experienced as a limited space during this period. However, according to Kaplan Mintz and colleagues' study (2021), what somebody sees is important indeed: windows with greater views of nature are related to higher levels of subjective well-being. Our study did not include variables on the type of scenery viewed from participants' windows. Nonetheless, whether the views are of nature or of urban settings, by looking outside from the window, people can project themselves in mobility, and when seeing others outside, those who are immobile can experience a form of mobility by proxy.

Once again, we have not found any research on the relationship between looking at photos – our second imaginative mobility variable – and life satisfaction. It is therefore difficult to explain the absence of relationship between these two variables. We can however think that looking at photos can generate two different reactions: one the one hand it can trigger feelings of nostalgia, which have been found to be positively correlated with life satisfaction (Rao et al., 2018), as they “may render the present self more positive and promote a brighter outlook on the future” (Ye et al., 2018, p. 1749). On the other hand, it can act as a reminder of the physical divisiveness brought about by the pandemic. These opposing reactions may thus cancel each other out and explain the non-significance of this type of imaginative mobility in relation to life satisfaction.

The lack of correlation between either virtual mobility variable and life satisfaction can be explained by the fact that neither of these mobility variables concern any type of social participation or social connectedness.

Moreover, we find good self-reported health to be positively associated with life satisfaction, which replicates existing research findings (Deaton, 2008; Kööts-Ausmees & Realo, 2015; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000). And lastly, having prayed during partial confinement is positively associated with life satisfaction, which is congruent to the found relationship between religiosity and our dependent variable (Amit, 2010).

The general hypothesis that we started with, that mobilities as conceived by the New Mobilities Paradigm (Urry, 2007) can constitute important resources, notably in the context of reduced physical mobility imposed by the semi-confinement and that it would have an impact on well-being, is not globally confirmed. Yet, when looking at virtual, communicative, and imaginative mobilities, we conclude that what is of importance to life satisfaction in this pandemic context is social interaction, whether direct or indirect.

## LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic and the partial confinement that was linked with it provided us with a unique situation. Researchers in social sciences quickly





mobilized to study the impact of the public health crisis at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Gamba et al., 2020). The same variables that have shaped individuals' lives have also had an impact on the conditions under which we conducted research. The main limitation of this study is the fact that the sample on which it is based is not representative, as we were not able to capture the entire diversity of Switzerland's socio-economic levels. To accurately analyze both subjective evaluations and objective behaviors, it was essential to collect our data during the semi-confinement. Because of this, we had to rely on a convenience sampling method, which involved an internet-based survey. Consequently, our respondents were persons with internet connection, or who were interviewed by friends or family. Despite our awareness of this sample limitation, this was the only way we could reach individuals aged 65 and over given the time and contextual restraints.

Another limitation is that our study does not investigate whether communicative, imaginative, and virtual mobilities compensate for physical ones, as we do not analyze the change in mobilities before partial confinement and during it, but rather our research analyzed whether they constitute potential resources in a context that limits physical mobilities.

Given the importance of communicative mobilities for life satisfaction among older persons, it would be beneficial for future policies to invest in literacy and access to information and communication technologies. These would equip older individuals with the necessary reserves (Cullati et al., 2018) to activate communication channels when confronted with physical immobility brought about by old age.

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**Table 1. Sociodemographic Variables and Distribution Among Working Sample**

Sociodemographic variable	n	Distribution (%)
Age		Min: 65 Max: 99 Mean: 73.3 Std. Deviation: 5.75
Gender		
Female	433	67.3
Male	210	32.7
Education		
Without post-compulsory training	29	4.5
Secondary	192	29.9
Tertiary	422	65.6
Relationship status		
Single	230	35.8
In a relationship	413	64.2
Children		
No children	113	17.6
Has at least 1 child	530	82.4
Region / Canton of Residence*		
Geneva	296	46.0
Vaud	165	25.7
Other	182	28.3

\* In Switzerland, canton does not only have a geographical meaning, but also has a political significance.

**Table 2. Mobility Variables and Distribution Among Working Sample**

Mobility variable	n	Distribution (%)
Frequency of talking on the phone during partial confinement		
Every day	346	53.8
Several times a week	274	42.6
Once a week or less	23	3.6
Freq. of digital means use for communication during partial confinement		
Every day	441	68.6
Several times a week	167	26.0
Once a week or less	35	5.4
Freq. of looking out the window during partial confinement		
Every day	234	36.4
Several times a week	208	32.3
Once a week or less	201	31.3
Freq. of looking at photos during partial confinement		
Every day	52	8.1
Several times a week	186	28.9
Once a week or less	405	63.0
Visited museums or expositions on the internet during partial confinement		
Yes	121	18.8
No	522	81.2
Searched travel destination on the internet during partial confinement		
Yes	82	12.8
No	561	87.2

**NOTE:** Looking at the variable distribution at first glance ([Table 2](#)), one may hypothesize that the non-significance of the relationship may be due to the small number of individuals who looked at photos every day (n=52) and the fact that “Every day” is the reference category in the regression. However, we also tried changing the reference category to “Once a week or less” but the relationship between frequency of looking at photos and life satisfaction did not change. We thus kept the reference category as “Every day” to be consistent with the other variables in the regression.



**Table 3. Linear Regression Analyses: The Relationship Between Communicative, Virtual, and Imaginative Mobilities, and Life Satisfaction (n=643)**

	Dependent variable: Life Satisfaction Scale					
	Model 1: Mobility variables			Model 2: + Sociodemographic and personal resources		
	Coef.	Std. Error	Sig.	Coef.	Std. Error	Sig.
Freq. of talking on phone during partial confinement						
Every day	Ref.			Ref.		
Several times a week	-0.416	0.414	0.315	-2.75	0.405	0.498
Once a week or less	-2.972**	1.081	0.006	-2.232*	1.051	0.034
Freq. of digital means use for comm. During partial confinement						
Every day	Ref.			Ref.		
Several times a week	-0.033	0.463	0.943	-0.163	0.446	0.715
Once a week or less	-2.407**	0.880	0.006	-2.069*	0.867	0.017
Freq. of looking out the window during partial confinement						
Every day	Ref.			Ref.		
Several times a week	-0.942*	0.477	0.049	-0.974*	0.461	0.035
Once a week or less	-0.033	0.481	0.946	0.038	0.471	0.937
Freq. of looking at photos during partial confinement						
Every day	Ref.			Ref.		
Several times a week	0.341	0.780	0.662	0.374	0.748	0.617
Once a week or less	-0.026	0.738	0.972	0.134	0.712	0.851
Visited museums or expositions on internet during partial confinement (Ref: Did not do so)	-0.614	0.505	0.225	-0.588	0.490	0.231
Searched travel destination on the internet partial confinement (Ref: Did not do so)	0.279	0.589	0.635	0.350	0.572	0.541
Male (Ref: Female)				-0.730	0.438	0.096
Age				0.052	0.035	0.140
Education level						
Tertiary				Ref.		



Secondary				-0.552	0.423	0.193
Without post-compulsory training				1.271	0.955	0.184
In a relationship (Ref: Not in a relationship)				1.423**	0.428	0.001
No children (Ref: Has children)				0.638	0.511	0.213
Strong interaction w/ neighbors (Ref: Minimal to no interaction)				0.739	0.392	0.060
Health: Average to bad (Ref: Good health)				-2.869***	0.449	<0.001
Prayed during partial confinement						
No				Ref.		
Yes				0.789	0.418	0.059
Missing				0.729	0.652	0.265