

IC - (20874) - RESTORATIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR THE OLDEST OLD: POTENTIAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF RESTORATIVE NEIGHBORHOOD OPEN SPACES CLOSE TO THE HOME

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Background and objectives

Over the next three decades, the global number of people over the age of 65 will more than double. This increase puts pressure on the healthcare systems. The aging process makes seniors more vulnerable to environmental stressors and developing attention fatigue, especially in environments that do not fit their needs and capabilities. Incorporating restorative design principles into the living environments of seniors can reduce stress and attention fatigue, improve their health and wellbeing, and thus mitigate the impact of global aging.

However, not much is known about the design of restorative environments for seniors. Seniors are not often included in restorative research; literature study shows that only 15 out of 234 studies included senior participants. Yet various studies suggest the need for restorative environments that comply with seniors' changing needs and capabilities. We hypothesize that seniors will have more need for well-designed restorative Neighborhood Open Spaces (NOS) close to their homes. Due to reduced mobility, seniors will probably have more difficulties with visiting traditional restorative environments like forests, urban parks, or historical places preventing them to restore resources.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

Exploratory interviews with seniors (N=27) were conducted in Waalre, the Netherlands about their preferred place for restoration.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

In line with the hypothesis, places named by the oldest old (80+ years) were almost all NOS close to the home, within 200 m. Of the younger seniors (65-80 years) half choose places within 30 km, relatively close to the home. However, from the group of older adults (50-65 years) half choose places outside the region (more than 100 km) like beaches and wild forests.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

These results suggest the need for the oldest old for restorative experiences close to the home. Designing high-quality NOS offers the opportunity to improve their health and wellbeing and help mitigate global aging.

Palavras-chave : Restorative environments, Neighborhood Open Space, Seniors, Fourth Age, Older old, Public space, Health & well-being