



Age-based Neighbourhood Development – Challenges for Sustainable Cities

Heidi Sinning¹

Abstract

In recent years modified demands on housing and community development have emerged because of different reasons. Especially aging and diversification of society due to the demographic change have become important issues for urban planning. The people in Germany who are 65 years and older are expected to increase from 20% in 2008 to 33% in 2050. Especially the very old people (80plus) will increase strongly. Similar situations exist in several European countries.

Elderly people are not a consistent group, but the group of seniors has very different lifestyles and demands. In order to be competitive in an aging market building companies as well as all other kinds of businesses and communities will have to adapt and react to changing demands. How can the aged population be systematized and classified? Which are the main specificities of the different groups?

In the context of the research project „WASta - Housing of Elderly People in the Context of Urban Development“ results of surveys in the German cities of Leipzig and Gera and theoretical investigations have been used to find answers. One result is that the state of health and the financial situation of elderly people are basic factors for differentiation.

Based on these results, on preceding findings and a systematization of the aged population, requirements for housing companies as well as for communities are derived how sustainable cities can focus on the very specific demands of elderly people. A key answer is an integrated perspective on neighbourhood development. An age-based neighbourhood development needs to be oriented on the people's needs. It involves the planning and equipment of the dwellings, the buildings (incl. entrances, halls, stairs, corridors etc.), the environment of buildings (e.g. greens, gardens, footpaths, benches), open spaces, parks, social and technical infrastructures in a neighbourhood.

An assessment framework „Age-based neighbourhood development“ has been worked out, which shall help to evaluate the current quality of a neighbourhood and to prioritize actions from the perspective of housing companies, urban development and elderly people. Examples illustrate the assessment framework and show how age-based neighbourhood development can be implemented.

Keywords:

¹ Erfurt University of Applied Sciences, Institute of Urban Research, Planning and Communication (ISP) , Altonaer Straße 25 | D-99085 Erfurt, Germany, E-Mail: sinning@fh-erfurt.de
www.fh-erfurt.de/isp

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1. Introduction – current trends and challenges

Demographic and social changes result in modified demands on housing economy. With their rising share in the overall population elderly people become increasingly important enquirers on the rental market. In shrinking or stagnating city regions the rental market that used to focus on supply has been replaced by a demand market. Housing companies have to avoid enduring long-term vacancies of a bigger extent and respond to the needs of the elderly as an increasingly important target group in order to operate economically sustainable. Challenges for housing companies do not only exist in the overall increasing share of elderly people as enquirers but in their modified and diverse demands for their dwelling, its surrounding area and accompanying services. Housing in this sense refers to the flat, the building, the surrounding area, infrastructure, services and social networks.

However elderly people do not form a homogeneous target group. Therefore this article outlines the proceeding diversification of this group. In this context main questions are: What kind of approaches of systematization exist? Which aspects are especially interesting for the differentiation of elderly people? Which requirements have different groups of elderly people and which qualities do they expect? And last but not least, which strategic approaches for age-based development are of interest for cities and communities?

Looking at the significant trends the following aspects can be highlighted (see also illustrations 1-3; Statistisches Bundesamt 2009 und 2011):

- Increase of the elderly: The part of people in Germany being 65 years and older will increase from 20% in 2008 to 33% in 2050.
- Greatly increasing share of the generation 65plus and the oldest old (being over 80 or even over 85 years old): The share of people being over 65 years old will rise from 21% (2009) to 34% (2060). The share to the oldest old (85plus) will increase from 2% (2009) to 9% (2060) of the overall population in Germany.
- Parallel to a higher life expectancy more and more people experience a longer healthy life time. Health of elderly people is very differently pronounced. Studies have shown that a difficult health status and financial situation (increasing poverty among the elderly) lead to less outdoor activity and to a reduction of social networks.
- Especially elderly women often live alone. Between the age of 60 and 85 the share of women living alone rises significantly according to statistical data of 2009.
- The importance of social networks beyond family bonds increases whereas the significance of the classical family bonds decreases.
- Last but not least, elderly predominantly wish to live at their home place as long as possible.

