An Inclusive Community for Ageing in Place: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract

The number of ageing adults that continues increasing globally has evoked crucial concerns that require examination, such as strategies to provide a conducive environment for the ageing population to live in. All segments of society, including older adults, are entitled to enjoy such benefits regardless of age following the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Current communities should accommodate older adults who choose to age in place despite limited physical and social abilities through social inclusion and equal opportunities. However, research on how an inclusive community could address the 'ageing in place' trend remains scarce despite a growing body of relevant literature. Therefore, this study aims to examine the attributes of an inclusive community for older adults to age in place. The outcomes derived from article and journal reviews revealed that an age-friendly city and inclusive society effectively accommodates older individuals to age in their own homes and communities. This study contributed to the available literature by applying the three principles of an inclusive community (social inclusion and equal opportunities and capabilities) to how the community could respond to the trend of ageing in place among older people. Overall, community planning and development prove pivotal to establishing age-friendly and socially-inclusive societies.

Keywords: Ageing, ageing in place, inclusive community, age-friendly city

INTRODUCTION

A sustainable society promotes socially-equal and peaceful communities that establish competent, responsible, and inclusive institutions at all levels to fulfil current needs without deterring future generations from meeting their requirements. Although the development process could essentially elevate society members' life quality, the unanticipated global surge of ageing adults and ensuing complexities require thorough investigation to fulfil their needs. Older adults' health, well-being, and overall happiness could be enhanced with high life quality. As the current proportion of ageing individuals aged 65 years and above could rise to approximately 16.0% in 2050 from an initial 9.3% in 2020 (United Nations, 2020), the question as to whether ageing adults would benefit from social inclusion and an improved life quality remains relatively unaddressed. Parallel to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all segments of society (including older individuals) deserve to reap such benefits regardless of age.

Ageing adults' preference to possibly remain in their homes denotes one of the trends associated with the ageing population (Lux & Sunega, 2014). This pattern

denotes an individual's ability to reside in their own homes and societies as they age. Notably, 77.6% of older Malaysians choose to age where they live (The Star, 9 July 2017), not unlike 90% of older American adults aged 65 years and above (Kim, 2020). An ageing population with no certainty of future circumstances would prefer to remain in their respective homes and cities (Abramsson & Hagberg, 2020), which increases independence, social connectedness, and a sense of community. Intriguingly, such individuals may benefit from ageing within an inclusive society with strong social networks, established services, and high perceived comfort and safety levels despite living in unaffordable homes. Research on how an inclusive community could address the 'ageing in place' trend remains scarce despite a growing body of relevant literature. As various communities strive to determine the means of accommodating and supporting ageing adults despite not being a novel phenomenon, this study aimed to examine inclusive community attributes for older individuals to age in place with secondary data (article and journal reviews) on inclusive societies and ageing in place.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Inclusive Community and Ageing in Place

An inclusive society prioritises inclusion, equal opportunity, and community members' ability to determine an established set of social institutions that regulate social interaction regardless of race, gender, class, generation, or location (DESA, 2008). Individuals within an inclusive society significantly create and sustain social institutions. Each person plays an active role as an inclusive community member who engages in such institutional development and asserts their opinions in meaningful decision-making processes. Additionally, inclusive society members could access available resources and opportunities regardless of race, gender, social class, or location to attain their full potential and engage in society as equals.

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On a global scale, the ageing population had reached 727 million in 2020 with a projected rise to 1.5 billion in 2050 (United Nations, 2020). Ageing at home or in a community proves pivotal for ageing adults' life quality. In ascertaining what constitutes ageing in place, much research outline ageing in place as the ability to remain at home or within a social context until old age (Weil & Smith, 2016; Wiles et al., 2012). Ageing adults strive to remain in their own homes and avoid nursing centers or being transferred between elderly care facilities (Forsyth & Molinsky, 2021).

Ageing in place denotes older adults' ability to live safely, independently, and comfortably in their own home and society regardless of age, income, or ability level based on the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). This capacity could prove vital for individuals who can no longer travel or live independently. Generally, ageing in place tends to occur with individuals' inclination to stay at home and in their neighborhood without losing autonomy. This decision is essential for those who have always lived their lives independently and prioritise autonomy. Given that ageing in place could provide older adults with high levels of self-esteem, such individuals could preserve their sense of purpose and identity throughout their lives by remaining active and engaged as community members.

An Inclusive Community for Ageing in Place

In planning national development, one of the primary government concerns is the development of a community that responds to older adults' needs. The World Health Organisation first introduced the term age-friendly city in 2007, which refers to a city that encourages active ageing by enhancing opportunities for people's health, participation, and protection as they age, thus improving their life quality (World Health Organisation, 2007). An age-friendly city enables older people who choose to age in place to live in an inclusive society (see Figure 1). Such a city would adapt its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people who reflect a broad range of needs and capacities. The three key principles of an inclusive community, including social inclusion and equal opportunities and capabilities, determine how an inclusive community could respond to ageing in place. Furthermore, eight vital domains of an age-friendly city would encompass the key determinants of social inclusiveness:

