

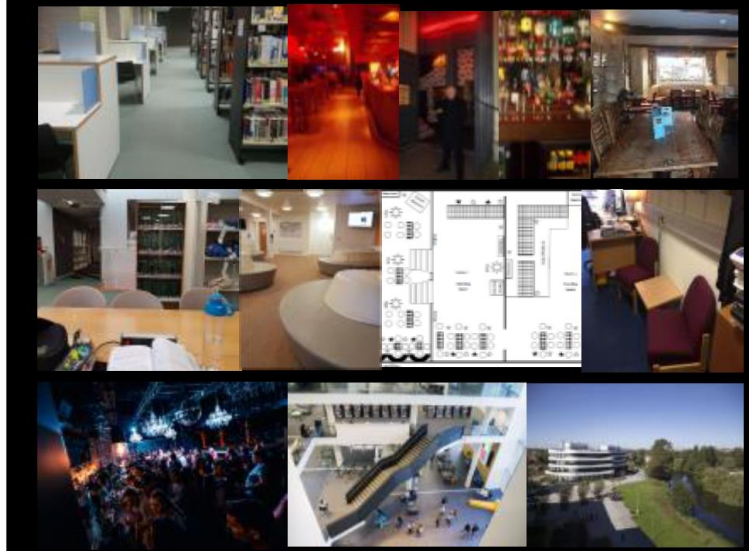
A Place for Me?

Enhancing Participation for Older Adults in Town Centre Regeneration Activities

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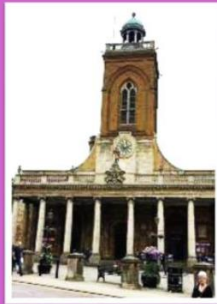
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Background

- Town centres can positively impact the health and wellbeing of local residents.
- High quality, functional design can promote healthy, accessible, safe and cohesive local communities.
- Population most at risk of isolation, loneliness and detrimental health outcomes.
- Least likely to be considered in urban regeneration or involved in decision-making processes.



Local Context

The number of people in Northamptonshire aged 65+ continues to increase faster than the rest of the population in the UK.

In 2018, there was an estimated total population of 225,146 people in Northampton, of those, 32,128 (14%) were over the age of 65 and 8,783 (3%) were aged 80 and over.

Current projected population figures suggest that there will be more than 45,000 people in Northampton over 65 by 2030.



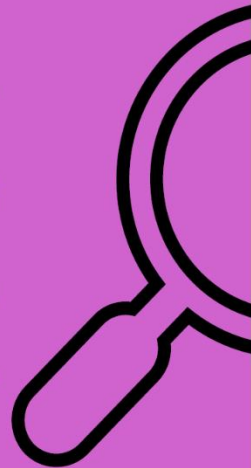
Active Ageing

- Helping people to stay in control of their own lives for as long as possible
- Allowing individuals to continue to contribute to the society and the economy.
- Participation in all aspects of life.
- Improving access to services, social cohesion, healthy ageing and needs for active, independent living.
- Positive perceptions, recognition of contribution, engagement in decision making.



Project Overview

- Functional significance: meaning of town centre for older adults.
- Design for all: making the town centre a place older people (and others) can and want to utilise.
- Improving wellbeing through reduced isolation and increased autonomy.
- Participatory approach and partnership working: UoN, Age UK, NC.



Functional significance

- Affordances: opportunities for action
- Functional 'fit' and specificity.
- Reciprocal, embodied and meaningful individual-environment relationships.
- Meaning exists within the interplay of individual and world.
- Perception is for action: actively navigate environments.
- Discovery, meaning and function.



Describe:

1. What do you see?
2. What would you do in this environment?
3. What does this environment mean to you?



Methods I

- Ethics, mental capacity and safeguarding.
- Recruitment via Age UK.
- 9 people took part: 5m/4f.
- Average age 82, white British, all lived locally.



Methods II

- Data Collection:
 - snap and chat
 - individual interviews
 - focus groups
- Participant engagement.
- Thematic analysis.



Town history & memories built a sense of identity

- Connecting spaces and history.
- A lost sense of belonging.

"I was just talking about an aeroplane in about 1941/42 time that crashed and lay here on the ground. It flew up Gold Street and as the wings were passing the houses, it left scars which are still visible now. I can remember the incident very well."
(Jack)



A place older people could take part in life and culture

- A place 'for others'.
- Limited inclusion and participation opportunities.

"Me and my wife only go to the places we want to go to. When we go in now, we only go to the banks now."
(Harry)



The town centre can be inaccessible

- Not an easy place to navigate.
- The bus station does not provide shelter.

"Some buses have never gone into the new bus station; those buses weren't given a place. My friend had to wait out here in the rain to get to her bus. God rest her soul, she died a couple of months ago, she always had to wait out here in the rain to get her bus."
(Isla)



Concern about previous regeneration activities

- Concern about investment on 'improvements'.
- Recommendations for regeneration not heard.

"I thought it was a waste of money. I think it was a complete waste of money to do it...there are far more things in this town that need doing than building a fountain, especially when it isn't maintained."
(Oscar)



The town is not safe

- Increased vulnerability.
- Wayfinding and orientation.

"They put all those nice tiles all over. It would have been better with decent paving slabs to make it more secure for people to walk on. Not just me; there are lots of older people. I've walked up the street and nearly stumbled."
(Mai)

"I went into Waterstones for a book once...I came out and I just didn't know where I was, because there was all these new trees."
(Isla)



Discussion

- Findings support existing literature.
- Action required: narratives contrast to policy recommendations and initiatives.
- Must support older people to remain active and independent as they age.
- Allow older adults to continue to be independent, contribute to the community in many ways.
- Key functional features of local town centre space impeded this, with far-reaching impacts.



Recommendations

- High street design and navigation: ensure pathways and pedestrian environments are accessible and safe.
- Improve cleanliness, maintenance and repairs.
- Provide age-friendly urban spaces with suitable opportunities to rest.
- Wayfinding: Introduce improved signage and continue to review impact of contextual changes from regeneration.
- Access and transportation: Assess the function and design of existing bus station and shelters.
- Consider retail offer and leisure opportunities for older adults.
- Ensure town centre is a place for all.



Older Adult Participation



- Actively enhance older people's participation in decisions about how public money is used to transform and regenerate urban areas.
- Demonstrate consideration of older people's 'voice' in transformation plans.
- Account for the supported involvement of older people in decisions and agreed changes.



Impact

- Presentation of findings.
- Participant involvement.
- Report dissemination.
- Media coverage.

Limitations

- Non-diverse sample.
- Sample size.
- Localised focus.



Future Work

- Extension of project.
- Northampton Forward and evaluation.
- Town centre community integration.
- Larger and more diverse sample.
- Covid and safety.
- Virtual snap and chat?
- Loss of meaning?



Concluding Points

- Older adults are integral to the success and regeneration of town centre spaces.
- Instead of hindering progress, older adults provide a wealth of knowledge and experience for policy makers.
- Participatory projects are important to increase non-engagement, enabling voices to be heard and the needs of older adults met in later life.
- Creative methods approaches are enjoyable for participants and enhance participation.
- Function-based descriptions provide rich, meaningful and useful insights into the relationship between older people and their local communities, with practical recommendations for designers and policy-makers.



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Thank you!
Any questions?

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