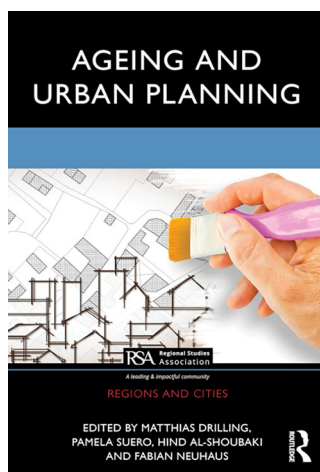


Drilling, M.; Suero, P.; Al-Shoubaki, H.; Neuhaus, F. (eds.) (2025): Ageing and Urban Planning

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The book “Ageing and Urban Planning” edited by Matthias Drilling, Pamela Suero, Hind Al-Shoubaki, and Fabian Neuhaus provides – in the words of the editors – a critical analysis of urban planning in the face of demographic change. Many books have been published in this domain in recent decades, so I was looking for innovative and critical thinking, provocative statements, and more. In an arena with many books merely regurgitating existing theories, the current volume did not let me down.

This scholarly work emphasises the importance of international approaches and practices to address age-friendly

planning, elaborating on work set out in the 2000s by the World Health Organization, which culminated in the launch of their publication “Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide” (WHO 2007). This publication is used by cities and communities around the globe as a blueprint for creating age-friendly environments, including in the area of outdoor spaces and buildings, and for promoting a society that is inclusive for all generations. From a strategic point of view, the World Health Organization’s programme is a good anchor. The current book clearly provides further guidance and inspiration to advanced students, researchers, and policymakers in the fields of urban planning, age-related disciplines and professions, and social policy. The fact that the book is richly illustrated, with examples from around the world, including Belgium, Russia, various countries in East Asia and Zambia, is of particular value. Knowing how little age-friendly literature emerges from some of these jurisdictions, I am very appreciative of the efforts of the editors here.

The book itself was developed within the framework of the Marie Curie Doctoral Network on Ageing, Place, and Home, and the editors are PhD supervisors, co-supervisors, experts, or PhD researchers themselves with backgrounds in social geography, spatial planning, gerontology, and architecture. The intergenerational nature of the editorial team is perfectly aligned with one of the many goals of the age-friendly movement, namely, to connect younger and older generations. So why not in science too, for instance, by training the future generation of scholars? The multidisciplinary background of the editorial team clearly shows in the topics included in the book, which apart from an Introduction (Part 1), is further divided into three parts, namely Part 2 Global Perspectives on Ageing and Place, Part 3 Materialisation of Ageing in Place, and Part 4 Ageing, Planning, and the City.

Although this book is not the only book in its genre, it

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does provide a number of new insights including many perspectives from countries, cities, and communities around the world which have not been dealt with before, showcasing the state of the art in those particular locations. The materialisation chapter entitled “Materialisation of ageing and urban planning” is also a new addition to the spectrum of age-friendly topics that exist in the many handbooks that have been written on the subject matter. Moreover, this chapter is richly illustrated with examples from nearly every corner of the Earth. It operationalises age-friendly theory and policy into tangible projects and interventions, which are shown in many graphical elements. Furthermore, the chapter shows examples from rural contexts, like Awra Amba in Ethiopia, and from the highly urbanised context of Hong Kong. Another richly illustrated chapter on ageing and gender provides a plethora of inclusive city-building practices in the Global North and the Global South, including lively photographic material from my own city, The Hague, which has been one of the members of the World Health Organization’s Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities since 2015. I must say I was happy to see that the research and assessment efforts of the Knowledge Platform Age-Friendly The Hague were correctly summarised. The chapters of Part 4 provide a good wrap-up of the contributions in the previous sections. The depiction of features in policy development for ageing, looking at goals and instruments, was of particular interest, as it combines these notions with the levels at which interventions are needed (the city level, the national level or the neighbourhood level). Given the intersectional challenges of ageing societies, the book elaborates on how integrated place-making strategies are required. The discussion also highlights the fundamental role of place in later life, including both its physical and social dimensions. In addition, the authors of Chapter 11 rightfully state that a negative narrative about ageing and older persons reflects ageist stereotypes that limit urban policy change. Perhaps this chapter is the most valuable of all for raising awareness of why the notions of the age-friendly movement are so much needed in our ageing societies. This is accompanied by a plea for more of the evidence that is needed for policy development in order to support ageing societies, and a focus on governance structures and the role they place in advancing age-friendly progress. The chapter is of particular interest for people working in public policy, like town halls and municipal government.

From a personal perspective, I also see great value in the overview of information that policymakers working in the field of planning “must know” about population ageing trends. This overview is not just timely, it is a practical overview that can be used when engaging with people working in policy. It appears in Chapter 12, which also deals with the digitalisation of urban environments and the need for a better consideration of environmental sustainability and climate change, as well as ageing and displacement. The authors of the chapter further address the question of how urban planning should respond to these trends: by rethinking urban planning principles, rethinking the narrative about ageing and older persons that influences urban planning, and rethinking the governance of urban planning.

The book did not let me down. As promised by the editors, it indeed offers a thorough critique of popular narratives surrounding ageing and urban planning while presenting diverse case studies on a variety of spatial scales. The richness of the photos and figures from urban design studios, planning processes, and real-life scenarios makes this volume stand out from other books that have been published in this area of study. In a world with increased longevity, it is of the utmost importance that the implications of population ageing for urban planning are put centre stage, in education, research, and policy. For instance, in my country nearly 21 % of the population is aged 65 years and over. It is not just a matter of ethics and inclusion to consider the needs of this cohort, but also an entrepreneurial challenge to cater for these needs. Ageing means business. Ageing also means shifting electorates for politicians. Why waste such a great opportunity? As the book can be downloaded free of charge, given it is published as an open access book under a CC BY Creative Commons license, there is absolutely no barrier to indulging in the contents.

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