

Tactics, Spaces, and Networks of Older People in the City: A Spatial-Ethnographic Study

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Abstract: Our societies are ageing to an unprecedented level. This ongoing demographic process presents our cities, architecture, and urban space with new challenges, prompting us to creatively reconsider well-known spatial and urban strategies. While we have made substantial progress in defining frameworks that seek to increase age-friendliness, such as the WHO's "Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide," which calls for better accessibility and increased embedment and participation of older people within our communities, we have still a fairly limited understanding of how older people actually partake in urban life and how they root themselves within its context, particularly from a spatial point of view. The work presented in this article seeks to bridge this perceived gap in current research by contributing a qualitative spatial ethnographic pilot study from the field of architecture and urbanism that explores the experiential realm of the city and the lived spaces of older people, specifically with regards to the tactics older people use in order to root themselves and partake in the city. The lived context is often far more diverse and complex than quantitative studies might imply, pointing to a need to redefine common assumptions about community, participation, and locality. The aim of the study is neither to verify a hypothesis nor to offer straightforward solutions, but to uncover the often hidden dimensions of older age, in order to generate new questions and ambitions. The wider aim of the research is to exceed the demand for an "accessible city" implemented through various practical measures by uncovering significant themes within the daily lives of older people that have the capacity to provide starting points for new urban and spatial strategies for the future city.

Keywords: Ageing, Urban Context, Spatial Tactics, Spatial Ethnography, the Everyday, Society

Research Premise

The search for age-friendly cities and communities has become a significant issue for social policy and governmental frameworks, triggered largely by recent demographic developments of our over-ageing societies and the predicted economic implications that this development may bring. Given that by 2030, a quarter of the world's urban population will be over sixty years old (WHO 2013), this is becoming an urgent issue. Whilst recent research into ageing has resulted in much-needed new social, legal, and health-related guidelines, research into old age and space is often limited to technological and practical issues. The interdisciplinary debate offers important new insights into ethical, social, economic, and cultural issues of old age but often excludes discourses about space. Terminologies such as neighbourhood, community, and participation are discussed, particularly in terms of a greater inclusion of older people within these, but research rarely breaks into a deeper exploration of these constituents in terms of space. New ageing concepts, such as "Aging in community" (Blanchard 2013; Thomas and Blanchard 2009), explore important dimensions between the individual older person and the community, yet community is still primarily discussed as a social network, or social capital, rather than being explored in its spatial dimension.

The disciplines of architecture and urban design have fostered important concepts that help increase the independence and inclusion of older people, such as lifetime homes, lifetime neighbourhoods, kangaroo-living, cohousing, sheltered living and multigenerational housing, to name but a few. Whilst these new impulses make important contributions, their focus on building

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