GLL
Geomatics, Landmanagement and Landscape No. 2 • 2026, 83–99

ISSN 2300-1496 https://doi.org/10.15576/GLL/224675

Research paper

Received: 02.04.2026
Accepted: 16.06.2026
Published: 30.06.2026

Spatial planning in the context of demographic change – the needs of older people in the light of the literature and legal regulations

Joanna Pałubska

Department of Integrated Geodesy and Cartography, AGH University of Krakow
✉ Corresponding author: palubska@agh.edu.pl

Summary

The current demographic changes, including the growing proportion of older people in the population, call for spatial planning policies that ensure the accessibility and functionality of public spaces for this demographic group. The World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations for creating age-friendly cities emphasise the need to consider long-term demographic processes in spatial planning. The existing approach, focused on development and meeting the current housing demand, should be complemented by consideration of future population size, migration and age structure changes. Projected population decline and an increasing proportion of older people imply the need to redefine the directions of spatial development, and to adapt infrastructure and urban functions to theis new reality. This paper synthesises existing research on spatial planning with regard to the needs of older people, as well as on an analysis of national legal regulations relating to spatial planning in this area. The addressed issues carry significant importance in the context of projected demographic changes, as well as the need to shape spaces that promote social integration and improve the quality of life for older people. This article's findings point to the need to refine planning tools and strengthen legal provisions in the area under analysis.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the literature by analysing ageing societies and its implications for spatial planning initiatives, including the accessibility of services, the quality of public spaces, the distribution of social infrastructure, and architectural solutions tailored to the needs of older people.

Keywords:

local plan development • senior estates • age-friendly cities • ageing societies

1. Introduction

Demographic changes are one of the major challenges facing social and urban policy in Poland and other countries. Cities today face two main challenges [Younes et al. 2023], which include the ageing of the population and the growing number of people living in cities. Statistical data indicate a steady increase in the proportion of people of post-working age within the population structure, although [O'Brien 2016] notes that demographic transition varies between and within countries in terms of the timing, rate and magnitude of these changes. According to WHO data [WHO 2007], older population will increase between 2006 and 2050 from 11% to 22%. Forecasts indicate that developing countries will experience population ageing more rapidly than developed countries. These demographic changes imply a growing demand for institutional forms of support for older people, such as care homes (DPS) or private long-term care facilities. In this context, the decline in the capacity to care for older family members is significant [Magdziak 2017]. This is a result of the increase in the number of older people relative to the working-age population, but also of the migration of younger generations to urban centres. A dynamic growth in the construction of housing for the elderly is therefore expected. Infrastructure for the elderly defined by spatial planning. Spatial planning determines the location of healthcare facilities, particularly hospitals, transportation networks, and services, and influences residents' quality of life. Since ageing is a natural and universal process [ARUP 2019], it should be considered a key aspect of planning community development. Every person, regardless of age, has the right to full participation in social life; therefore, planning efforts should include all residents. Unfortunately, activities in the field of spatial planning [Hockey et al. 2013, Labus 2011] are mainly limited to physical aspects, which stems from the historical nature of spatial planning, viewed as a tool for controlling and managing land use or for supporting productive potential [Biggs et al. 2015]. Meanwhile, older people perceive space in a multidimensional way, encompassing social, cultural and economic factors. In order to function sustainably urban spaces must be designed to meet the shared and diverse needs of different generational groups, as well as the design of urban structures that meet the needs of future generations. Development requires adaptable functions and infrastructure, such as the conversion of former nurseries into centres for older people, as discussed by Jian et al. [2025].

The issue of housing for older people can be considered from two complementary perspectives: the institutional perspective, covering public and state-run care homes, and the concept of 'ageing in place', whereby a person grows old in their current place of residence.

The question of the location of care homes within the spatial planning system has not been unequivocally resolved in current regulations, particularly in the provisions of the Act on Spatial Planning and Development [Ustawa o planowaniu i zagospodarowaniu przestrzennym 2024].

This raises the question whether the current planning model provides the adequate instruments to maintain land security for care infrastructure, and whether the municipality's spatial policy aligns with its implementation of social assistance responsibilities.

Poland undergoes a steady ageging of its population. At the end of 2024 [GUS 2025b], the share of older adults – that is, those aged 60 and over – in the country's population stood at 26.6%, which dates to approximately 10 million people (compared to 17.2% in 2005). It is important to note that these figures show an upward trend year over year. It is projected that by 2060, the number of older adults will be nearly 19% higher than in 2024. At the same time, life expectancy is increasing, standing at 74.9 years for men and 82.3 years for women. The old-age dependency ratio – i.e., the number of people aged 65 and older per 100 people aged 15 to 64 – is steadily increasing, reaching 31.9 by the end of 2024 compared to 18.9 in 2005.

The ageing of the population is a phenomenon observed throughout Europe [Devictor 2012], where it is estimated that by 2050 the number of people of working age will fall by 42 million and the number of older people will rise by 58 million. In 1950, the median age in Poland was 25.8 years [Devictor 2012], and by 2024 it will be over 43 years [GUS 2026a]. Demographic changes are forcing local authorities to adapt development strategies [Kamiński 2026]. Demographic situation has adverse impact on housing infrastructure development, as well as on economic growth, rural-to-urban migration and the continuous expansion of urban agglomerations. Housing preferences are changing, with a gradual transition away from the ownership model towards an increasing emphasis on renting.

