Challenging the Cognitive and Physical Reserve of Aging Adults Through the Development of a Central New York Aging Readiness Plan:

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Abstract:
An unprecedented number of older adults, namely the Baby Boomer generation, are entering retirement. The need for age-friendly communities is omnipresent. Seniors’ desire to age in place supports this scale-defying exigency. Barriers to aging in place are ubiquitous, urban, suburban, and rural communities demand solutions to threatening obstacles. Absence of a comprehensive aging-readiness plan necessitates action. The purpose of this study was to identify the barriers to aging in place in Central New York, and propose appropriate planning solutions. Focus groups were conducted to determine the barriers to aging in place. These main themes arose: area for physical security and exercise facilities is a priority, feeling of safety/security affects going out, and loss of control leads to compromised independence. Basis for in-the-barriers to aging in place in Central New York, and propose appropriate planning solutions. Focus groups were conducted to determine the barriers to aging in place. These main themes arose: area for physical security and exercise facilities is a priority, feeling of safety/security affects going out, and loss of control leads to compromised independence. Basis for intervention involved the following community context breakdown: property/garage, house/building, street, block, & neighborhood. Each theme was addressed via multi-generational planning, smart growth, universal and ecological design principles.

Mobility Ability & Physical/Cognitive Reserve Theory:

Gaps in Knowledge-Opportunities for Demonstration:
• No single American Community has developed a comprehensive aging-readiness plan.
• Only 60% of American communities have begun to address the needs of the growing aging population (The Maturing of America, 2006).
• Aging in place can foster independence for aging individuals and may raise overall quality of life, but current barriers suppress this option for seniors.
• Accessory dwelling units are a viable option for seniors who prefer to age in place, yet zoning restrictions limit their presence.

The New Urban Community:

Methods:
• Five focus groups were held in CNY to address the major barriers/facilitators of aging in place.
• Asnowball sampling method was used, group participants were aged 65+ or older.

Top Themes of Focus Groups:

• Aging is a natural process that each human being experiences and requires physical & cognitive adaptation within both the residential and community setting.
• One characteristic that simultaneously unifies and differentiates our global population is the condition sarcopenia or the age-related loss of muscle mass and strength (Guccione A. A., et al., 2012).
• As we age, a general decline in overall physiological ability occurs, which Schwartz refers to as “vigor!”
• The Slippery Slope of Aging diagram is a foundation for the planning of successful comprehensive aging-ready communities and bypasses regional ideas & terminologies.
• Certain standards must be set to ensure an optimal level of safety and security, which includes the provision of walkable communities.
• This includes the usage of a “complete streets” approach.
• Planning boards need to prioritize aging-readiness plans, as the number of seniors is expected to increase significantly in the next decade.

Conclusion:

Challenges of Aging in Central NY:

Results:

• Top themes were identified and then data was organized into themes based on their frequency.
• The top three facilitators and barriers to aging in place were used in formulating the design matrix below.
• Smart growth principles, universal design techniques, multi-generational planning, and ecological design were the areas of intervention for each theme identified.
• Property/garage, house/building, street, block, & neighborhood interventions were considered for each theme.

Theme I: Area for Physical Activity & Exercise Facilities is a Priority

Theme II: Feeling of Safety/Security Affects Going Out

Theme III: Loss of Control Leads to Compromised Independence