Illustration 1: Trend: Increasing share of elderly people in the overall population (2010 and 2060) (Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2009)

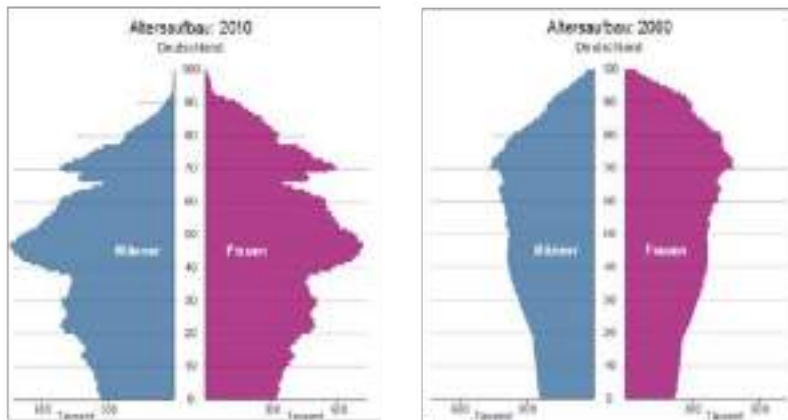


Illustration 2: Trend: Highly increasing share of the generation 65plus and the oldest old (over 80 or even over 85 years of age) (Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2011: 11)

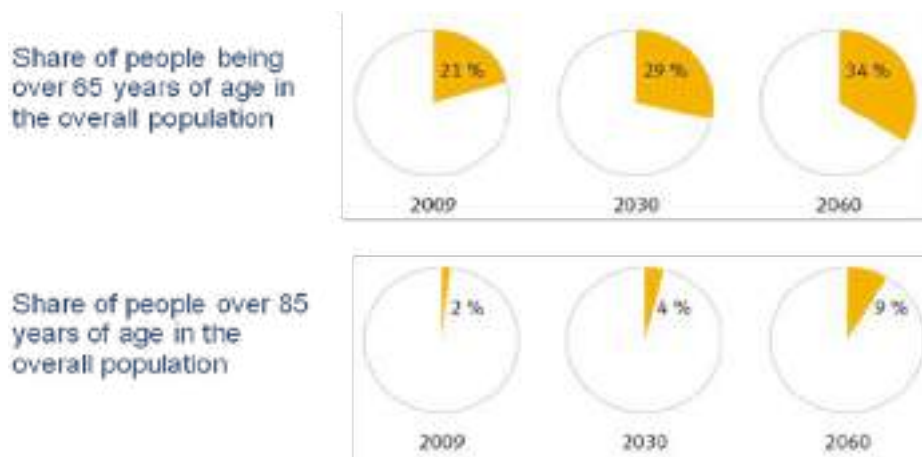
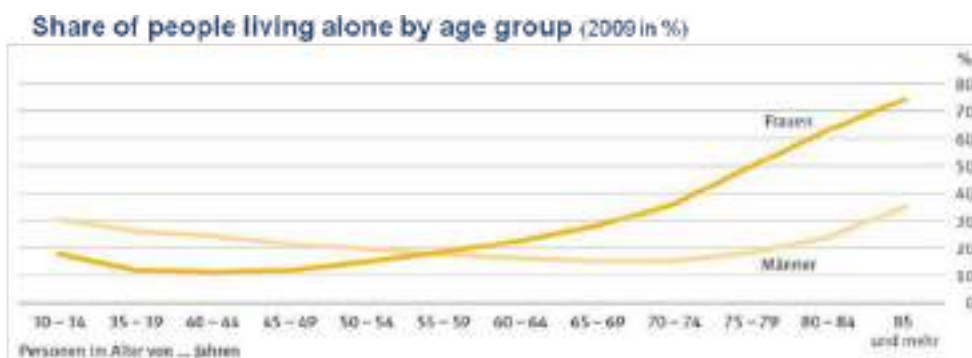


Illustration 3: Trend: Especially women often live alone (Source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2011: 20)



Scientific Background

In the context of the research project „WASta – Housing of Elderly People in the Context of Urban Development“ trends and challenges outlined above were reassessed. The project has been funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and aims to describe the diversification of the target group generation 50plus, develop a classification to distinguish different demander groups among the elderly, and identify their specific housing needs. The project focuses on specifying the group 50plus with their differentiated housing aspirations and needs as a target group for housing companies. Furthermore recommendations are to be developed within the project to enable the application of the new aspects of classification and to meet concrete requirements on the implementation of an age-based neighbourhood (Gädker, Sinning, Thalheim 2012).