Local authorities [O'Brien 2016] will face the problem of the costs involved in modernising existing infrastructure to adapt it to the needs of older people, whilst at the same time experiencing a decline not only in population numbers but also in the revenue feeding into municipal budgets. This is also linked to a disproportionate rise in infrastructure maintenance costs [Śleszyński et al. 2018], which exceeds the financial capacity of local authorities, particularly in rural areas where settlements may suffer severe depopulation.

At the end of 2024, there were 2,232 residential social care facilities in Poland, including 903 care homes, where older people accounted for nearly 69% of the total resident population. On average, there were 74 people aged 60 and over for every place in a residential social care facility. As people age [Ay et al. 2025], the demand for living space decreases, as households shrink to one or two people, and existing building designs become architectural impediments for older people. Subjective assessments of housing conditions among older people indicated that nearly 24% of households with at least one older person lived in buildings that architecturaly hindered their daily functioning. Un the case of households inhabited only by older people, this proportion stood at nearly 27%. Accessibility barriers represent a significant planning and urban development issue that affects the quality of the living environment for older people. Spatial planning policy must also take into account the characteristics of the local older population [Dikken et al. 2026], which is not homogeneous and comprises people with varying levels of physical ability, independence and capacity to function in everyday life. Public authorities are required to monitor the situation of older people [Ustawa o osobach starszych 2015], which includes, among other things, their housing situation and the availability and standard of social services. As part of the policy for

senior citizens, measures are to be taken to create conditions that support dignified and healthy ageing.

Based on the above considerations, the following research questions have been formulated:

a. How can spatial planning and the design of the living environment better meet the needs of an ageing population?
b. What challenges do urban planning and spatial planning face in adapting urban spaces to the needs of older people?

2. Materials and methods

This study is based on a systematic review of the literature on demographic changes and the relationship between population ageing and spatial planning. The literature review was conducted using the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. The search process involved combinations of keywords in Polish and English, including: 'ageing society', 'elderly people', 'senior-friendly city', 'local spatial planning', 'urban planning', 'spatial planning', 'accessibility', 'age-friendly city', 'spatial planning', 'older people', 'local development plan', 'land use planning'. There were used logical operators AND and OR.

The analysis covered publications issued between 2011 and 2026, book chapters, legislative acts (including laws and regulations), statistical data published by the Central Statistical Office, commentary on the Act, and publications and reports available on websites.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- academic publications analysing demographic changes associated with population ageing and their implications for spatial planning and the functioning of cities,
- studies highlighting the challenges that the ageing of society poses for urban policy or peripheral regions, pointing to the need to adapt spatial structures and public services to the growing number of older people,
- legislation relating to policy for older people and spatial planning,
- works on architecture adapted to the needs of older people, highlighting solutions that enhance the comfort, mobility and safety of older people.

During the review of the literature and source materials, the titles, abstracts or full texts that were not thematically relevant to the scope of the analyses were excluded. These were mostly publications relating to the mental health of older people, public safety, analysing specific architectural solutions for older people, and the use of AI in planning spaces for older people. Studies not available in full text were excluded from the review. A total of 55 publications were included in the final analysis. The analysis of planning documents and legal acts involved identifying provisions relating to spatial accessibility, public services, mobility, housing and infrastructure supporting an ageing society.

3. Subject of research and literature review

Housing options for older people [Jancz 2016] can be classified as follows:

- institutional (public and private, including care and treatment facilities, and both public and private care homes),
- social housing (rental of self-contained flats offered by social housing associations) and
- market-led (housing estates or blocks of flats on the outskirts, blocks of flats in urban areas and within multi-generational housing estates).

In Poland, social care homes provide round-the-clock support that covers the elderly, in situations where such support cannot be provided in the person's own home. The need for such support can [Szochner-Siemińska 2018] arise from the person's illness, disability or age. Social care homes may be run by various entities, primarily by local government bodies. In these cases the operation of social care homes is primarily the responsibility of the district.

Community-based social assistance [GUS 2025a] constitutes one of the elements of the state's social protection system, i.e. the totality of instruments and measures undertaken by public authorities to support households or individuals in specific problems. Reciprocal services of equivalent value are not required from the beneficiary. Community-based social assistance, together with residential forms of such assistance, constitutes the Social Assistance System [Ustawa o pomocy społecznej 2004]. Social assistance is an element of the state's social policy designed to support individuals and families in overcoming difficult life situations that exceed their own capabilities, resources and entitlements.

Social care homes [Ustawa o pomocy społecznej 2004] are run by a local authority, district council or non-governmental organisations on behalf of the local government. Admission to a social care home is based on an administrative decision issued by the relevant facility. Another form of care is provided by care and treatment centres (ZOL) [Ustawa o działalności leczniczej 2011], which are healthcare facilities intended for people who do not require hospitalisation but need constant medical and nursing care. People are admitted on the basis of a referral from a doctor. The lack of sufficient state-run care homes for the elderly, coupled with significant changes in our country's demographic structure, results in an increasing number of private care homes. These are facilities providing round-the-clock, long-term care for the elderly people with disabilities and chronic illnesses [Ustawa o pomocy społecznej 2004]. They are run by private individuals or foundations. The costs of a stay are covered in full by the resident or their family. It is pointed out [Ay et al. 2025] that investments in housing designed to meet the needs of the older generation present attractive business opportunities for landowners, developers and private service providers. Unfortunately [Frey 2017], there are instances that involve carrying out these services in detached houses, which are not designed for this purpose. This is significant, among other things, in terms of fire safety, where much stricter fire safety requirements apply to multi-occupancy buildings.

