



A study of housing typology and perceived age-friendliness in an established Hong Kong new town: A person-environment perspective



Yi Sun^{a,*}, David R. Phillips^b, Moses Wong^c

^a Department of Building and Real Estate, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

^b Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Lingnan University, Hong Kong

^c CUHK Jockey Club Institute of Ageing, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Housing typology
Age-friendly city
Well-being
P-E fit
Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Our study examines older people's perceptions towards the urban environment and their spatial experiences through a person-environment perspective. We argue that Person-Environment (P-E) fit is critical to older people's quality of life: positive environmental stimuli and personal adaptation competence have been held to influence this fit, and quality of fit will eventually affect interactions between older people and place. In a mixed-methods study, a context sensitive place audit was applied to a new town in Hong Kong, with a view to identifying strengths and weaknesses in the built environment and older people's own strategies of living. Through 302 questionnaires and three focus groups with older participants, the results revealed high appreciation of outdoor spaces, transportation and social participation. The findings also indicate a strong association between housing typology and perceived age-friendliness. People accommodated in public housing estates tended to accord higher scores to their living environment although social exclusion was identified among oldest-old respondents in particular. Older people's affective links with their living environment across time and their unique life-course experiences may help to explain their relatively relaxed attitudes when they face changes and hardships.

1. Introduction: urban environment and older persons

Demographic ageing is an almost global phenomenon in which East and Southeast Asian countries reveal most rapid growth and largest percentages (WHO, 2015). In this, a large segment of older people will be living in cities. Urban setting has a direct bearing on the quality of life of older people (Baars et al., 2006; Phillipson, 2015). This is because older people spend most of time in their local neighbourhoods and are therefore sensitive to changes in the urban environment (Buffel et al., 2012; Day, 2008; Phillips and Yeh, 1999; Phillipson, 2010). Rapid urbanization and its sometimes associated pathological effects (such as environmental degradation, lack of resources, neighbourhood decay, crime) could bring many challenges to living a healthy and purposeful life. Previous studies have shown that the quality of the built and social environment affects the action space of older people, which is likely to impact on their daily activities and social participation (Cerin et al., 2017; Phillips et al., 2005; Chui, 2008). As such, the interface between older people and environment needs to be articulated carefully, and a match between what environment can offer and what older people want will be critical to ageing in place in particular for Asian cities.

Theoretically, the concept of Person-Environment (P-E) fit would suggest that the well-being of older people depends on their spatial experiences when they use the environment and engage in different social relationships (Phillips et al., 2009). In the meantime, well-being is also dependent on older people's own adaptation strategies in the built environment. Insights from environmental gerontology highlight two interrelated aspects for ageing well. Environment, including the natural, built and social environments, could act as stimuli for older people's functioning and feelings. Correspondingly, older people's competence, for example, their health status and living capabilities, can influence their various degrees of adaptation to environmental changes. This will be a useful perspective to identify the interface between environment and people wherein synergies take place. It is important to bring environment into a systematic study so as to find out the 'best fit' in which older people actively interact with the environment and the extent it meets their needs.

Most studies in environmental gerontology to date have been in locations in Western countries. Scholarship in other contexts is only starting to emerge, with emphasis generally on various aspects of dwellings. To fill this gap, our study extends the focus of environmental

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: yi.sun@polyu.edu.hk (Y. Sun), phillips@ln.edu.hk (D.R. Phillips), moseswong@cuhk.edu.hk (M. Wong).

gerontology to the Asian context, examining P-E fit in an established new town in Hong Kong. The key research question in Hong Kong, where social policy takes on a strong characteristic of non-interventionism, is “how and to what extent do older people appreciate urban living?” Specifically, older people’s behavioural patterns will be examined to reflect their competence and habitability strategies in urban living. Older people’s perceptions on the built and social environment will be evaluated, based on World Health Organization (WHO)’s age-friendly city and communities (AFCC) concept (WHO, 2007).¹ This will help understand the advantages and weakness of environment and identify environmental stressors/press reported by older people themselves.

Our analysis is presented in four parts. First, the relationships between environment and ageing are reviewed. We note above that the interface between environmental press and competence is key to older people’s well-being. The contents of P-E fit are reviewed: existing studies suggest environment affects well-being through a variety of inter-related factors that are sited at different scales in relation to individuals. In the second part, we pay particular attention to the study of P-E fit in the Latin America and Asian countries and, after a comprehensive review, we argue that the spatial experience of people to a wide spectrum of environmental settings, as well as their ways of adaptation, should be highlighted. Mixed-methods research is reported in the third part, based on a case study of Sha Tin new town in Hong Kong. Our place audit synthesizes the merits from both the quantitative and qualitative research to identify strengths and weaknesses of the built environment as well as older people’s own surviving strategies. The conclusion discusses major findings that could shed light on future urban planning and design for age friendly community in Hong Kong and potentially other large cities in the wealthier areas of the Asia-Pacific region.

