

Linking the Built Environment, Activities and Well-Being: Examining the Stories among Older Adults during Ageing-in-Place

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Abstract : Under the background of the rapid development of China's ageing population, ageing-in-place has become a primary strategy to cope with this problem promoted by the Chinese government. However, most older adults currently living in old residential communities are insufficient to support their ageing-in-place. Therefore, exploring how to retrofit existing communities towards ageing-friendly standards to support older adults is essential for healthy ageing. To better cope with this issue, this study aims to shed light on the inter-relationship among the built environment, daily activities, and well-being of older adults in urban China. Using mixed research methods including GPS tracking, structured observation, and in-depth interview to examine: (a) what specific places or facilities are most commonly used by the elderly in the ageing-in-place process; (b) what specific built environment characteristics attract older adults in these frequently used places; (c) how has the use of these spaces impacted the well-being of older adults. Specifically, structured observation and GPS are used to record and map the older residents' behaviour and movement in Suzhou, China, a city with a highly aged population and suitable as a research case. Subsequently, a follow-up interview is conducted to explore what impact of activities and the built environment on their well-being. Results showed that for the elderly with good functional ability, the facilities promoted by the Chinese government to support ageing-in-place, such as community nursing homes for the aged, day-care centre, and activity centres for the aged, are rarely used by older adults. Additionally, older adults have their preferred activities and built environment characteristics that contribute to their well-being. Our findings indicate that a complex interrelationship between the built environment and activities can influence the well-being of the elderly. Further investigations are needed to understand how to support healthy ageing-in-place, especially in addition to providing permanent elder-ly-care facilities, but to attend to the design interventions that can enhance these particularly built environment characteristics to facilitate a healthy lifestyle in later life.

Keywords : older adults, built environment, spatial behavior, community activity, healthy ageing

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