

Fitting Aging: adaptive and inclusive public space design for active aging in place

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This paper investigates how small-scale spatial interventions can transform everyday green urban public spaces into adaptive environments that support active and inclusive aging in place. In response to the rapid aging of urban populations, the research positions public space as a critical infrastructure for sustaining health, social engagement, and everyday mobility in later life.

Focusing on key spatial elements- such as seating, lighting, pathways, and signage- the study examines how their configuration, materiality, and spatial distribution influence patterns of use, underuse, and misuse among elderly users. Through comparative case studies and spatial analysis, the research identifies how targeted, small-scale design adaptations can enhance accessibility, safety, orientation, and comfort, thereby extending both the duration and quality of use in public space.

The paper is grounded in the concept of the “ecology of ageing,” which frames aging as a dynamic interaction between individuals and their spatial environment. Within this framework, adaptability, redundancy, and polyvalency emerge as essential design capacities, enabling public spaces to accommodate diverse physical abilities, temporal rhythms, and social practices. Particular attention is given to culturally specific and resource-constrained contexts, where design must operate through low-cost, durable, and context-sensitive interventions.

The research proposes a set of spatial strategies that translate the principles of Inclusive Design into applicable architectural approaches. By emphasizing the performative role of public space elements, the paper argues that adaptive, age-inclusive environments can be achieved through incremental transformation, positioning small-scale interventions as a key mechanism for enhancing social diversity, resilience, and the everyday usability of urban public space..