2. Systemizing the group of elderly people

For housing economy and urban development to adequately react to differentiated housing needs and demands of the target group of elderly people a small scale view and detailed knowledge of the target group are prerequisites. Against the background of theoretical approaches regarding aging, e.g. disengagement- and activities-theories, there are different approaches to systemize elderly people. Existing classification approaches are:

- chronologic age/calendrical age (e.g. „young old“ 50 to 65 years of age, seniors 65 to 80 years of age and „oldest old“ above 80 years of age);
- cohorts (by life experience, e.g. world economic crisis/ post-war period /economic miracle in Western Germany; see inter alia Kreuzer 2006);
- phases of life model (different approaches with two to eight phases; see inter alia Höpflinger 2008);
- life style approach (opinions, values, social position, educational status, financial means etc.; see inter alia. Schneider, Spellerberg 1999);
- Sinus-Milieus® approach (milieus are e.g. hedonists, performer, tradionals, konservatives; aspects of differenciation are spatial, cultural and social condition etc.; see inter alia.Sinus 2010);
- Social milieus (Federal association for Housing and Urban Development (vhw) together with Sinus-Sociovision): three types of elderly people, based on a “body & mind typology”: Best Ager, Old Ager und Old Kids (see amongst others Podding 2006, Borgstedt 2010).

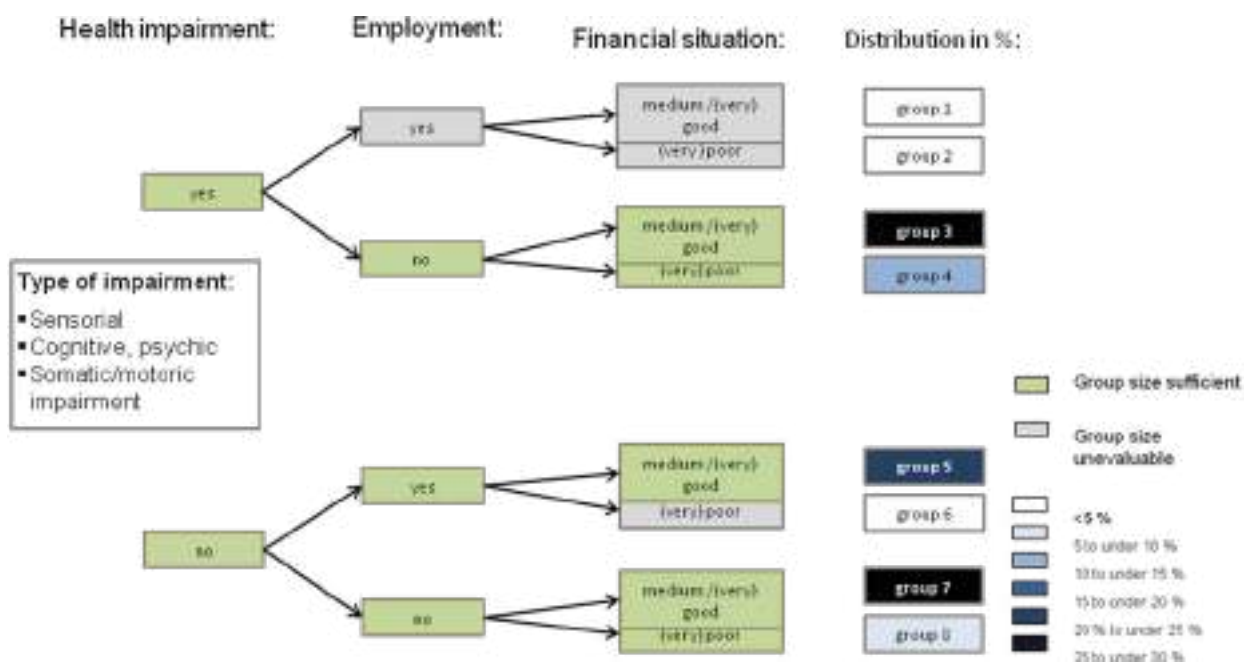
These approaches however rarely relate to housing. Due to insufficient data previous approaches are not easily applicable in the practice of housing economy or they are too general to allow specific conclusions regarding housing. Therefore, within the research project “WASta – Housing of elderly people in the context of urban development” the aim has been to work on an applicable classification of people being over 50 years of age.