In Poland, the range of housing options for older people [Gronostajska 2016] is not as extensive as in some Western European countries, where, alongside institutional care homes and residential care facilities, there are also housing communities for older people, flats in complexes or collective housing, independent flats, multi-functional urban complexes comprising independent flats, care homes and geriatric centres, and hospital geriatric wards. In Poland, social care homes account for the majority of facilities for older people [Gawlak et al. 2024] also point to alternative forms of residential care, such as sheltered or supported housing linked to care services. Surveys among young people aged 18–27 show that they would prefer to remain in their own homes in old age and receive assistance from a carer or share a flat with family. However, they acknowledge the need to change their place of residence if their current home is incaable to accomodating older people.

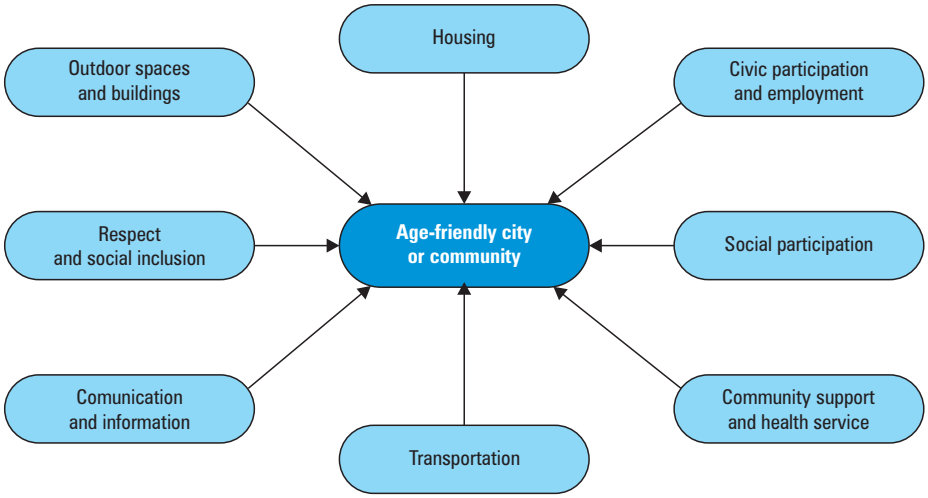
Van Hoof et al. [2018] highlight the benefits of creating housing adapted to the needs of older people within existing buildings, as well as of modernising existing social housing stock with the older people's involvement . Older people are encouraged to continue living in their current homes and familiar surroundings ('ageing in place'). This is the strategy [Ay et al. 2025], which focuses on enabling older people to live independently and safely within their communities, avoiding dependence on institutional care. This requires, in the field of spatial planning, that infrastructure be adapted to this end. This means providing housing stock that is physically accessible to older people and adapted to household size to eliminate the inefficient use of living space. It should also by located within a specific community.

Contemporary spatial planning should far more integrate the needs of an ageing society, striving to create cities that are friendly to older people. This requires taking this group of users into account at the level of architectural design of buildings, land-use planning, the organisation of transport systems, and the planning of the location of care services and support institutions for older people.

The concept of an age-friendly environment [WHO 2023] is defined as one that promotes healthy and active ageing. Based on research conducted in 23 countries, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified eight key areas for age-friendly cities and communities presented on Figure 1.

Some studies [Kerbler 2015] identify the following as the most important factors:

- outdoor spaces and buildings – including, amongst other things, regulations aimed at reducing noise and environmental pollution, well-designed and well-maintained green spaces and footpaths; age-friendly infrastructure,
- transportation – including, amongst other things, the physical and economic accessibility of the transport system, enabling access to healthcare facilities and care services, including transport for people with disabilities, and the availability of parking spaces,
- housing – residential properties that are appropriately designed and finished, and are conveniently located in relation to transport stops and service infrastructure.



Source: adopted from National programmes for age-friendly cities and communities: a guide. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2023

Fig. 1. Age-friendly cities domains of actions

The WHO points out that there are many examples of well-managed local policies that create good living environments for older people, but at the same time draws attention to the multitude of objectives (priorities) that need to be achieved in a given area, given limited financial and human resources. The World Health Organisation has established the 'Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities', which support its members – that is, cities and communities – in implementing measures designed to improve the quality of life for older people. The main aim of the project was to develop guidelines for a senior-friendly urban environment. Three dominant areas of activity for this cohort were identified [Magdziak 2017]: public spaces, transport and housing. A focus on creating more functional and accessible urban spaces should be the aim of local government policy and the work of urban planners and architects. At the same time [Figueiredo et al. 2023], it is very important to set the direction for further changes in the design of the urban environment to meet the needs of an ageing society. In the spatial planning process, particular importance is attached to the optimal distribution of services for older people, which should reflect their preferences, needs and the constraints determined by their daily activities and mobility. Alongside the need to develop institutional care for older people [Song et al. 2020], attention is drawn to the possibility of imbalances in the utilisation of existing places in care homes in urban and non-urban areas. The reasons included the preferences of older people when choosing care homes, relating to their state of health, the location of the care homes, transport links, air quality, the care services provided, the distance between these facilities and the older people's homes, as well as the nearest hospitals and the cost of a stay (where applicable).

