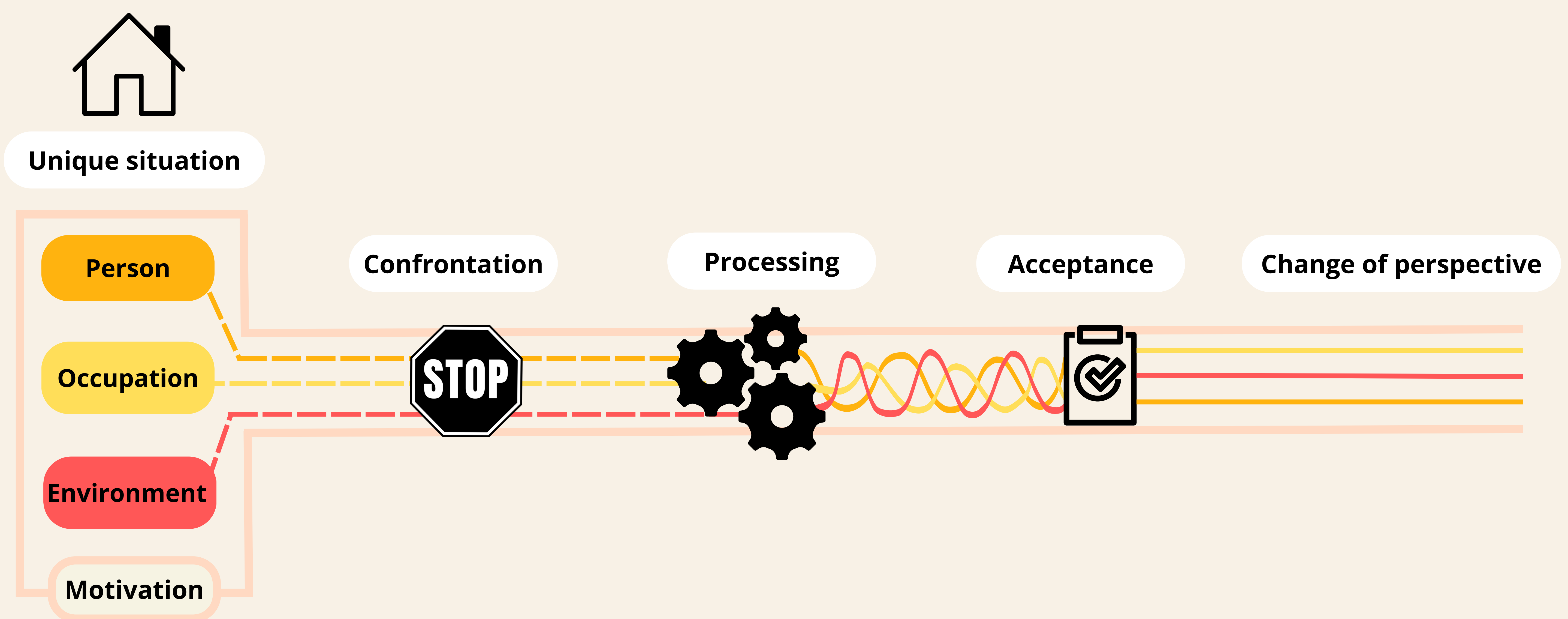


# The home environment as an enriched environment for people with chronic spinal cord injury

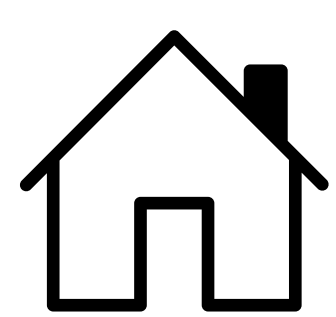
Delooz, E.<sup>1</sup>, Piškur B<sup>1,2</sup>, Bonnechère B.<sup>1,3</sup>, Spooren A.<sup>1,3</sup>

**Introduction:** Chronic patients with spinal cord injury (c-pwSCI) who live in the home environment often experience challenges in engaging in meaningful activities. However, it remains unclear what underlies these challenges and how they take shape in daily life. Little is known about which elements play a role in either supporting or hindering engagement in meaningful activities, and even less about how possible elements may interact as part of a process. Gaining insight into this dynamic is crucial for understanding how c-pwSCI navigate their everyday activities. The aim of this research is therefore to explore the processes that underlie engagement in meaningful activities among c-pwSCI living at home.

**Method:** A rapid ethnography was employed, incorporating rich data gathered through data-triangulation using multiple data collection methods to explore the experiences of five male c-pwSCI living in Belgium and The Netherlands (C2-C6). These methods included observations during meaningful activities, semi-structured interviews, and the collection of photographs capturing activities and the surrounding environment in the home environment.



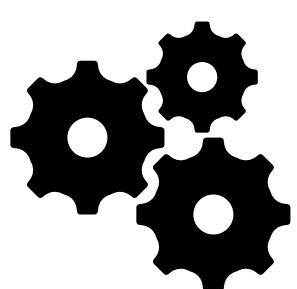
## Results:



**Unique situation:** Consists of the person, the environment, and the occupation. The person is living with a cervical spinal cord injury in a home context. The environment is not aligned with the new condition and previously meaningful occupations are disrupted. Motivation surrounds this triad: the strong desire to participate and remain engaged continues to be present. However, because person, environment, and occupation are not well aligned, this motivation cannot always be realized in action, which creates tension.



**Confrontation:** When the misalignment between person, environment, and occupation becomes apparent, the person is confronted with loss and dependency. *"Everything I used to do in and around the house, all the little tasks, it has almost all disappeared."* This confrontation highlights the gap between what matters and what is possible.



**Processing:** The confrontation initiates a process of coping and adjustment. The individual starts to work through the emotional impact and gradually explores what new opportunities might exist: *"It is immense, to place all of that in your head and process it."*



**Acceptance:** Involves acknowledging the new condition and redefining what participation can look like. *"The most important thing is that you must accept that you have to accept your new condition."* Acceptance is not passive but opens the way to new forms of engagement.



**Change of perspective:** Through acceptance, perspective shifts. Adaptations become possible – such as home modifications, sharing or dividing tasks, or contributing in alternative roles. *"I cannot work on the car, but I can explain things. I can share my knowledge."* In this way, participation is reshaped, and motivation continues to play a key role in sustaining involvement: *"Now I have found my way in it, but it really takes time. You live it in another way."*

**Conclusion:** This study highlights how c-pwSCI experience a dynamic process when person, environment, occupation and motivation are not aligned. Through processing and acceptance, participants gradually shift their perspective, finding alternative ways to remain engaged in meaningful occupations, often by redefining roles or adapting tasks. These perspective shifts are closely tied to the possibilities and limitations of the environment: adaptations in the home, opportunities for social contribution, and supportive contexts all create conditions that enable new forms of engagement in meaningful activities. In this way, the home can evolve into an enriched environment, in which barriers are reduced and facilitators become more salient. Such an environment not only sustains engagement but may also help bridge the intention-behaviour gap, where intentions to act do not automatically lead to actual engagement in meaningful activities.

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