

Call for evidence on ageing research

How do we ensure that our homes, neighbourhoods, villages, towns and cities meet the needs of our ageing population? Does the profession have access to the knowledge base that will enable it to respond to the design issues raised by our changing demographics? How can industry and government support standards and best practice in design for older people? How do we support architects and designers to engage fully and creatively with the desires and needs of older people?

The RIBA has formed a research and innovation working group, chaired by Sophie Handler, to bring together research that will aid the profession in responding to the complex challenges and opportunities posed by demographic change, and to identify key areas where more work is desperately needed. Today the RIBA puts out a call for evidence, asking architects, academia and policy makers to help it map the knowledge landscape – and urgent policy areas that architects need to address as they respond to these shifting demographics. This call for evidence is focused around five core themes – raising a series of questions for each:

Practicing spatial inclusion

How ‘inclusive’ are the spaces we design for (/with) older people? How do architects and designers approach the idea of ‘inclusion’ in design practice? And how involved are older people in that design process?

From minimum access standards and principles of inclusive design to emerging participatory models of design practice this theme explores what spatial inclusion might mean for both older people and design practitioners alike - and what emerging approaches, methodologies and creative practice still need to be developed to minimise the marginalisation/exclusion of older people in the built environment.

Houses, ‘home’ and neighbourhoods

What are the key issues that researchers, policymakers and architects have already addressed around the design of housing, homes and neighbourhoods? And what are those issues and areas of work that still need to be developed?

From the physical fabric of housing to those broader questions raised by the meaning of ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘home’ – this theme explores those key and emerging issues that architects, policymakers and researchers need to address to ensure that homes and neighbourhoods support people’s changing needs and aspirations in later life.

Urban development and change

How does urban development and change impact on older people’s everyday lives? Where are older people located in these patterns of change? And what is the role of architects, designers and of older people in shaping planning and development processes?

At a time when demographic ageing combines with rapid urbanisation this theme looks at the existing evidence on how urban change and planning impacts on older people’s everyday lives and what the role of architects and older people might be in engaging with these processes of urban change (from a city-wide to neighbourhood level).

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Designing for wellbeing

How does the built environment impact on older people's physical health and mental wellbeing? And what kind of places, spaces and designs need to be developed to support changing health needs and wellbeing in later life?

This theme explores the existing evidence around the relationship between the built environment and its impact on older people's wellbeing. From assistive technologies to therapeutic environments, and the importance of accessing the urban outdoors – what are the kinds of spaces, designs and forms of practice that already support and promote older people's wellbeing – and what kind of innovations and ways of working still need to be developed?

Spaces of social exchange

How does the built environment impact on older people's sense of connection with the world around them? Can the design of buildings and spaces support social interaction and exchange? And how might architects and designers develop the kinds of spaces and design processes that support social connection in older age?

This theme explores the less visible dimension of design practice – to explore the relational qualities of designed spaces - and their impact on older people's everyday lives. From public spaces of (inter-generational) sociability to design processes and emerging technologies that facilitate social exchange - this theme responds to the growing debate around loneliness and isolation in later life to explore how different forms of spatial practice can support older people's sense of connection with place.

Call for evidence

Murray Fraser, Chair of the RIBA Research and Innovation Group, said:

“We want to support architects by bringing together the most up-to-date thinking from academia, and effective design solutions reached through design research, so that they can continue to create the better buildings and communities that the RIBA's purpose it is to champion. It is also vital that we identify and encourage new and emerging areas of research, research methods, design and forms of practice so that the profession is ready to respond to the complex implications of demographic change on our society.”

Sophie Handler, Chair of the RIBA working group on research and ageing, said:

“Issues surrounding the ageing of our society will have a significant impact on all aspects of our lives, from where we live to how we connect with the people and places around us. This is an issue of such importance that groups across the RIBA are all contributing to the discourse. The launch of the RIBA Building Futures report *Silver linings* complements our work by provoking debate and speculation on the potential urban futures of an 'active Third Age' raising broader questions that we all need to address as to how we design and structure places and spaces for our older age.”

Evidence received will shape the RIBA's research focus on ageing over the course of 2014, its dissemination of both innovative and best practice research and design over the course of the year, culminating in work with research funders to fill gaps in knowledge and practice.

Timeframe

We will be collating evidence throughout 2014, however this call for evidence closes on **31 December 2013**; further calls for evidence on more focussed aspects of ageing may go out throughout 2014 as our work develops.

How to respond

Responses should be emailed as word document to research@riba.org, with the subject “Ageing research, call for evidence”. Please do not send images or documents, such as research papers, unless you are the copyright holder.

Sources

We are looking both the evidence base related to design and ageing, and futures thinking. Where talking about evidence it would be helpful if respondees could note the source of the information they are discussing: a full academic reference is certainly not necessary (though would be welcome) but signposting along the lines of “Age UK research into digital inclusion concluded...”, or hyperlinks to sources, would be appreciated.

Feedback and questions

If you have any questions about this call for evidence or the RIBA’s programme of work on research into ageing please contact:

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