

# The Capability to Age in Place: Access to Life from the Home to the Community Despite Vulnerability

Chair: **Steven Schmidt**, Sweden

## **Session Type:** Symposia

One pillar of UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 (2016) is to make cities inclusive, and in light of population ageing, many Western countries are implementing policies to promote ageing in place. With age being the main predictor of functional decline, people are thus living longer in their homes and neighbourhoods with functional limitations. This can lead to vulnerability and unequal access to valued activities, i.e. less inclusive cities. From a capabilities perspective, individual functional decline without societal adaptations in the social and physical environments can reduce a person's freedom to engage in activities they value. In this symposium we focus on out of home activities. The four presentations address personal, social, and environmental aspects relevant for an individual's capability to go from the home to the community to engage in valued activities.

As a starting point, presentation one will describe the theoretical frames around which this symposium is grounding including capability and vulnerability in the context of environmental gerontology. The first presentation will also demonstrate the application of such theories to the example of driving as a mobility practice. The second presentation will explore individual attitudes related to out of home mobility and show which factors best predict out of home mobility behaviour. The third presentation comes from a transport equity approach addressing capabilities (here mobility opportunities) in relation to individual resources and access to different modes of transport to achieve desired everyday activities. The fourth presentation addresses the accessibility of public buildings; a new instrument will be highlighted that can be used to assess the accessibility of building entrances for people with different functional impairments. Finally, a discussant will look at the cross-cutting themes from a theoretical perspective and discuss implications for research and policy, e.g., with respect to making cities more inclusive.

Co-chair: **Björn Slaug**, Sweden

Discussant: **Frank Oswald**, Germany

# **Findings from a Capability-based Travel Survey Among the Young-old Living in Sweden's Large Metropolitan Regions**

Steven M. Schmidt [Sweden]<sup>1</sup>, Anders Wretstrand [Sweden]<sup>1</sup>

Lund University<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this study was to conduct an empirical investigation of disparities in mobility opportunities among the young-old living in Sweden's large metropolitan regions. By drawing on Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, this study aimed to identify which resources and characteristics among those aged 65-79 are associated with fewer mobility opportunities relative to peers. By focusing on mobility opportunities or capabilities (instead of proxies for capability), the disparities reflecting equity concerns could be more clearly depicted. The research material comprised 1,149 interviews with representative samples living in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö's large metropolitan regions. Links were identified between social resources, holding a driving license, access to public transport, income, health condition and chronological age and capabilities. These results call for a greater focus on capabilities in travel surveys and a more fine-grained approach to policymaking by accounting for intersectionality effects. In this way, more targeted and holistic policy measures – combining different aspects of everyday life – can be developed.

# Doing Mobility -- Towards a Practice-Theoretical Framework for Environmental Gerontology

Anna Wanka [Frankfurt am Main, Germany]<sup>1</sup>

Goethe University Frankfurt am Main<sup>1</sup>

Environmental gerontology focuses on the description, explanation and optimisation of the relationship between older adults and their socio-spatial environments. The growing popularity of this research field is not least due to the policy initiatives like the *Age-friendly Cities and Communities* (ACC) movement or *ageing in place*, which shall support the capability of older adults to live independently in their community. This paper provides a theoretical discussion of existing approaches towards vulnerability, capability, and environments in later life: Dualist frameworks, like Sen's (1987) capability approach, distinguish between personal capabilities on the one hand, and the (environmental) facilities offered to achieve those capabilities on the other (cf. Stephens et al., 2018), hence understanding space as a 'container' in which human action happens. Relationist approaches, like the model of person-environment fit (Wahl & Oswald, 2010), try to capture the relations and interactions between older persons and their environments for assessing capability and vulnerability. A practice-theoretical perspective could take this development even further, as with it the focus shifts from either persons or environments to the social practices that *take place* (Wanka, 2018). Social practices are inherently spatial and actively integrating material elements (e.g. bodies, things, architecture), elements of meaning (e.g. safety, belonging), and competences (e.g. mobility; cf. Shove et al., 2012). The capability to age in place, then, is being *done* in a nexus of everyday life practices. The paper illustrates this approach on the example of *driving* as one exemplary outdoor mobility practice of older adults. It concludes with the proposition of a practice-theoretical research agenda in environmental gerontology that may help to encounter future challenges in this field.

