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BOOK REVIEW

The role of the outdoors in residential environments for aging, edited by Susan Rodiek and Benyamin Schwarz, New York, The Haworth Press, ISBN 0-7890-3244-9, pp. 266, US$24.95 (paperback)

This book is a collection of 11 papers from researchers in Italy, Canada, the UK, Sweden and the United States, joined by a common theme of improving quality of life for older people through connection to the outdoors. The reader can expect to learn about the use of the outdoors by older people living in a range of settings, the human benefits in terms of health and wellbeing, and the common physical, physiological, psychological and administrative barriers older people must often overcome. A wide range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies are demonstrated and the literature is thoroughly reviewed, which makes this a valuable addition to the bookshelf of anyone in environmental gerontology or environment–behaviour research. Participant research was demonstrated in a range of settings, including retirement housing, assisted living facilities, day centres, long-term care facilities and nursing homes, continuing care communities and urban neighbourhoods. This review will briefly group and summarize the studies, provide suggestions aiming to improve dissemination of this type of research and identify future directions in which the book points.

From a cultural design perspective, Alves and colleagues bring new insight to the landscape preferences of elderly Hispanic people based on identifying needs for social interaction. Likewise, Scopelliti and Giuliani identify the built and natural restorative environments of Italian elders, further examining such preferences through place-specific processes such as activities and social interaction. Kearney and Winterbottom engaged 40 residents in long-term care about the importance and benefits of green space, preferred characteristics and barriers to use, as a step towards design recommendations. Likewise, Bengtsson and Carlsson extracted themes from nursing home staff upon which 'cautionary' and 'inspiring' design could be proposed. Joseph and colleagues were also interested in design when attempting to correlate outdoor features with exercise participation. Two studies involved older people more overtly in the development of design guidance. Rodiek learned what 108 residents of 14 assisted living facilities considered to be 'magnets' or 'barriers' to outdoor usage. Cranz and Young described a study of an elderly housing project which endeavoured to determine why outdoor places so appreciated were so little used.

Researchers Ottosson and Grahn strengthen arguments for spending time outdoors by providing evidence of restorative effects to the psycho-physiological balance of Swedish octogenarians, and particularly for persons with poor balance initially. Tang and Brown also correlated physiological measures, this time with viewing the landscape. Such studies demonstrate implications for healthcare broadly. Cutler and Kane provided sobering insight from their North American nursing home study that 32.2% of 1068 residents went outdoors less than once a month, and that only 44.3% of 131 nursing units had direct access to an outdoor environment. Providing outdoor areas, as their paper shows, is no shortcut to satisfying human needs for beauty, stimulation, fresh air, exercise and bird song. They pointed out that there are no federal regulations for provision of outdoor spaces in nursing homes (which resonates in the UK as well). This may be a blessing in disguise as building regulations must only be followed to the letter, replacing the need to *design* space with the remit to merely *provide* it. The authors also identified barriers to going outdoors erected within the social and policy environment, as did others to varying degrees. Sugiyama and Thompson furthered the theoretical foundations of human–environment interaction by assessing the direct influence of the outdoor environment on an individual's quality of life.

As a person involved in research, design and care practice, I found something of use in every paper. I am encouraged to see a book devoted entirely to this important issue of outdoor environments for older people. However, as this book endeavours to reach beyond the research community, it would have been helpful to assist knowledge transfer with a clear overview and/or summary for design and practice colleagues if such persons are intend to use it, as the back cover trumpets. The table of contents might have had sub-sections under which the papers were grouped (for example: How people use outdoor space; How looking out or going outdoors affects the body; Promoting exercise and neighbourhood interactions). Each of these sub-sections could have ended with a short summary of implications for design and practice. A table might have also been useful, giving the study aims, research questions, methodology and setting. The need to provide a road map for the reader is overcome to a degree in the *Journal of Housing for the Elderly* (Vol. 19, Nos 3–4, 2005 in which the papers are co-published) by providing abstracts in the table of contents. The vitality sensed within the umbrella field of environmental design and research lies partly in a

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strong and sensitive ethic for interdisciplinary dialogue. Rather than drawing a line under our findings, interpreting them for design, care practice and policy develops a wider audience for the work, and increases the likelihood that research will matter.

While many of these papers confirmed previous work on *what* people want or do not want (preferences for easy access, vegetation and comfortable seating vs. problems with paving, maintenance, noise and proximity) and what is being provided or not, this book points toward the need for more work in the area of *why* and *how* such things are important. If form follows function then we need to know more about the *possible* functions of outdoor areas from the perspective of people living, or perhaps more importantly, contemplating living there. Research linking outdoor use and social interaction, for example, begins to tackle the larger question posed by the editors in the introduction – why outdoor use in care facilities is *optional*. Rodiek touched upon a way forward when she said that 'people unfamiliar with environmental design may consider the built environment to be expensive or difficult to change, and therefore tend to *accept* rather than criticize environmental conditions' (p. 105, italics added). The emotional and psychological down-sizing of age leads to assumptions about one's relationship with her or his social and physical environment. Furthermore, acceptance is the end result of a complex mix of perceptions and beliefs about privacy, control, liberty, responsibility, permission, personalisation, ownership, entitlement and provision.

A person's assumptions in terms of outdoor usage are very different between a private house and a care facility. A person may wonder, What exactly is my role here? And in turn, What is the role of the outdoors? If you made a list of 100 reasons a person goes outside when they live at home, how many of them would still exist as viable reasons in a care facility? I have long doubted the efficacy of looking for design solutions at a facility level, where it is easier to identify barriers to use of outdoor spaces than to address the deeper issue of barriers to living a proper life. As long as there is not one reason to go outside, never mind 100, why bother? Is there something intrinsic to a care facility, or indeed to care provision, that removes these reasons?

Essentially, a book entitled *The Role of the Outdoors in Residential Environments for Aging* has contributed to our understanding of expressed preferences, desires and barriers. And the collected papers bring further value by addressing the role of the outdoors at various scales – room, building and neighbourhood. What is still needed is an honest appraisal of 'role', which requires not only an inventory of elements asked of a person once they are living in the environment, but an understanding of their life and aspirations before moving in. A narrative, observational, lived-world depiction of people's relationships with the natural world is needed to balance and extend the findings shown here. While awaiting that, reading this will inspire and stimulate. I especially recommend it to masters-level students to read while pondering their dissertation research. It is a career magnet into the design and psychology of therapeutic space – a book which retrospectively will be seen as a necessary step towards redefining the role of the outdoors as reasons to engage.

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