Environments of Ageing: Potential of Approach and Ways to Profoundly Map Future Priorities

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Environmental Gerontology

- In-depth understanding of interrelations between ageing persons and their physical-social environments
- How these relationships shape ageing outcomes (endpoints)
- Wide understanding of person-environment relations (home, out-of-home action space, technology and products → “contexts of ageing”)
- Practical: What are good environments for ageing people of today and tomorrow? (M. P. Lawton: Support, stimulation, maintenance)

(Lawton, 1989; Scheidt & Windley, 2006; Wahl & Iwarsson, 2007)
Environmental Gerontology

- A field of particular importance for European ageing research (e.g., links ageing persons with contexts and vice versa; fosters interdisciplinary, urges micro-macro connections)

- A field of particular importance for ageing people in Europe (e.g., improve living conditions, foster “new” housing for those highly competent or frail; improve transport and technology)

- A field of increasing success both scientifically and practically (e.g., increasing acknowledgement of European housing research in the U.S.; European housing as an international model)

(Scheidt & Windley, 2006; Wahl & Iwarsson, 2007)
Environmental Gerontology: Future Challenges

1. Increase theory building and research integration
2. Deepen and enrich linkages beneath key disciplines
3. Improve methodology of person-environment assessment
4. Foster translation research and controlled implementation

(Wahl & Iwarsson: FUTURAGE proposal; theme „Environments of Ageing“)
Environmental Gerontology: Future Challenges (1)

→ Increase theory building and research integration

(Wahl & Iwarsson: FUTURAGE proposal; theme „Environments of Ageing“)
Theory Challenges (Examples)

- Broad understanding of person-environment dynamics as people age
- Wide application of theory (those highly competent, those demented or very low in functional ability)
- Understanding how macro and micro contexts interact as people develop in contexts
- Macro context: Societal conditions, country specifics

(Wahl & Iwarsson, 2007; Wahl & Oswald, in Phillipson & Dannefer, in press)
Integration of Research Findings (Examples)

- Does the home environment make a difference in terms of the maintenance of functional competence?
- What is the relationship between out-of-home use of action space and cognitive impairment?
(Wahl, Fänge, Oswald, Gitlin & Iwarsson, The Gerontologist, in press)
**GPS-based Tracking of Mobility Patterns of Those with Cognitive Impairment**

- Emerging findings, but scattered research scene
- Seen as “second class care”, but also as efficient support → ethical issues
- Technology as a powerful means to compensate for lost cognitive function (memory, central executive, dual task challenges in everyday world)
Mobility patterns

Walking

Driving (car, public transport)

Problems, while crossing busy street

Getting lost in neighbourhood

Example: Project SenTra (University of Heidelberg, Hebrew University Jerusalem)

(Shoval, Auslander, Freytag, Landau, Oswald, Seidl, Wahl, Werner, & Heinik, BMC Geriatrics, 2008)
Environmental Gerontology: Future Challenges (2)

Deepen and enrich linkages beneath key disciplines

(Wahl & Iwarsson: FUTURAGE proposal; theme „Environments of Ageing“)
Building New Alliances Beneath Disciplines Under the Umbrella of Environmental Gerontology

- Example 1: Occupational therapy, psychology and engineering
- Example 2: Geography, psychology, geriatric medicine / geropsychiatry and ethics
Environmental Gerontology: Future Challenges (3)

- Improve methodology of person-environment assessment

(Wahl & Iwarsson: FUTURAGE proposal; theme „Environments of Ageing“)
Needed Methodology Improvements

- Sound and robust measurement of accessibility (e.g., Housing Enabler, Iwarsson & Slaug, 2001)
- Simultaneous consideration of objective and subjective p-e relations → meaning of home, environmental attachment processes (even regarding technology!)
- Measures to address neighbourhood and urban / rural environments
- Mix of methods as rule
- Link micro-meso assessments with macro context (e.g., housing and transport regulation policy)
- Approach international comparability and a gold standard of p-e assessment
Environmental Gerontology: Future Challenges (4)

→ Foster translation research and controlled implementation

(Wahl & Iwarsson: FUTURAGE proposal; theme „Environments of Ageing“)
Challenges of Translation Research in Environmental Gerontology

- Systematic analysis of implementation processes (including expected major differences between European countries)
- Systematic analysis of science-practice communication interfaces
- Consideration of a wide scope of actors (family members, social and health care staff, older people’s organisations, community policy stakeholders)
Our Ambition Within FUTURAGE

- Multi-level strategy involving:
- Two workshops to be held in Heidelberg and Lund with a select group of internationally renowned experts
- Furthering research integration in the field
- Consultation with experts
→ Contribution to overall roadmap for ageing research in Europe

(Wahl & Iwarsson: FUTURAGE proposal; theme „Environments of Ageing“)
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