The ever-increasing demographic burden [Ruczkowski 2023] poses a challenge for national and local authorities.Tthrough the right implementation of policies for older people, these authorities should take into account the needs of the elderly as part of the framework of spatial planning and development policies. The first stage of the process of shaping these policies it the appropriate location of facilities for older people within the city's spatial structure. Equally important is the design of these facilities, which should address the users age. Planning analysis should be complemented by an analysis of the architecture of facilities for older people, taking into account aspects of ergonomics, safety and the quality of space conducive to the well-being of users.

According to Benek [2015], addressing the housing needs of older people and improving their quality of life is one of the challenges facing contemporary architecture. When designing the spaces within care homes, particular attention is paid to the accessibility of the surroundings for people with disabilities, the selection of appropriate finishing materials, and the functional and spatial layout.

In Poland, the proportion of senior-friendly social housing is low [Bradecki 2016]. The architectural forms of residential buildings designed with the elderly in mind should not draw on models typical of hospital facilities, but should be based on modern design trends whilst optimising spatial solutions in relation to the plot's parameters. The architectural forms of retirement homes should aim for solutions that provide residents with a sense of security and psychological comfort, and that make their daily lives easier.

Architectural solutions [Bradecki et al. 2024] are linked to residents' health, their level of independence, lifestyle and activity levels, as older people's expectations regarding the care they require change as they age. Key factors determining the location of care homes include green spaces, low levels of disturbance, and the internal and external transport links that meet the needs of people with reduced mobility. Among the criteria for newly designed facilities [Bielak 2013] for older people, the requirements concerning the site – in terms of its location and neighbourhood – are highlighted. The sites should have good transport links and be situated in safe and peaceful areas, surrounded by greenery and distanced from potential sources of disturbance. At the same time, the requirements include proximity to the town centre, residential estates, and retail, service, cultural and medical facilities.

The development of age-friendly cities [Van Hoof et al. 2021] is linked to current local government policy and competes with other objectives, such as economic development, which may lead to a lack of funding or a shift in priorities of local authorities. To achieve environments that are friendly to older people, it is proposed, amongst other things, to coordinate the work and cooperation of people from various sectors, such as local authorities, architects, designers, urban planners, the business sector, transport specialists and gerontologists. Citizen engagement is also crucial, as is taking their views into account in future planning and decision-making.

4. Results

The ageing of the population in Poland [Kłobukowska 2014] and in other countries will influence housing policy. It is the role of the government and local authorities to play a part in designing the housing stock intended for older people and to systematically adapt it to the changing needs of this social group. Local government bodies, i.e. municipalities, districts and provinces [Biały 2022], prepare an assessment of social assistance resources based on an analysis of local social and demographic conditions. This assessment primarily focuses on the infrastructure within which public tasks will be carried out. Municipalities are also responsible for developing strategies to address social problems, while provinces draw up social policy strategies.

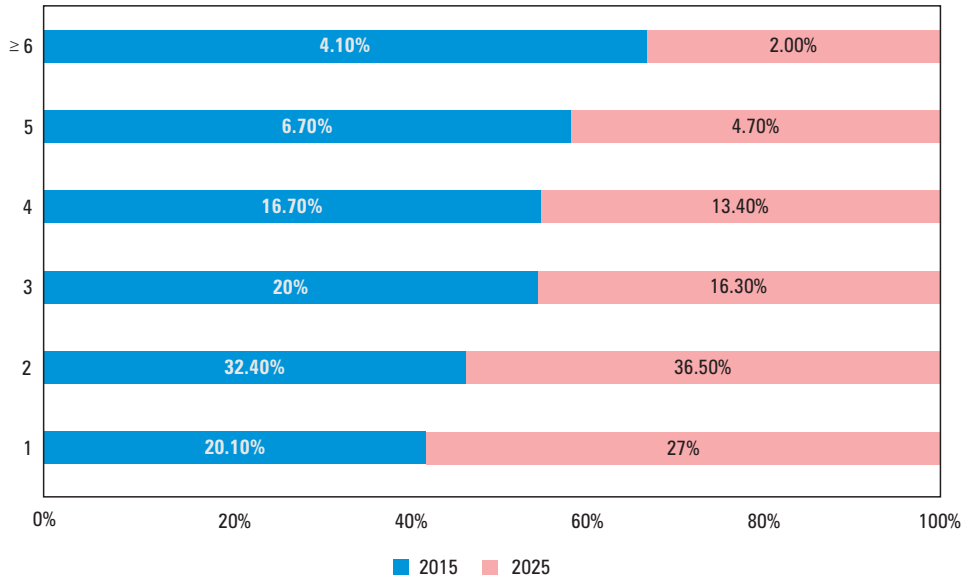
Urban agglomerations [Li et al. 2024], due to their large populations, are more acutely affected by the consequences of population ageing, which impacts the accessibility of healthcare services, the development of age-friendly infrastructure, and the incorporation of senior citizens' policy objectives into spatial planning instruments. Rational spatial planning enables the optimal and efficient provision of services for older people and improves spatial accessibility for them. Spatial policy in cities [Zuo et al. 2024] should be tailored to the character and development of the specific area. Urban regeneration should be based on three pillars: economy, society and environment. Urban planning [Li et al. 2024] should focus on the sustainable distribution of care facilities for older people and the optimisation of services for this section of the population, ensuring access to these services even in sparsely populated areas or those with poor transport links. Ageing population [Feng et al. 2020] poses a challenge to the long-term care system, which is burdened by rapid growth in the residential care sector, slow development of home-based services, and increasing involvement of the private sector.