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outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, social participation, community and health services, and communication and information. Developed nations resembling Australia, Denmark, and the United Kingdom have implemented national policies constituting community-oriented initiatives for ageing adults who live autonomously at home (World Health Organisation, 2015).
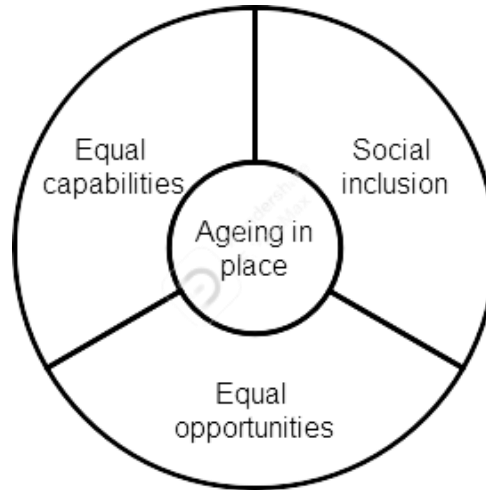

Figure 1: *Ageing in Place in An Inclusive Community*

Ageing individuals who live alone with insufficient care are prone to safety- and health-oriented risks. Poor physical abilities and health conditions require senior citizens to seek external assistance. Local environments and societies are responsible for ensuring optimal ageing in place as this concept offers adaptations within the home. Ismail et al. (2020) explained that older adults who decide to age in place live in family homes or a series of homes, where they move from one home to another home, but within the same community. This decision enables older people to live autonomously with adequate facilitation from their homes and communities (Horner & Boldy, 2008). Grove (2020) demonstrated how ageing adults value their physical ability through high mobility and autonomy, strong social networks, and the effective execution of daily tasks and errands. In this vein, such individuals could successfully age in place with a sense of community and support.

Ageing in place in an inclusive community could be a safe and healthy alternative for older adults who require much care. Community members could ensure that such individuals remain socially connected, equal, and independent with the necessary support for optimal safety and health through social inclusion, such as facilitated living arrangements (assisting with bathing, dressing, and cooking). Older individuals with a longer lifespan may feel socially disconnected upon transitioning through the life stage and are susceptible to social exclusion. At this stage, most individuals experience exclusion in terms of services and social networks (Key & Culliney, 2018), struggle with their spouse's demise or ailments, regret the loss of close contacts, experience changes in connecting with family members, and feel dependent on helpers (Vos et al., 2020). Older people tend to isolate themselves in the wake of a negligent community that fails to support their basic needs (Bayar & Türkoğlu, 2021).

Notwithstanding, most individuals strive to recover from the aforementioned changes despite personal differences in terms of pace and intensity. Inclusive community members should be interdependent as everyone receives equal opportunities and capabilities. A society could establish a positive ageing-in-place environment with a conducive, respectful, and comfortable atmosphere that fulfils older adults' fundamental requirements. Older individuals' capacity to age in place is impacted by distance to the nearest facilities and services and their social engagement level (Bayar & Türkoğlu, 2021; Matsumoto et al., 2016). Current community services should be sufficiently equipped to facilitate older people's ageing in place (World Health Organisation, 2007). Granbom et al. (2021) denoted how the desire to age in place transitioned to realising that they had no choice but to age in place following a paucity of resources and alternatives. Notably, older adults remain residing within the community owing to older people's family requirements, being a homeowner, a supportive neighborhood, and the ability to manage at home.

Older people are socially connected following a strong sense of belonging (Bosch-Farré et al., 2020), which allows ageing adults to be mentally healthy and valued as community members. This feeling is primarily expressed through active engagement in neighborhood activities that establish a conducive environment. Most of the individuals desired social connectedness, a sound knowledge of available resources, and a role as active social contributors across cultures and generations (Jakubec et al., 2019). Enjoyable, interesting, and age-appropriate activities (getting together for coffee,

going for walks, or participating in other collective activities) and facilities could be regularly organised to provide social inclusion for ageing-in-place residents.

An inclusive community that facilitates ageing in place must be accessible and welcoming. Ageing individuals with strong cultural and familial connections to their communities intend to remain in personally meaningful places (Guzman & Harrell, 2015). Simultaneously, social institutions establish systems and programmes in community development for optimal knowledge, information, and social accountability. As individuals with equal opportunities and capabilities, they feel socially connected with a sense of personal and communal belonging (Fabian et al., 2019). Although older people who live in communities struggle to attain optimal well-being (Nieboer & Cramm, 2018), their welfare and life quality could be much improved when they remain in the same house or community (Bowling, 2008). İt is deemed essential for societies to create a conducive ageing-in-place environment as inclusive community characteristics could facilitate or challenge the ageing-in-place trend. An age-friendly city successfully facilitates older adults to age in place within an inclusive society.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE AGENDA

An inclusive community enables older individuals who choose to age in place to feel supported and comfortable in their surroundings. Such an environment proved pivotal to ageing well in accommodating older individuals' physical and cognitive abilities. Prevalent social networks, well-established services, and perceived comfort and safety levels were high in an inclusive community. As such, older individuals could remain at home and socialise with friends and neighbours for optimal mental and physical health. Overall, this situation proved advantageous for both the individual and community to ensure social inclusion and equal opportunities and capabilities regardless of age.

Communities could become more age-friendly and socially inclusive by developing fair policies and guidelines and ensuring that all residents could access the same resources and opportunities. The aforementioned communities could also facilitate older adults towards independent living with secure and conducive environments and establish networks and partnerships with other age-friendly communities, disability organisations, and social service agencies. Such networks and partnerships connect

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ageing adults with other community members and social service agencies for optimal support and services. Meanwhile, potential scholars could provide a holistic understanding of how societies respond to preferences for ageing in place, address key areas in ageing-in-place trends where social exclusion is prevalent based on house design and transportation, and discuss the steps to promote ageing in place within an inclusive society from economic, social, and political perspectives.

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