Urbaging: Designing urban space for an ageing society

Funding: National (Switzerland)
Duration: Jan 2007 - Jan 2009
Status: Complete with results

Background & policy context:
The study focuses on the urban planning implications of demographic trends in Switzerland and the associated demands placed on the built environment by an ageing population. Demographic forecasts predict a sharp rise in the number of elderly citizens, with the 65-plus age group expected to account for a quarter of the Swiss population by 2040. This is very likely to spawn problems relating to the design of the built environment, which is primarily geared to the needs of families and the working population.

Objectives:
The project sets out to gauge the extent to which developed public spaces and associated amenities are able to satisfy the needs of older generations. The findings will then be used to develop strategies and project proposals aimed at giving greater weight to the needs of the elderly in urban design and planning processes. The project will also facilitate an estimate of the associated costs.

Methodology:
The project will focus on two urban centres: the Lugano conurbation in Ticino and the town of Uster in Canton Zurich. The first step will involve detailed analyses of public spaces and amenities. A comparison will then be made, for the two regions, with the geographical data on the elderly population to evaluate their ease of access to the provided amenities. Allowance will also be made for future demographic trends. Interviews will then be conducted with focus groups to establish needs, forms of use and the satisfaction of elderly people with regard to public spaces and amenities. Finally, the results will be discussed with municipal representatives, planning officers and the target group.

Parent Programmes:
NRP 54 - Sustainable Development of the Built Environment (National Research Programme 54)

Institute type: Public institution
Institute name: SNF - Swiss National Science Foundation
Funding type: Public (national/regional/local)

Partners:
Switzerland:
Institute for Contemporary Urban Project
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Key Results:
The project findings allow the development of planning solutions aimed at adapting the built
environment to the present and future needs of an ageing population. The project is therefore of immediate relevance to current debates on the function and remodelling of public spaces.

Three main messages:

1. The high quality of public space makes a “good city”. The city of the future will be built around an efficient network of public spaces of different nature, responding to the various needs of the contemporary society. For the elderly, public space plays a different role: socialization places and intergenerational relationship on one hand, and a place of calmness and relaxation on the other. In both cases, public space has to give a sense of security and offer a high standard of environmental comfort. Public spaces have to be accessible and connected through a tight network of pedestrian paths that can ensure a pleasant walking use of the space.

2. The city of the future is inclusive and pluralist and encourages intergenerational coexistence. The “city for the elderly” should not exist. Instead, it should be built as a city for all, a city in which all generations will be recognised and feel comfortable, including the elderly. Special attention will be given to the most vulnerable parts of our society, and we think especially to the “physically disabled” people, also called in French “personnes à mobilité réduite” (person with reduced mobility). Those needs have to be gathered directly from the users of the public space through participatory process. The idea of an integrated city results in improving the transversal approach and the interaction between different actors as administrative, private, association, users, politicians. Being attentive to the most vulnerable users of the urban space means performing a balancing act among all the actors. It is not just a matter of eliminating the “architectural barriers”, but the abilities to respond to different actors without compromise a ordered operation of the city.

3. Quality of life implies also the strengthening of cohabitation between the different generations. The built environment (public space and residential space) contributes to a better social cohesion at certain conditions. First: the refusal of ghettos generated by economical, social and non-systemic way of thinking. Second: moving away from the misleading thinking patterns in single disciplines

Documents:

- NRPS4_FSReport_16-02_DEF.pdf (Final report)

STRIA Roadmaps: Smart mobility and services
Transport mode: Multimodal transport
Transport sectors: Passenger transport
Transport policies: Environmental/Emissions aspects, Societal/Economic issues
Geo-spatial type: Network corridors