An ageing population necessitates that the needs of older people be taken into account in spatial planning with regard to proposed transport systems, healthcare services and other facilities and services available to the general public, so as to prevent social isolation whilst ensuring social equality [ARUP 2019]. Research [Guida et al. 2022] shows that, when shaping spatial policy, it is important to support decision-making with accessibility data that highlight areas with poor access to services for older people. The implementation of this approach faces numerous constraints, including high data requirements, the complexity of analytical methods, and issues related to the interpretation of results. In practice, this hinders decision-making and limits accessibility analyses. An additional challenge may be the insufficient institutional integration of transport and spatial planning. This contributes to the persistence of inequalities in access to urban services, particularly for the older population.

In the long term, the decline in the working-age population may eventually leave empty, abandoned and functionally obsolete spaces [Buček and Bleha 2013]. This is especially relevant to non-urban areas. The proportion of single-person households is increasing, accounting for around 27% of all households in Poland [GUS 2026b].

An analysis of the data presented in the chart indicates significant changes in the structure of households during the period under review. They are linked to an increase

in the proportion of single-person households and a decrease in the proportion of multi-person households comprising four or more people.



Source: Author's own study based on data from GUS [GUS 2026b]

Fig. 2. Households by household size – percentage of total households

Spatial interventions aimed at creating age-friendly communities cover a wide range of areas [Salmistu and Kotval 2023]. These include both the adaptation and development of built-up environment and infrastructure, as well as strengthening social relationships and civic engagement of residents. Another important element is combating isolation and social exclusion, as well as fostering awareness and attitudes that promote integration. It is also essential to ensure equal access to spaces and support, particularly for those most at risk of marginalisation. Age-friendly cities should address both the physical dimension, by providing appropriate infrastructure, and the socio-political dimension, through social integration and the active participation of older people in city life [Scott 2021, Azzali et al. 2022]. It is noted that many societies are not prepared for an ageing population, thus their population does not live longer in good conditions.

Two factors can be identified that influence social change [ARUP 2019]: increasing life expectancy and the concentration of the population in cities, which are becoming home to a growing elderly population but are not usually designed with this group in mind. Spatial planning puts greater emphasis on attracting younger people, whilst the needs of older people are often treated as homogeneous. The lack of involvement of older people in spatial planning processes can lead to age discrimination and isolation. New York gives an example of taking measures that can be identified

at the building design stage to reduce the risks posed by heatwaves and to modernise existing housing to ensure a safe living temperatures [NYCHA 2019]. Becoming an age-friendly city or community is presented as a process [Rémillard-Boilard and Doran 2024] in which every initiative, however small, can contribute to improving residents' lives. Elements of the urban environment, such as the gradient of streets or uneven, protruding sections of pavement, which may previously have been regarded as insignificant, present significant barriers to the daily functioning and mobility of older people [Handler 2014].

The realisation of investments relating to the construction and maintenance of public healthcare facilities, nurseries, social care homes, care and educational institutions, and sports facilities is in the public interest. Consequently, the law [Konstytucja 1997] provides for the instruments of acquiring property for this purpose, including through expropriation, which follows the state's constitutional duty to provide social care.

However [NSA 2020], a public-purpose investment should be aimed at serving the public interest, which is significant for the community, at least at the local level, and shall not serve to satisfy private interest.

As part of monitoring the situation of older people [Ustawa o osobach starszych 2015], an assessment is carried out of their living conditions and social functioning in demographic, economic, housing and health terms. This also covers the level of professional, social, educational, cultural and sporting and recreational activity, the structure and situation of households, the availability of social services, and the implementation of senior citizens' policy measures, taking into account the prevention of age discrimination.

At local level [Ustawa o samorządzie gminnym 1990], the municipality's core responsibilities include meeting the needs of the community, which cover areas such as healthcare, social welfare – including care centres and facilities – and policies for older people.

Polish law [Ustawa o planowaniu i zagospodarowaniu przestrzennym 2003] refers to local authority standards for the accessibility of social infrastructure. Here 'ensuring access to a social infrastructure facility' is understood to mean designating land for a purpose that allows for the location of such a facility. Within the framework of these standards, it is permissible to establish rules for ensuring access to nursery schools, crèches, primary healthcare clinics, libraries, community centres, social care homes, sports grounds, public transport stops, post offices, pharmacies, and police or fire stations. In the general plan [Niewiadomski 2026], the local authority has the option of setting urban planning standards relating to the accessibility of social infrastructure. Should it decide to do so, it is obliged to establish rules for access to primary schools and public green spaces within the limits set by the regulations. At the same time, it is permissible to extend these regulations to other elements of social infrastructure, including, amongst others, primary healthcare facilities, social welfare facilities, public transport stops, and public services such as post offices, pharmacies, and law enforcement and emergency services.

