

Ageing homes

visual anthropology and the architecture of elderly care

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MORE TOGETHER, MORE APART:
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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Ageing homes: visual anthropology and the architecture of elderly care

20. Residential Buildings and Architectural Design

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An ageing society has severe implications for the organization of care and residential housing. Existing housing designs as well as public spaces generally are not well equipped for accommodating growing numbers of elderly. Social care programs also are confronted with problems of segregation and inequality in the accessibility and affordability of housing and services. The demographic transition to an ageing society runs parallel with transitions in the policy and practice of elderly care, which moves away from institutional buildings and arrangements towards informal support networks of friends, neighbours and family. Despite these transitions in elderly care policy, research on the perception and use of home spaces among older people as well as how to incorporate this knowledge in the design and redevelopment of residential space, is still scarce. There is a need to rethink the architecture of home and living environments for elderly people, as, for example, in how elderly care might be embedded in urban settings or how more inclusive environments might take shape.

This paper addresses these issues by reporting first findings of an ongoing anthropological and architectural research on the everyday life of elderly in care centres, located in two Dutch cities. The research is a visual anthropology of architectural space. It focuses on the practices of the everyday life, on small acts and concrete actions. The research aims to document and visualize the needs and living conditions of elderly today, as well as translate fieldwork into architectural design, which is understood as the organisation and materialization of elements and forms of space. The main questions that will be addressed in this paper concern the everyday life of residents, professionals and visitors of elderly care centres. How do older people make home? How do they move around and share spaces? How do (sub)communities work in residential care settings? How do private spaces relate to public and parochial spaces? And how do personal worlds relate to the outside world of the city and the neighbourhood?

The paper contains three sections. The first section discusses current paradigms in the management, housing policies and architecture of elderly care. The second section formulates a method of researching these care institutions by combining visual anthropology and architecture. Fieldwork is related to pictorial techniques of studying everyday life (observational drawing, sequential photography, soft mapping) and using architectural representations (sections, floorplans, axonometric drawings, diagrams) to analyse fieldwork material. The third section then presents preliminary findings of a fieldwork study in two elderly care homes, organized as part of a design studio with a group of fourteen students in Architecture.