



The elderly as a catalyst in public space

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Introduction

The space of our cities reflects values that we as a society collectively define, therefore the arrangements of forms, objects, and materials are expressions of our cultural values and political convictions. [Hauderowicz and Ly Serena, 2020] Our spaces tend to say a lot about how we view ageing and how we treat the elderly in comparison with other age groups. The focus of this article is to understand what the needs for different age groups in open spaces are and what are the criteria's that needs to be considered when designing urban space.

What is an age-inclusive public space?

An age-inclusive space is focusing on accommodating the interplay between "changing both individual competences (needs), and the changing constraints of the environmental context, and refers to the spatiality where people of different ages may converge. [Rowles and Bernard, 2013].

"The less competent the individual, the greater the impact of environmental factors on that individual." [Iwarsson and Stahl,2012]

Why age-inclusive public spaces are important?

Age-inclusive spaces are important firstly for "elderly" people, because is a key environment for establishing a sense of belonging to society and the mainstream of life. [Hauderowicz and Ly Serena, 2020]. Also, by accommodating the aging individual contributes to diversity in public space, strengthening its quality as a scene for meeting a broad range of people. Having a diverse public life is essential to the political function of public space, as the space where all people can legitimate their right to belong to society. [Wahl and Oswald, 2013]

What is elasticity defined as in public space?

Another step that needs to be considered is the importance we give to a specific space and that is "elasticity". The ability to see potential everywhere, and to make sure that we aren't developing a new typology of "age-inclusive" or, worse yet, "seniors" spaces to add to the existing patchworks of

programs and services within the modern city. [Benevolo,1975]. The notion of elasticity is the space where the act of changing one's level of engagement can take place. [Hauderowicz and Ly Serena, 2020]

Possibilities for elasticity can be found where the same spatial setting allows for a variety of public engagements and social encounters. [Kuma K.,2010]. Grand plazas, parks, and promenades are space where the flow of strangers and visitors often is so dominant that local neighbourhood identity dissolves in favour over more general and all-embracing city identity. Elasticity gives the changing human being the possibility to form individual participation within personal boundaries. [Hauderowicz and Ly Serena, 2020]

A great example is the nursing home De Drie Hoven, which is an inviting urbanity with various degrees of openness to social contact.

Here, the threshold is extended by half-doors, niches, seating areas, low walls, places for plants and furniture.



The threshold of senior housing of the care home De Overloop includes cover seating. It gives residents the opportunity to visit

each other without intruding on the private sphere of dwelling. The individual's sense of autonomy and control over their own environment is preserved, while opportunities for social encounter are provided. [Buchan and Hertzberger,2018]

Another example can be found in the Plaza Nicaragua by Flores y Pratts multiple possibilities for seating – alone, together with others, or amidst the scene-provide great freedom choice.



One can cross the square or stick to the paths, pass it by unnoticed or just briefly rest on its borders. Overlaps and juxtapositions between different elements of play, leisure, and recreation form a

nuanced landscape with great variety for many kinds of participation and social engagement.

a Child's Eye View

We discussed how the elderly can feel in the public space and their needs but at the opposite side, how public spaces feel for the younger?

Ensuring the safe movement of children and inspiring their spontaneous activities are key points to build Children-friendly public spaces. The method of" line space and point space" meets the basic safety need for children and uses different multi-level arrangements to accommodate their need. [Tim Gill, 2021]

What attracts people to a certain public space?

All activities, as specified by Gehl [2010], are essential here, including functional activities like commuting, social activities like children's play, and optional activities like walking. The way these activities are supported by the built environment has a big impact on the city's vitality. If there is a diverse range of intriguing places for individuals to encounter and open their social lives, an open space is essential. [Gehl ,2010]. As a result, people choose to use a public area if nearby amenities or activities meet their needs.

Based on the survey conducted by Rianne van Melik, 76% of Leeuwarden residents don't use the meeting room set up in one of the senior housing buildings since the service provided doesn't suit their needs. People in the survey claimed that going to the street market daily gave them a 'feel-good' feeling. [Melik and Pojpers,2017]. 'The existence of local facilities was considered as a significant factor in allegiances to neighborhood' for parents with young children. [Melik and Pojpers,2017]. People are drawn to a public area not only because of its design, but also because the meaning of the surroundings.

The diorama shows that even through the public space design is simple, together with the shops along the sides and the urban furniture, people have a reason to come to this urban space-offering because it offers them more opportunities.



How can Havenkwartier benefit and open for all ages?

By including this age-inclusive space in the Havenkwartier, interaction between different age groups can be improved in the public space without segregating them. The Green Boulevard can become an elastic place where people can meet and interact without feeling insecure or that their privacy is intruded. Furthermore, the commercial area and the shops near benefit the interaction and offer different opportunities based on age needs. Based on the case studies if the Green Boulevard will have fewer tall trees, people can have a clear vision of their surroundings and by using different elements of play, leisure, and recreation the social impact can maximize interaction between different age categories.

Conclusion

New public spaces tend to overrepresent attention to only certain age groups whereas elderly is neglected and forgot. [Hauderowicz and Ly Serena, 2020].

The population will continue to grow, and the number of aged people will continue to increase, thus so we should encourage people of all ages to use the urban space by designing it the right way. [Hauderowicz and Ly Serena, 2020]. By designing the space to meets the needs of the elderly –other group of people can be adjusted in the same environment (young people with disabilities, children).

Resources

Photography:

Photo — Max Guther

Herman Hertzberger -De Overloop, Almere-Haven,1984, Photography by Martin Charles

Flores y Prats, Plaza Nicaragua, Barcelona, 2005

Books

- [Hauderowicz and Ly Serena, 2020] -Kristian Ly Serena, Dominique Hauderowicz (2020). Age- inclusive public space
- [Gehl ,2010]-Cities of people-
- [Rowles and Bernard, 2013]- Rowles, G. D., & Bernard, M. 2013. Aging well and the environment: Towards an integrative model and research agenda for the future
- [Iwarsson and Stahl,2012]-Wahl, H.-W., Iwarsson, S., 2012. Ageing well and the environment: Towards an integrative model and research agenda for the future.
- [Wahl and Oswald, 2013]-Wahl, H.-W., & Oswald, F. 2013. Environmental gerontology: Making meaningful places for old age.
- [Benevolo,1975]-Benevolo, L. 1975. Die geschichte der stadt. Frankfurt am Main
- [Kuma K.,2010]-Kuma, K. 2010. Kyokai: A Japanese technique for articulating space.
- [Tim Gill, 2021]- Tim Gill, 2021. Urban playground: How child friendly planning and design can save cities.
- [Melik and Pojpers,2017]-Van Melik R., & Pijpers, R. 2017. Older people's self-selected spaces of encounter in urban ageing environments in the Netherlands. City & Community.