The standards for the accessibility of social infrastructure set out in the master plan are binding at subsequent stages of the planning and investment process, in particular when drawing up local plans and issuing planning permission decisions.

In the context of creating age-friendly cities, urban planning standards should go beyond the minimum statutory requirements and include:

- the availability and distribution of services for older people, including care homes, health centres, pharmacies and leisure facilities,
- taking into account architectural barriers, such as the gradient of streets, the condition of pavements and the accessibility of building entrances,
- the location of services within easy reach for people with reduced mobility,
- the integration of housing and services in a way that promotes the social, educational and cultural engagement of older people.

Incorporating such criteria into planning documents enables the more effective shaping of an urban environment that improves quality of life for older people and supports the implementation of policies for older people and measures to combat social isolation.

Current legal regulations define accessibility standards for technical infrastructure, focusing mainly on minimum functional and technical requirements. However, precise guidelines that take into account the specific needs of older people, including their limited mobility and the need for easy access to public services, are lacking.

5. Conclusions

In spatial planning, at both the local (municipal) and regional levels, it is essential to systematically take into account demographic changes associated with an ageing population. Adapting the location of technical infrastructure and public spaces to the needs of older people, as well as designing residential buildings and public facilities to ensure their functionality and accessibility, constitutes a key element of planning policy aimed at social integration.

An analysis of current legislation on spatial planning indicates that the requirements regarding the consideration of the needs of older people are formulated in general terms. Planning documents and development strategies take little account of demographic forecasts, including the systematic increase in the proportion of older people within the population. Given the anticipated further increase in this proportion, it is necessary to develop detailed planning guidelines that will ensure the practical accessibility of spaces and infrastructure for older people.

The issue of an ageing population highlights the necessity to adapt spatial planning and social infrastructure to meet the needs of the elder. The key aspects discussed in this paper are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Key factors influencing spatial planning in the context of an ageing population

The area under study	The major conclusions
Demographic changes	• the growing proportion of older people is leading to increased demand for housing and services for this demographic, • the population growth in cities, • differences in the extent of demographic change, not only between countries but also within them, • the growing number of one- or two-person households means that elderly people remain in their homes, and existing design features are becoming barriers to their daily lives as they get older.
Social welfare system	• an increase in demand for institutional care homes for the elderly, • a decline in the care-giving capacity of families, resulting from the migration of the younger generation to larger cities and a decline in the working-age population, • increasing number of private care homes for the elderly are being set up due to a shortage of public care facilities, • promoting 'ageing in place' as a means of living independently and safely within a community, whilst avoiding dependence on institutional care.
Legal framework	• current legislation highlights the need to take the circumstances of older people into account; however, the question of the location of facilities for older people within the spatial planning system has not been clearly regulated, particularly in the provisions relating to spatial planning and development, • in the local authority standards for the accessibility of social infrastructure, 'ensuring access to a social infrastructure facility' is understood to mean, amongst other things, designating a site suitable for the location of a care home, • under the master plan, the local authority has the option of setting urban planning standards relating to the accessibility of social infrastructure.
Architectural design of care homes	• facilities for older people should ensure the safety, accessibility and comfort of users and remove architectural barriers, • modern housing for older people should create a more homely and welcoming atmosphere than traditional care homes.
Spatial planning	• spatial planning is largely limited to the management of land use, • the lack of specific provisions regarding the inclusion of care homes in local plans and other planning documents, • it is important to ensure that care services are evenly distributed and that they are easily accessible by public transport, • the needs of older people shoul be taken into account when designing transport systems and organising access to public, health and social services in order to prevent exclusion of from transport and society, • the need for greater integration of an ageing population through the creation of age-friendly cities, • the need to take older users into account when establishing land-use and development policies, particularly when setting out the detailed parameters for planned public and private developments, • urban planning analyses should take greater account of the architectural aspects of facilities for older people, in terms of ergonomics, safety and the quality of spaces that promote users' well-being.

Source: Author's own study

The literature review has identified several key areas relating to spatial planning and the design of the living environment for older people that require further research:

- the need to take into account, in spatial planning, the diversity of older people in terms of age, mobility, independence and physical fitness,
- the need to design with participation all social groups, including both future generations and older people,
- the approach to drawing up local plans focuses on the working-age population, making it more attractive to younger demographic groups, whilst downplaying the importance of the older population,
- the problem of rising maintainance costs and infrastructure modernisation to adapt it to the needs of older people, coupled with a decline in revenue for local authority budgets in the case of ageing communities, mainly in rural areas,
- insufficient involvement of older population in spatial planning processes may lead to age discrimination and exacerbate the social isolation of this group of residents,
- in urban development and spatial planning activities, it is advisable to give greater consideration to the principles of the 'age-friendly cities' concept in order to adapt urban spaces to the needs of an ageing society.

This research was partly financed by a subsidy for maintaining research potential, no. 16.16.150.545, allocated to the Department of Integrated Geodesy and Cartography, AGH University of Krakow, and was partly supported by the 'Excellence Initiative – Research University' program for AGH University of Krakow.

References

ARUP 2019. Cities Alive: Designing for Ageing Communities, London, Arup.