For this classification of the elderly the health status and the financial situation were taken as leading criteria next to recreational activities (life styles). So far these criteria have hardly ever been taken into account by housing economy and urban development. The classification approach is based on empirical findings from a written household survey of 3000 residents in the cities of Leipzig and Gera as well as from an expert workshop and literature research. In

the survey individual health impairments, e.g. in the fields of hearing, watching, walking, could not be included. But for deeper analysis it would be necessary to further differentiate.

As illustration 4 shows the groups 3 (group with health impairments, not employed, average to very good financial situation, about 25-30%), 5 (group without health impairments, employed, average to very good financial situation, about 15-20%) and 7 (group without health impairments, not employed, average to very good financial situation, about 25-30%) of elderly people in the cities of Leipzig and Gera are dominant. This means that in particular for group 3 there is a need for meeting their requirements on the housing market. Group 4 (group with health impairments, not employed, bad to very bad financial situation) is expected to increase in the future (“elderly poverty”).

Illustration 4: Classification approach of elderly people by health status and financial situation (source: own scheme)



3. Requirements for neighbourhood development and housing economy

Against the background of the systematization approaches and health status and financial situation as main criteria of differentiation housing companies and urban development are challenged to develop and modify neighbourhoods and the housing stock according to the needs of their residents and in adequate quantity and quality. In this context the following challenges are important:

- Elderly people do not form a homogeneous but a more and more heterogeneous group. Accordingly a greater diversification becomes necessary oriented above all to health status, financial situation and recreational behaviour respectively life styles as distinguishing features.
- An age-based city and neighbourhood development, pursuing the goal of supporting the residents to as long as possible live their lives self-reliantly and self-determinedly, requires an integrated and neighbourhood-oriented approach of housing and urban development. Of particular importance is integration of housing stock, its surrounding area and neighbour-

hood infrastructure. Furthermore social networks and neighbourhoods ought to be taken into account.

- As the area surrounding the dwelling gains in importance with an increasing age a neighbourhood perspective is essential planning and developing concrete improvements to the quality of life.
- Quality of housing is a major „hard“ locational factor for cities and municipalities. For their residents the quality of housing has an important impact on their quality of life. Especially due to the great increase of the elderly and the share of old aged modifications to the quality of housing are promising activities for cities and municipalities to improve their position in a target group oriented competition for residents.

Assessment framework „Age-based Neighbourhood Development“

The differentiation of elderly people helps to understand their specific needs. A possibility to enhance the quality of life of elderly people is to measure this quality in detail. Therefore, an assessment on “Age-based Neighbourhood Development” has been developed aiming at the needs of local residents and at screening the quality of flats and buildings, the surrounding area, services and infrastructures in the neighbourhood.

The criteria “requirement-based/age-based” aim to improve the quality of life of different target groups. Age-based neighbourhood development includes constructional, social, financial and nursing aspects. Requirement-based expresses that adaptations to the neighbourhood are to be oriented on the actual requirements of different residential groups. This includes flexibility for adaptations to the dwellings for example or that services are oriented to actual requirements (pick-up and delivery services, care services etc.). The model of neighbourhood development is based on an understanding of the different needs of generations in a cross-generational neighbourhood. (cf. Kreuzer 2006: 156).

