

Can Emotionally Intelligent Architecture Improve Well-being in Co-Housing Communities for Individuals Over 55s?

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Course: BSc Architecture

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Module code: ACAA5003

Word count: 505

Date: 19/04/2025

Introduction

As populations age and traditional retirement housing becomes increasingly outdated and expensive, the need for inclusive, emotionally nourishing environments grows more urgent. Co-housing—an intentional model based on shared spaces and mutual support—offers a compelling alternative for individuals over 55.

This dissertation explores how architecture, informed by psychological principles, can enhance the emotional and social wellbeing of older adults in co-housing. Having long been interested in how the built environment affects human behaviour and mood, I believe that architecture plays a vital role in shaping not just how we live, but how we feel.

People over 55 often face major life transitions—retirement, health changes, and social shifts—making them vulnerable to isolation yet open to new housing solutions. I hypothesise that emotionally intelligent design, grounded in environmental psychology, can help foster belonging and reduce loneliness in this group.

Methodology

This study will use a qualitative approach, combining case study analysis and personal interviews. I will examine three co-housing developments—**Marmalade Lane** (UK), **Saettedammen** (Denmark), and **OWCH** (London)—through site visits, floor plan analysis, and spatial critique.

Where possible, I will conduct interviews with residents, architects, or scheme managers. Interview data will be interpreted using frameworks from environmental and design psychology, focusing on features like shared spaces, privacy gradients, light, and circulation flow. This approach aims to reveal how design supports or hinders psychological needs.

Aims and Objectives

The project aims to explore the emotional, psychological, and financial needs of individuals over 55 in community-based living. It will examine how architectural strategies can address themes like autonomy, loneliness, identity, and community. The goal is to propose psychological design principles tailored to co-housing for this age group.

Literature Review

Initial sources include *Designing for Older Adults* (Fisk, 2004), *A Pattern Language* (Alexander et al., 1968), and *The Experience of Place* (Hiss, 1991). These are complemented by papers in environmental psychology and ageing.

There is a gap in literature connecting psychological insights with architectural design for older adults. To address this, I will also review architectural journals such as *Architectural*

Design and *The Journal of Architecture*, particularly those covering relevant case studies or similar.

Limitations

The research is limited by word count and feasibility of access, which may restrict the number of case studies. Interviews may be constrained by ethical considerations, including confidentiality. Also, some participants may be unfamiliar with online surveys, potentially affecting data collection. These challenges will be managed through careful planning and adherence to ethical standards.

Ethical Considerations

All participants will give informed consent and may remain anonymous. Questions will be non-intrusive and handled sensitively, especially around topics like health, isolation, or ageing.

Timeframe

- **May–June:** Literature review
- **July:** Case study selection, sketching and interview planning
- **Aug–Sept:** Data collection and analysis
- **October:** Writing, visual compilation, final edits

Conclusion

This dissertation investigates how psychologically informed architecture can improve co-housing experiences for people over 55. As society grapples with ageing and isolation, this study aims to offer both academic insight and practical guidance for designing homes that support residents emotionally, mentally, and socially.

References

Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S. and Silverstein, M. (1968). *A pattern language which generates multi-service centres*. Berkeley, Calif.: Center For Environmental Structure.

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Hiss, T. (1991). *The experience of place*. New York: Vintage Books.