

## Relevance, Aim, Theory

### 1. Introduction

In the face of the COVID-19 virus restrictions implemented in Sweden in spring of 2020, limitations to accessing urban space for older people (at least above the age of 70), could not have been more clear (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2020). These restrictions opened up questions about how older people experienced accessing city even before the recent upheaval. While there are quite a lot of research into the health and well-being of older people, less research have looked into the intersection of public urban space and older people's right to accessing it (Finlay & Finn 2020). Although one should be careful to generalize "older people" as a population, some things should be of particular concern for older people. After all, they are more likely to be dependent on transportation infrastructures, spatial closeness to necessary services, need for resting places in public space among others (WHO 2007). Public places are of particular importance as older people are one of the groups that uses public spaces most frequently, such as public parks (Guo et al. 2019).

Why should older people's inclusion in urban spaces be of importance for research? It might seem obvious that it is important to look at how "marginalized" groups can be further included in urban spaces. But older people's needs will become even more relevant for cities from both a political, social and urban planning perspective in the future. After all, not only is the world's population growing more urban, but elderly people will be a larger percentage of the population overall (UN 2010 p. 4) and will occupy urban spaces to an even larger extent than they do now. Thus it will be important to research how older people are excluded in the way urban spaces are shaped both in planning and in everyday participation.

Most of the existing research into older people and urban space have been made within gerontology through concepts such as the "age-friendly city" minted by WHO (World Health Organization) in 2007. Yet, there have been critique within critical gerontology towards the way the concept has been used, as it has ignored the larger social and political trends which affects the way cities are shaped to exclude older people. This study hopes to bridge that gap by using analytical tools and concepts from urban geography research to analyze older people and urban space, using the theoretical lens of the right-to-the city perspective (Brenner et al. 2009)

## 2. The aim of the research

This research will look into the exclusion and inclusion experienced by older residents in Stockholm, which will serve as a case study for larger urban trends. This study will try to contribute to letting old people define and discuss their own exclusion and will try to avoid prescribing how the exclusion takes its form by taking an inductive approach. The research will look at both the planning of the physical environment and the everyday practices in how the urban space is being used, as they combined shape the experience of accessing it. The study does not only want to look at exclusion experienced, but also try to capture if there is some form of resistance in the way old people use urban space in their daily practices.

The aim of this research is as following:

- How are older people spatially excluded/included in urban spaces in Stockholm?
  - How are they included at the urban planning stage?
  - How are they excluded/included in daily practices in urban space?
  - How are older people resisting exclusion?

## 3. Theories and concepts

The theoretical background takes its roots in from two academic subdisciplines: critical gerontology and critical urban geography, as the study aims to combine them.

Critical gerontology is one of the few theoretical fields that has concerned themselves with analyzing the intersection of age and urban space through a broader systemic perspective, which made it vital to include for the study. Critical gerontology criticizes how earlier gerontology research has ignored the overall societal and political structures leading to exclusion, limiting itself to individual well-being, an issue termed “microfication” (Kelley et al. 2018), and that one of the problems is the lack of theories within the field to analyze the situation for older people in cities. In looking for theoretical perspectives from outside the discipline to bridge that gap, critical gerontology research has borrowed concepts from critical urban geography such as spatial exclusion (Moulaert et al. 2018).

Urban geography research, though possessing analytical tools to investigate the question of urban space has often neglected looking at old age as a factor of exclusion (Finlay & Finn 2020). While there have been a lot of research looking into urban exclusion of different

groups according to poverty level, gender, ethnicity and class, older people has not yet been investigated to a larger extent within urbanization studies, as older people has been coupled with the rural environment (Hanlon & Skinner 2016, Abramsson & Hagberg 2019). Yet the theories within the field are applicable even when looking at age. Rémillard-Boilard (2018) brings up an example of the difficulty of age friendly city development in the face of economic austerity politics and the drawback of states.