Ay D., Götze V. 2025. Housing for 'ageing in place': Urban densification projects and the provision of age-appropriate housing in Switzerland. Cities, Article 106304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2025.106304

Azzali S., Yew A.S.Y., Wong C., Chaiechi T. 2022. Silver cities: planning for an ageing population in Singapore. An urban planning policy case study of Kampung Admiralty. Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research, 16(2), 281–306. https://doi.org/10.1108/ARCH-09-2021-0252

Benek I. 2015. Architektura domów seniora a posiadane dyspozycje społeczno-kulturowe ich mieszkańców. Społeczeństwo i Edukacja. Międzynarodowe Studia Humanistyczne, 17(2), 147–157.

Biały S. 2022. Zadania administracji publicznej w zakresie polityki społecznej wobec osób starszych – wybrane zagadnienia. Zeszyt Prawniczy UAM, 12, 7–22. https://doi.org/10.14746/zpuam.2022.12.1

Bielak M. 2013. Standard of Living and Residence of Senior Citizens in Institutional Care. Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Oeconomica, 297, 81–92. https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-6018.297.07

Biggs S., Carr A. 2015. Age- and Child-Friendly Cities and the Promise of Intergenerational Space. Journal of Social Work Practice, 29, 99–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2014.993942

Bradecki T. 2016. Housing estates for senior citizens – case studies in Poland. In: Architektura v Perspektive 2016: 8th Architecture in Perspective 2016. Sbornik Prispevku z Mezinarodni Konference. M. Perinkova, M. Nedved (eds.). Vysoka Skola Banska – Technical University of Ostrava, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Department of Architecture, Ostrava, 97–99.

Bradecki T., Strzelecka-Seredyńska M., Kantarek A.A., Uherek-Bradecka B. 2024. Selected issues in contemporary housing design for seniors – Poland in the European context. Architectus, 78(2), 85–96. https://doi.org/10.37190/arc240209

Buček J., Bleha B. 2013. Urban Shrinkage as a Challenge to Local Development Planning in Slovakia. Moravian Geographical Reports, 21, 2–15. https://doi.org/10.2478/mgr-2013-0001

Devictor X. 2012. Starzenie się społeczeństwa a gospodarka. World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/pl/news/opinion/2012/06/14/poland-aging-and-the-economy [accessed: 5.03.2026].

Dikken J., Bertani M., Pavlovski D., Ivan L., Kazak J., Perek-Bialas J., Barrie H., Özer Z., Ayalon L., Staalduinen W., Hoof J. 2026. Understanding age-friendly communities: Five global typologies of older adults. Urban Studies. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980261437909

Feng Z., Glinskaya E., Chen H., Gong S., Qiu Y., Xu J., Yip W. 2020. Long-term care system for older adults in China: policy landscape, challenges, and future prospects. The Lancet, 396(10259), 1362–1372. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)32136-X

Figueiredo M., Eloy S., Marques S., Dias L. 2023. Older people perceptions on the built environment: A scoping review. Applied Ergonomics, 108, Article 103951. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2022.103951

Frey D. 2017. Dom seniora nie w każdym budynku. Rzeczpospolita. https://www.rp.pl/samorzad/art2542401-dom-seniora-nie-w-kazdym-budynku [accessed: 13.03.2026].

Gawlak A., Ptak-Wojciechowska A. 2024. Designing cities for future seniors. Structure and Environment, 16(4), 233–246.

Gronostajska B.E. 2016. Kształtowanie środowiska mieszkaniowego dla seniorów. Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław.

Guida C., Carpentieri G., Masoumi H. 2022. Measuring spatial accessibility to urban services for older adults: an application to healthcare facilities in Milan. Eur. Transp. Res. Rev., 14, 23. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12544-022-00544-3

GUS 2025a. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Beneficjenci środowiskowej pomocy społecznej w 2024 r. https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/warunki-zycia/ubostwo-pomoc-spoleczna/beneficjenci-srodowiskowej-pomocy-spolecznej-w-2024-r-,15,8.html [accessed 9.03.2026].

GUS 2025b. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2024 r. https://bialystok.stat.gov.pl/publikacje-i-foldery/ludnosc/sytuacja-osob-starszych-w-polsce-w-2024-r-,4,7.html [accessed: 9.03.2026].

GUS 2026a. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Sytuacja społeczno-gospodarcza kraju. https://ssgk.stat.gov.pl/Ludnosc.html [accessed: 10.06.2026].

GUS 2026b. Główny Urząd Statystyczny. Polska w liczbach 2026. Gospodarstwa domowe. https://plwliczbach.stat.gov.pl/pl/index.html?page=gospodarstwaDomowe [accessed: 14.05.2026].

Handler S. 2014. An Alternative Age-Friendly Handbook (for the socially engaged urban practitioner). The University of Manchester Library, Manchester.

Hockey A., Phillips J., Walford N. 2013. Planning for an Ageing Society: Voices from the Planning Profession. Planning Practice and Research, 28(5), 527–543. https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2013.820039

Jancz A. 2016. Potrzeby mieszkaniowe osób starszych i ich opinie na temat budownictwa senioralnego. Studia i Prace Wydziału Nauk Ekonomicznych i Zarządzania, 45(1), 305–316. https://doi.org/10.18276/sip.2016.45/1-24

Jian I.Y., Mo K.H., Ng E., Chen W., Jim C.Y., Woo J. 2025. Age-friendly spatial design for residential neighbourhoods in a compact city: Participatory planning with older adults and stakeholders. Habitat International, 161, Article 103428. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2025.103428

Kamiński M. 2026. Wpływ demografii na przyszłość polskiego rynku nieruchomości. Nieruchomości, C.H.Beck, 3, 35–38.

