Aging in Place and the Basic Parameters of Geographical Gerontology in Turkey

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Abstract
The populations of all countries in the world gray as the days go by. Although Turkey has a young population, it is also a rapidly aging country as a result of low birth and death rates and long life expectancies. The growing aging population has made senior citizens’ problems more apparent. In particular, the question of whether living spaces are arranged in line with the needs of the elderly people has gained momentum. Similarly, geographical gerontology, a sub-discipline of gerontology that studies the relationship between older adults and their living places, has gained greater significance. In this study, some reflections on Rowles’ theory of insideness (autobiographic, physical, and social components/parameters) will be studied to examine the relationship between elderly people and their living spaces in Turkey. Using the qualitative method, in-depth interviews were carried out with 30 nursing-home managers to understand the autobiographical parameter through their nursing homes, the physical parameter through aging in place (with therapeutic spaces as an alternative), and the social parameter through their perceptions of the retirement community network in Istanbul. As a result, this study sheds some light on the question of whether elderly people, who are seen as prisoners of place, have a say in redesigning their place of residence or developing alternative, multi-provisional residences.

Keywords
Geographical gerontology • Aging • Nursing homes • Social policies • Migration

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Problem, Purpose, and Significance
The world is graying due to decreased birth and death rates, in addition to increased life expectancies. Although developed countries have higher populations that are aged 65 and over, the aging population of developing countries increases faster compared to developed countries (Kinsella & Victoria, 2001). Turkey is also among countries facing a growing aging population in spite of having a young population. That is why the problems of an aging population have also moved to the front burner in Turkey. Because the aged now live in different kinds of places, their relationships with these places have gained great importance and, thus, geographical gerontology has, too. Geographical gerontology is a sub-discipline of gerontology that covers all issues of the aged connected to place. Therefore, reflections on insideness theory (Rowles, 1978) through its autobiographical, physical, and social parameters have been taken into account to examine the relationship of older adults with their living spaces in Turkey. These reflections are based on nursing home administrators’ answers to what they think about the relationship between older adults and place. Their views on this relationship are important for the following reasons: They (a) provide information about older adults’ living spaces and other alternative places, (b) help to evaluate the present social policies related to aging and place, and (c) provide an opportunity for the owners of nursing homes to develop these places and their alternatives.

Assumptions and Limitations
This study reviews the assumption that place is a variable that affects the preferences of the aged and thus predicts a relationship between older adults’ preferences and their places through autobiographical, physical, and social parameters. Also, it is limited to the views of nursing home administrators in terms of geographical gerontology. However, even though the interior views of residents from these places are believed able to enrich this study, such an aspect has been left to an on-going in-depth study in some nursing homes in Turkey.

Model and Data Collection Process
In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 nursing-home managers in Istanbul. Managers from different nursing homes were selected using the snowball model, taking account of the references.

Theoretical Background
Aging and environment: Age-friendly places. Although the aging population is increasing in Turkey, some urban planners have yet to consider the demands of older adults. Therefore, age-friendly places are vital for meeting city residents’ needs, not only because these places are important for older adults but also because they are quite helpful for disabled people and those who use baby strollers.
Why geographical gerontology? Geographical gerontology focuses on the residence-types of older adults in their physical and social worlds, in addition to their experiences in these living settings (Andrews, Evans, & Wiles, 2013). It studies the impact of place on aging as well as the effect of aging in place as an interdisciplinary field (Gardner, 2008). That is why gerontologists, city planners, service providers, local and governmental social policy makers need to have a perspective on geographical gerontology to redesign places in terms of the new demands of their residents, including elderly and disabled people.

Different parameters of geographical gerontology. Place is not just a physical entity but also a social aspect where senior citizens’ identities are formed (Gardner, 2008). Rowles’ insideness theory (1978) is an important paradigm in reading the autobiographical, physical, and social aspects of place in relation to aging.

Firstly, the autobiographical aspect of place in insideness theory is related to residents’ memories of nursing homes. Secondly, its physical parameter has a strong relationship to aging-in-place and therapeutic neighborhood settings. Finally, the social aspect of place is associated to retirement community networks or residential settings.

Findings, Discussion, and Interpretation

In one example of the autobiographic parameter of geographical gerontology according to the administrators, 80% of nursing home residents are there because of loneliness, whereas 20% are there for other reasons. This shows that most residents have a collection of dramatic memories because of loneliness.

In the physical and social parameters of geographical gerontology, 70% of nursing home administrators do not see the present nursing homes as good places for older adults. However, 53.3% did not suggest any alternatives to these places; 23.4% focused on aging in place as a physical parameter, and 13.3% mentioned retirement community networks as a social parameter of geographical gerontology.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Three parameters of geographical gerontology have been examined in this study using insideness theory (Rowles, 1978) through reflections in Turkey. It is interesting that, even among these institutions’ administrators, the perceptions of nursing homes in terms of the autobiographical aspect of geographical gerontology are not positive. A more interesting point appears in their weak responses to alternatives to institutionalized care. However, their suggestions for aging in place with respect to the physical aspect of geographical gerontology and retirement community
networks for the social aspect of geographical gerontology open a new horizon for debates in terms of the future of aging in Turkey. For this reason, the most important recommendation for upcoming studies in relation to aging is to enrich the scope of geographical gerontology through its autobiographical, physical, and social aspects.

Kaynakça/References


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