

Attraktive Stadtquartiere für das Leben im Alter

– English Abstract –

Attractive Urban Neighbourhoods for the Elderly

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Attractive Urban Neighbourhoods for the Elderly

What living conditions should urban districts and neighbourhoods offer to the elderly so that they can live well? Evaluating follow-up research to 21 earlier Ex-WoSt (Experimental Housing and Urban Development) pilot projects and other urban development projects, the present review shows how planning approaches focusing on urban neighbourhoods provide quality of life to people of an advanced age.

Initial Situation and Reason for the Study

The possibilities and opportunities for leading one's everyday life in a creative and meaningful way depend to a large extent on the structure of the urban neighbourhood where one lives. The design of buildings and open areas, and their location in the district in question, are as important as the type and number of commercial, social and cultural services and uses on offer. From 1989 to 1995, the 21 individual pilot projects of the research programme 'The Elderly and their Residential Neighbourhoods' focused on new district-specific concepts in developing experimental housing and urban design projects with a view to improving the quality of life for elderly people at their places of residence. The pilot projects distinguished between inner-city neighbourhoods, housing estates and rural or suburban communities. At the time, housing and urban design targets were investigated in combination with social planning strategies. Even today, this combined approach appears promising.

Study Procedure

The present study takes another look at the earlier projects in order to evaluate the effects of the strategies developed at the time. In which way have the unfinished plans been completed and implemented? Did the concepts developed stand the test of everyday routines? In what way have they been affected by current developments in society? Have new approaches been integrated into the projects? If so, which ones? Have there been follow-up projects to the first 21 pilot studies? The present study evaluates a further 21 projects which propose good living conditions for elderly people, using interdisciplinary and integrative methods.

Findings of the Research Project

In view of the expected increasing proportion of older people in our society and the heterogeneous social structure of this age group (which will include more poor people and more with an ethnic-minority background), there is need for action. Currently available accommodation will not meet the demands – neither in terms of quantity nor of quality. Apart from the possibility of adapting urban quarters to requirements for a different demographic structure, we particularly need housing and urban design projects with cultural sensitivities and projects which help people to help themselves, even though their financial resources may be small.

The 'neighbourhood approach' to planning represents a context-specific, interdisciplinary, user-related perspective and forms the basis for multi-dimensional planning concepts which propose a whole bundle of measures in different fields. The elderly are regarded as important, active co-planners (and not as the 'target group'); various functions and facili-

ties are initiated and integrated, activities and services offered to different age groups are combined, and residential quarters redeveloped by restructuring and new building, while old buildings are upgraded by being converted and extended for mixed uses.

Possible Measures:

- ▶ broadening the range of dwellings, in particular by eliminating any physical obstructions from existing flats, accompanied by counselling and social care
- ▶ creating obstruction-free and practically organised public spaces and buildings and a wide range of squares in the neighbourhood
- ▶ creating the structural framework conditions for procuring supplies and a wide range of services locally
- ▶ providing physically easily accessible places and spaces for activities and meetings
- ▶ establishing multi-functional centres which benefit the local community
- ▶ combining residential units with commercial and other services – fixed or mobile – with local branch offices for advising and assistance
- ▶ promoting urban integration, not isolation, and retaining 'life-support' functions within the neighbourhood, instead of concentrating these in far-away areas.

In view of the great number of 'players' involved, long-term viable forms of co-operation and common commitment to joint targets are essential. Apart from local governments, these include the housing industry, providers and operators of social infrastructure and services (not only for the elderly), the private sector, civil bodies (such as co-operatives, associations, foundations) as well as self-help and other activities organised by the elderly themselves. Although integrated action is universally demanded, it is in fact one of the main problems in developing and implementing new solutions. This applies to different levels of society and regulatory systems, i.e. municipal departments, support systems and legislation. It also applies to the co-operation of local government departments with those active 'on the spot', and the teamwork between professionals and volunteer activists.

Whether the pilot projects produce any practically applicable pieces of knowledge, which will remain in people's minds for any length of time, depends on several factors: on planned measures being implemented so that those involved will gain experience and new knowledge; on the development of procedures that can be repeated, also in other contexts; on the articulation of new philosophies and working approaches; on continuity in terms of personnel, and on whether research findings will be stored and accessible beyond termination of the project. There is special demand for high-quality, affordable structural solutions in adapting existing dwellings better to the needs of the elderly, and generally for flexible, practical buildings and public spaces; establishing accessible supportive services and activities locally; offers of assistance to individuals and target groups; self-organised residential projects, e.g. communes and building partnerships; for self-help and citizens' participation, co-operation and integrative procedures.

It has become clear that, in addition to the special requirements of certain groups of people, many qualities are of general interest. The aim is not to 'customise' urban design for the elderly, but to develop urban open frameworks of great diversity, suitable for different ages and different needs. Such areas offer the best conditions for the residents' self-regulation, because their users adapt the spaces to their own needs and because they provide opportunities and incentives to meet existing demand with suitable offers.