Kerbler B. 2015. Population ageing and urban space. Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia, 25(1), 33–48.

Kłobukowska J. 2014. Polityka mieszkaniowa wobec starzenia się społeczeństw – podstawowe wyzwania. Świat Nieruchomości, 3(89), 35–40. https://doi.org/10.14659/worej.2014.89.06

Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r. (Dz.U. 1997 Nr 78 poz. 483).

Labus A. 2011. Planowanie przestrzenne i odnowa miast z perspektywy procesu starzenia się społeczeństwa. Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej. Seria: Architektura Z, 50, 131–145.

Li M., Peng P., Zhu H., Ao Y., Zhou Z. 2024. Exploring the equitable spatial planning on the accessibility of institutional elderly care in megacity: A study based on Chengdu, China. Sustainable Cities and Society, 117. Article 105998. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2024.105998.

Magdziak M. 2017. Miasto dostępne dla osób starszych. Studia komitetu przestrzennego zagospodarowania kraju PAN, 176, 195–210. https://doi.org/10.24425/118574

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). 2019. Sheltering Seniors from Extreme Heat: A Study of NYCHA Senior Housing. New York City Housing Authority, 22 April 2019, New York.

Niewiadomski Z.K. (ed.). 2026. Planowanie i zagospodarowanie przestrzenne. Komentarz, ed. 14. C.H. Beck, Warszawa.

NSA 2020. Naczelny Sąd Administracyjny. Wyrok Naczelnego Sądu Administracyjnego z dnia 26 listopada 2020 r., sygn.. II OSK 1312/18.

O'Brien E. 2016. Planning for population ageing: implications of local demographic, spatial and fiscal differences. International Planning Studies, 21(4), 317–328. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2015.1125775

Rémillard-Boilard S., Doran P. 2024. Developing age-friendly cities and communities: an international perspective. In: Reimagining Age-Friendly Communities: Urban Ageing and Spatial Justice. T. Buffel, P. Doran, S. Yarker (eds.). Policy Press Bristol, 25–43. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447368571.ch002

Ruczkowski P. 2023. Osoby starsze a planowanie i zagospodarowanie przestrzenne gminy – wybrane aspekty administracyjnoprawne. Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Iuridica, Numer specjalny, 291–302. https://doi.org/10.18778/0208-6069.S.2023.25

Salmistu S., Kotval Z. 2023. Spatial interventions and built environment features in developing age-friendly communities from the perspective of urban planning and design. Cities, 141, Article 104417. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104417

Scott M. 2021. Planning for Age-Friendly Cities. Planning Theory & Practice, 22(3), 457–462. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2021.1930423

Song S., Wang D., Zhu W., Wang C. 2020. Study on the spatial configuration of nursing homes for the elderly people in Shanghai: Based on their choice preference. Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 152(C), Article 119859. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2019.119859

Szochner-Siemińska M. 2018. Placówki dzienne i całodobowe w systemie pomocy społecznej. C.H.Beck, Warszawa.

Śleszyński P., Wiśniewski R., SzejgiecKolenda B. 2018. Demographic processes in Poland in the years 1946–2016 and their consequences for local development: Current state and research perspectives, Geographia Polonica, 91(3), 317–334. https://doi.org/10.7163/GPol.0123

Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r. o samorządzie gminnym (t.j. Dz.U. 2025 poz. 1153).
Ustawa z dnia 27 marca 2003 r. o planowaniu i zagospodarowaniu przestrzennym (t.j. Dz. U. 2024 poz. 1130).
Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2004 r. o pomocy społecznej (t.j. Dz. U. 2025 poz.1214).
Ustawa z dnia 15 kwietnia 2011 r. o działalności leczniczej (t.j. Dz. U. 2026 poz.156).
Ustawa z dnia 11 września 2015 r. o osobach starszych (t.j. Dz. U. 2015 poz.1705).
Van Hoof J., Boerenfijn P. 2018. Re-inventing existing real estate of social housing for older people: Building a new De Benring in Voorst, The Netherlands, Buildings, 8(7), 89. https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings8070089
Van Hoof J., Marston H.R., Kazak J.K., Buffel T. 2021. Ten questions concerning age-friendly cities and communities and the built environment. Building and Environment, 199, Article 107922. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2021.107922
WHO 2007. World Health Organization. Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide. Geneva.
WHO 2023. World Health Organization. National programmes for age-friendly cities and communities: a guide. Geneva.
Younes S.R., Marques B., McIntosh J. 2024. Public Spaces for Older People: A Review of the Relationship between Public Space to Quality of Life. Sustainability, 16(11), Article 4583. https://doi.org/10.3390/su16114583
Zuo J., Fan J., Huang X., Li C., Luo J. 2024. Classification and Spatial Differentiation of Subdistrict Units for Sustainable Urban Renewal in Megacities: A Case Study of Chengdu. Land, 13(2), Article 164. https://doi.org/10.3390/land13020164