The assessment framework focuses on the demands of elderly people. Most items being of advantage to elderly people (no doorsteps, platforms etc.) are also of advantage to other population groups such as parents with prams, bicyclists etc.

The assessment supports screening the following aspects regarding their current condition and their contribution to the neighbourhood development:

- building / flat
 - entrance situation
 - front door
 - stairway / corridor
 - lift
 - door of flat
 - bell
 - floors
 - furniture
 - management utilities etc.
- area surrounding the flat
 - entrance area
 - parking sites
 - footpaths

- street and traffic area
- public transport
- open space
- infrastructure and services
- recreational activities
- supporting neighbourhood relationships
- planning and implementation process
 - participation
 - co-operation
 - communication
 - structural neighbourhood development

Illustration 5: Extract from the assessment framework, example “door entrance” (Source: Institute for Urban Research, Planning and Communication - ISP 2012)

| | überwiegend gegeben | überwiegend nicht gegeben |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| ▪ Sitz- und Verweil möglichkeiten | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ ausreichende Bewegungsflächen | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ überdachter Eingangsbereich | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ gut lesbare Hausnummer | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Abstellflächen (z.B. für Rollatoren) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - Nähe zur Haustür | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - abschließbar | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - überdacht | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - ebenerdig erreichbar ♿ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Ausreichende Anzahl an Fahrradabstellmöglichkeiten | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Anmerkungen zu Hauseingangsbereiche | | |

As the assessment of a neighbourhood is always subjective it ought to be applied by persons of different personal backgrounds. (e. g. stakeholders of housing economy, urban development, senior representatives, residents’ representatives with different health status). To apply the assessment it is recommended to develop a common interpretation of the assessment results as gathered by different persons. Besides others the following aspects ought to be assessed:

- Which aspects have not been put into practice / were regarded to have a negative impact?
- Which areas call for action?
- Which items of the assessment are assessed differently by different stakeholders?

From the results of the assessment of the current condition the need for action can be deduced regarding as well the community and the local development as well as the housing companies and their housing stock.

4. Conclusion

As the contribution shows it is of great importance to pursue an integrated strategy to meet the current adaptation requirements in urban planning and development in the course of an ageing population and a more significant generation of elderly people. Especially on the level of neighbourhood development stakeholders can contribute to the implementation of measures to meet the current and future requirements of age-based planning and equipment.

The challenge is not about developing “ghettos of elderly people” but to design mixed neighbourhoods for young and old inhabitants. All generations benefit from an age- and requirement-based equipment although the orientation towards health impairment and an increasing demand for local supply of social, transport, recreational infrastructure and services particularly corresponds in particular to the needs of elderly people.

There are specific demands and target group specific requirements of elderly people on housing and its surrounding area. To integrate health status and financial situation as distinguishing features in the classification of the elderly first of all necessitates the investigation of adequate data, e.g. in a local household survey. The availability of those data enables cities and housing companies to address specific housing requirements.

In order to design age- and requirement-based neighbourhoods, stakeholder groups, such as housing economy, city development, residents, representatives of residents like senior committees, will have to enter into a dialogue, commonly assess strengths and weaknesses of the neighbourhood development and deduce measures and priorities. Furthermore, age-based neighbourhood development requires interdisciplinary co-operation including different stakeholder and departments.

The assessment framework “Age-based Neighbourhood Development” has the potential to support this process. Existing assessments on age-based planning and design are often aligned only to singular topics, for example the flat or footpaths. The assessment framework which is described here is based on an integrated approach including all topics of importance for the quality of life of elderly people. Only a holistic view and co-action of several measures as well as the collaboration of different stakeholders in a neighbourhood can achieve a sustainable improvement of elderly residents’ quality of life.

Finally it seems necessary to underline that a specific challenge for future urban development that ought to be taken into account at the implementation of an age-based neighbourhood development is poverty among the elderly and the related question how affordable housing and quality of life respectively housing can be maintained or newly achieved for low income households. This topic as well as the earlier explanations of this contribution show that age-based neighbourhood development will become an increasingly important challenge for the development of sustainable cities and especially for urban planning in the coming decades.

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