The urban context of Hong Kong makes population ageing an increasingly important issue, given its high density living environment, limited space and resources, high housing costs, and apparently more frequent extreme weather events. Socioeconomic conditions are crucial. In spite of the SAR’s high GDP per capita, it is reported that one in three older people in Hong Kong are living in poverty even if this is mediated by access for some to low cost rental housing and health care (HKSARG, 2016). A recent study of Hong Kong shows that older people has dis-integrated identity in society which becomes a source for societal alienation (Wong et al., 2017a). For those who are poor, society is hardly supportive and, for those who wish to work, there are insufficient employment opportunities. The elderly social care and support system in Hong Kong is highly dependent on services provided by a wide range of NGOs (many of which receive basic government subsidies or subventions). These agency-based elderly services in Hong Kong can create an emotional gap, meaning that it is becoming important to incorporate strongly the needs and voices of the older population, who should have a say in what the city offers (Sun et al., 2017a). This is very much in line with the WHO’s AFCC framework and network.

2. Ageing and places: a person-environment perspective

2.1. Person-Environment (P-E) fit

The dynamic relationships between environment and ageing have been studied in environmental gerontology adopting the ecological model of ageing. According to the model, older people’s embeddedness in various social and environmental contexts is contingent to different interfaces and forms of interactions between environment-related features and older people’s perceptions, identification and behaviours (Wahl et al., 2012). Environment is a constellation of socio-spatial relationships. Starting with the microsystem, the most immediate environment of an individual, environment includes the mesosystem

(such as family and home environment), exosystem (neighbourhood and communities) and macrosystem (such as culture, law, and political-economic structures) (Shaffer and Kipp, 2010). Older people confront, interact with and adapt to these systems every day, during which they gain spatial experience as well as developing ties towards their homes and places (Rodríguez-Rodríguez and Sánchez-González, 2016; Peace et al., 2006). There is a need to explore the equilibrium between the demanding characteristics of environment and people’s coping strategies – the P-E fit, developed, as advocated by Lawton and his colleagues (Lawton and Nahemow, 1973).

P-E fit emphasises two equally important elements. P is about a person’s competence, the basic capacities to survive that help satisfy human needs at different levels, in Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy, from satisfaction of basic psychological needs to a positive end of self-actualisation. Older people are not always the passive recipients of environmental demands. They can be active managers of their own health and well-being, through “selection, optimization, and compensation” (Baltes and Baltes, 1990), attempting to maximise access to health related resources and reduce age-related loss. Accordingly, older people may develop “environmental proactivity”, a state with increased personal capability to make use of resources, as well as an enhanced sense of mastering the environment and tackling with social relationships (Satariano, 2006). Given that competence ranges from low to high and may decline with ageing (including deterioration in mental and physical condition), the other extreme is the emergence of “environmental docility” in which the daily life routines are constrained by the characteristics of the environment (La Gory et al., 1985; Lawton, 1986).

Environment (E) is essential in a life-course which shapes people as social, intellectual and natural beings (Sack, 1993). Particularly for older people, environment potentially exhibits many “demanding characters”, consisting of environmental stressors and behaviour demands that can paralyze competence (leading to environmental “press”). Environment is one of the prominent factors affecting health and human functioning, in addition to the body, activities, and participation (Gitlin, 2003). Several pathways are available wherein older people achieve better physical and mental health through adaptive response to environment (Glass and Balfour, 2003). For example, if a place looks comfortable and inviting, older people would come to use it, becoming more likely to develop positive feelings about the environment, do more physical activities, and socialise with other people (possibly leading to accumulation of social capital).

Again, the environment invokes mental and psychological reflections among older residents about who they are and where they live. When people age, they may be prone to “staying put” and their daily life routines are likely to be constrained to the immediate environment of their homes. Consequently, older people are prone to developing stronger cognitive and affective ties with their local communities. This psychological appreciation of place is conducive to developing a self-identity among older people, whereby “social and individual stories are combined or become indivisible” (Klein, 2016, p. 219). A stronger territorial identification is often associated with a higher degree of self-control and self-efficacy, which are important for quality of life (Smith, 2009). Having these identities people can assist better understanding of a physical setting, sensitivity to any changes in it and eventually undertaking necessary behavioural responses so as to bring about a desirable change (Proshansky et al., 1983).

2.2. Rearticulating urban environment in connection to health and well-being

The best P-E fit illuminates a triangulation of interactions among individuals, places and others (e.g., friends, acquaintances and neighbours) (Gustafson, 2001). It is critical to create good environmental features that are in line with older people’s functional capability. The same person, with the same level of competence, who is capable of coping with a certain environmental press could be tipped into a state

¹ See http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/age_friendly_cities_network/en/.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7353844>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7353844>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)