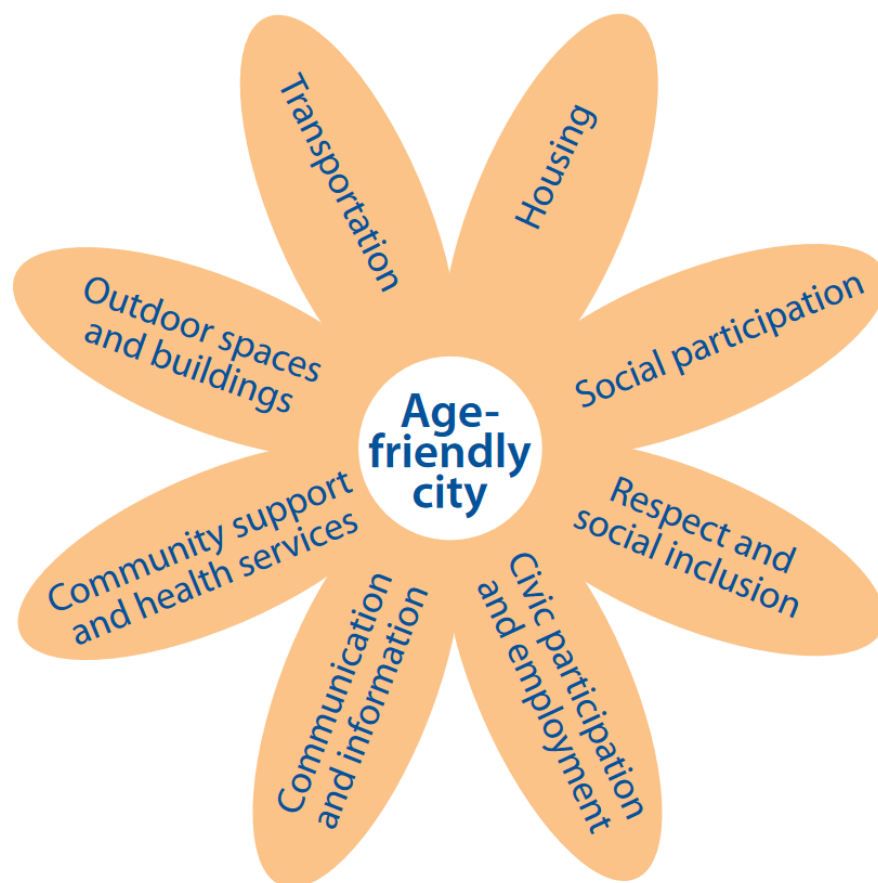
#### 4.1 Right to the city

Using a rights-to-the-city theoretical lens as promoted by Lefebvre (Brenner et al. 2009), researchers has looked at how “neoliberal” urban policies has aimed to exclude marginalized groups from urban environments and thus worked against their right to democratically decide over the urban space.

“Right to the city” is not only about theoretically investigating the subject, but rooted in activism that strives make groups claim their right to urban space through resistance to the urban exclusion created by capitalist development of cities (Brenner et al. 2009). While the main focus of the research has been on the exclusion of the poor, the theoretical framework is not necessarily limited to a class perspective. It has been applied to other excluded groups such as gender, ethnic and sexual minorities as well (Marcuse 2009, 2012 ). Though critical urban geography has mostly ignored age as a factor the theoretical tools of the discipline lends itself to expanding to analyzing age as well (Finlay & Finn 2020).

#### 4.2 Age-friendly city

“Age-friendly” cities, was minted by the World Health Organization 2007 (WHO 2010), and parts of the concept focus on how older people are excluded or included in cities (see figure 1). Yet it has often been used from an top-down perspective with positivist epistemological assumptions in urban planning (Fitzgerald & Caro 2016). Researchers working within critical gerontology such as Sharlach (2016) and Buffel et al (2018), has problematized how the concept is used, wishing to open up a wider debate beyond WHO's definition. “[...]the need for a stronger embedding of the age-friendly mission in a citizenship- and rights-based narrative of ageing, one that is centred on values of equality, community empowerment and spatial justice” (Buffel et al 2018 p. 288).



*Figure 1 (source: WHO 2007)*

Another critique has been the way the “age-friendly city” concept has failed to take the local and regional differences into account. Instead the model has been prescriptive in deciding what needs and concerns are important to older people (Chan et al. 2016). Elderly people themselves should not be erased from the discussion about the exclusion they face, and it is important to let old people participate in the planning and research process of age-friendly cities (Buffel et al. 2018).

The study wishes to take the concern of critical gerontology to heart: earlier research has generalized the experience of older people, is centered on developed countries and often neglected the voices of older people. The concept might however serve as a useful theoretical starting point for identifying excluding factors. Though it will have to be used critically, understanding that everything might not be applicable in the local context. Instead the research must foremost value experiences described by the interviewees. The concept could then later be used to compare and contrast with the local reality.

#### 4. Methodologies and methods

The study will use a case study methods approach. Rather than a research method in its own right, case study research is an epistemological framework used to analyze a case by using several different methods (Stoecker 1991). The case will be defined as Stockholm city, focusing on the centralized urban parts of the city, and limited to the Stockholm city districts. The study will use three qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews, field observations and a textual analysis of planning documents from the city office. As the research is taking an inductive approach, theories will be used like a tool, rather than trying to fit the data into the preconceived theories (Franklin 2012 p. 233).

Doing a case study should be a good approach compatible with the research goal of finding an in-depth understanding of older people's exclusion in Stockholm. Taking the local context into account and to not generalize from earlier findings are stressed in the critical gerontology research reviewed. As well as the necessity to further involve older people to determine the exclusionist factors they face (Wanka et al. 2018). One of the weakness of the study will be the potential limit of generalizability, though this should pose no problem (Thomas 2010), as the results will be indicative of the range of the factors of exclusion or inclusion experienced by older people, rather than making a quantitative analysis in how large a part of the older population experiences exclusion or inclusion (Small 2009).

The semi-structured interviews will work from an interview protocol which it will loosely follow. As the purpose is to explore which factors are of importance in the local context, the researcher will try to be attentive where the interviewees and adapt to the situation, which is the advantage of the chosen method (Galletta 2012). Due to the focus on older people, the interviewees will be selected through convenience sampling aimed towards finding the target group by reaching out to organizations for older people, senior homes, or other potential meeting spaces for older people. The sampling frame will be defined to people above 65 years of age living within the city of Stockholm. The sampling size will be around 20 participants and try to achieve saturation of the views represented (Bryman 2012, p. 426). The study will use stratified sampling if possible, by selecting interviewees from a diverse selection as possible in class, gender and ethnicity and disability status.

The textual analysis will be using a basic content analysis method (Drisko and Maschi 2015), by creating a coding scheme based on the semi-structured interviews that will be used to analyze how the concerns raised by older people are addressed in the city planning

documents. The planning documents be limited to the areas selected for the field observation to limit the scope of the selection for the study, and the selected documents consists of reports and planning documents from Stockholms stads city government.

Further methodological reading is required to conduct the field studies currently, though the literature review has included a few studies using field observation as a method, such as Neckerman et al's (2009) study that compares neighborhoods in New York using a coding scheme. The studies will most likely serve as inspiration for the observation methods. The sites for field observations will be conducted in urban spaces in central Stockholm, though the location has not been selected yet. The sites might be chosen or changed based on the places interviewees experience exclusion.

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