

You are kindly invited to the public defense to obtain the degree of

DOCTOR OF ADULT EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

of Bas Dikmans

Which will take place on

November 4 at 5 pm-7 pm CET

Aula D.0.03 ([building D](#)) – [VUB Main Campus Brussels](#)

Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussel

LIVES, PLACES AND DISADVANTAGED URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS: RETHINKING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN LATER LIFE

JURY

INTERNAL:

**Prof. Dr. Geert Vandermeersche, Vrije
Universiteit Brussels, Belgium
(VUB) (Chair)**

**Prof. Dr. Joachim Cohen, Vrije
Universiteit Brussels, Belgium
(VUB)**

**Dr. Daan Duppen, Vrije Universiteit
Brussels, Belgium (VUB)**

**Prof. Dr. An-Sofie Smetcoren, Vrije
Universiteit Brussels, Belgium
(VUB)**

EXTERNAL:

Prof. Dr. Maja Ročak, Zuyd Hogeschool, Sittard, the Netherlands

Prof. Dr. Sandra Torres, Uppsala Universitet, Sweden (UU)

PROMOTOR(S)

**Prof. Dr. Sarah Dury, Vrije Universiteit
Brussels, Belgium (VUB)**

**Prof. Dr. Liesbeth De Donder, Vrije
Universiteit Brussels, Belgium
(VUB)**

**Prof. Dr. Rodrigo Serrat, Universitat de
Barcelona, Spain (UB)**

Coming by car? Please [register your licence plate](#) in advance to have access to the campus.

You are also invited to the reception afterwards.

Please confirm your attendance before **October 28** by filling out this [form](#).

SUMMARY

This dissertation explores older adults' civic engagement in relation to the places where they live. Civic engagement includes formal volunteering, political participation, informal help, associational membership and digital forms of engagement. Using an environmental and life-course approach, the dissertation examines how civic engagement unfolds across time and place, with a focus on older adults living in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods and those with migration backgrounds. As such, life-story interviews were conducted.

Results indicate that older adults' civic engagement in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods is shaped by particular social and physical neighborhood features. Furthermore, long-term residents speak about how neighborhood changes have reduced social networks. Yet, older adults also demonstrate agency, resilience and resistance through their civic engagement. Next to this, older migrant's life stories indicate that civic engagement does not only take place in neighborhoods, but it can be family-based or transnational as well. Overall, these findings suggest that civic engagement is dynamic and relational, that older adults contribute to their environments in diverse ways, and that we need to consider a plural notion of place, not only limited to neighborhoods, for fostering inclusive civic engagement in later life.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Educational Background

2011-2014

Bachelor in cultural anthropology and development sciences, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen

2015-2016

MA in Latin American Studies, Universiteit van Amsterdam

2017-2019

MSC in Cultures and Development Studies, KU Leuven

Key publications

Dikmans, B., Serrat, R., Stegen, H., Vercauteren, T., De Donder, L., & Dury, S. (2025). "Life course of place": Older adults' social networks and informal help amidst urban change. *Urban Planning*, 10: 9909.

Dikmans, B., Dury, S., & De Donder, L. (2025). Older people living in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. In: R. Serrat, *Civic Engagement in Later Life*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.