# **Toward a Better Understanding of Mobility-Related Attitudes in Later Life -- Theoretical and Empirical Reflections**

Susanne Penger [Frankfurt Main, Germany]<sup>1</sup>, Kerstin Conrad [Germany]<sup>2</sup>, Frank Oswald [Germany]<sup>1</sup>

Goethe University Frankfurt<sup>1</sup>, ILS-Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development gGmbH<sup>2</sup>

What do we need to stay mobile in later life, particularly from a psychological perspective? To date, research on psychological attitudes in the context of out-of-home mobility is still scarce. Furthermore, attitudinal determinants of mobility are yet not enough considered when designing age-friendly cities. Thus, the objectives of this presentation are (1) to describe mobility-related attitudes that potentially foster daily out-of-home mobility in later life, (2) to theoretically embed these concepts into the field of environmental gerontology, and (3) to empirically examine the role of mobility-related attitudes for daily out-of-home behavior in old age. Based on Lawton's early ecological theory of aging, we conceptually describe a newly developed instrument of mobility-related behavioral flexibility and routines (MBFR) as a personal attitude with regard to potentially subsequent mobility behavior. With respect to the empirical part, we conducted a field study in order to examine the role of MBFR in the context of daily out-of-home mobility in an urban setting. Data was gathered from face-to-face interviews and trip diaries with 211 community-dwelling elders aged 65 years and older in the City of Stuttgart, Germany. Differentiated analyses showed a strong predictive value of MBFR for out-of-home mobility behavior especially among older participants with functional limitations. Accordingly, older adults with greater levels of mobility-related flexibility (and not routines) benefit from their positive attitudes despite their reduced physical capacity in order to maintain their daily out-of-home mobility. Our findings support the relevance of mobility-related behavior flexibility in order to cope with environmental mobility-related challenges while aging in place.

# Assessing Public Entrance Accessibility: A Construct Validity Study

Slaug Björn [Sweden]<sup>1</sup>, Jonsson Oskar [Sweden]<sup>1</sup>, Carlsson Gunilla [Sweden]<sup>1</sup>

Lund University<sup>1</sup>

**Background:** To live an active life requires accessible public environments. The significance of accessible public environments for activity and social participation has increasingly gained attention, not least in view of the increasing proportion of older people. This presentation deals with part of the validation process of a new instrument for assessing public entrance accessibility, based on a person-environment fit model.

**Methods:** A study setting of 15 public entrances was strategically selected and a combination of observational assessment and simulation techniques was used. The discriminant validity hypothesis was that the accessibility problems reflected by the new instrument should discriminate between different functional profiles, revealing problems differing in both range and severity. Four functional profiles were used: 1/ visual impairment; 2/ limitations in movement; 3/ wheel-chair users; 4/ limitations in upper extremity. Differences in accessibility problems between the functional profiles were analyzed by means of expert review and consensus discussions.

**Results:** Overall, accessibility problems were most substantial in relation to wheel-chair use, followed by visual impairment. Related to limitations in movement or wheel-chair use most problems were generated at the entrance door, such as by presence of stairs or inadequate ramps. Related to visual impairments, the instrument showed most problems on the route to the entrance, such as lack of tactile pathways. Related to limitations in upper extremity, problems were limited and restricted to the entrance door. The three public entrances generating most problems differed widely for the profiles, depending on entrance design.

**Conclusions:** This study demonstrated that the construct of the new instrument captures different accessibility problems of public entrances in a valid way. The goal of the new instrument is to support planning, evaluation and accomplishment of policies targeting participation of older people by making public entrances accessible for all, regardless of functional capacity.