



Access: Built spaces



Figure 2: Photo Credit: CBS News

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Providing accessible built spaces beyond seniors’ housing needs lies at the core of WHO’s Age-friendly cities guidelines. This not only ensures that they retain their sense of dignity and self-reliance but also lets them age actively (World Health Organisation, 2007). The following discussion looks at three relevant precedents of senior-friendly built spaces.

Accessible Departmental Stores: Kaiser’s Supermarket

Many participants of the community consultation sessions have revealed that local grocery stores are also locations where information about community events is shared, either through posters in display windows or through conversations with the cashier and other shoppers while checking out. These stores must thus accommodate the changing needs of the aging population. Hence, it becomes vital for senior-friendly departmental stores to be studied.

One of the first store chains to do this was Kaiser’s Supermarkt in Berlin, Germany. In the early years of this century, like most of the developed world, the German senior population was becoming a big part of their demographics. In 2010, 21% of their population was recorded to be above 65 years of age and by 2050 it was estimated to grow to 33% (RetailNet Group, 2010). To profit from this trend, Kaiser’s stores rolled out their first ‘senior friendly’ store in 2005 (Sims, P., 2008). A quick look reveals four kinds of changes that the store has rolled out.

Communication: The chain made sure that they project themselves as senior-friendly. Their posters and advertisements clearly listed all the new interventions that were brought in. The signages were made clear and consistent and shelf labels became much bigger to increase legibility (Roth, R., 2007).

Design and layout: The stores gradually made their main entries accessible by adding ramps. Automatic doors were installed, and aisle spaces were widened. Climbable ledges were added at the bottom of high counters to keep top aisles within convenient reach. Magnifying lenses hung from the shelves so that fine print could be easily read. The floors were finished with matt, anti-skid tiles with glare-free downlighting from the ceiling. Benches were installed after the checkout so that seniors could catch a break, transfer their shopping into totes,

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Photo Credit: Sivereco.org

Figure 3: Kaiser’s posters clearly listing store’s measures to attract seniors.



Photo Credit: Bridgman Colaborative Architecture Ltd.

Figure 4: The retrofitted ramp on one side of the Manitoba Legislature building.

etc., before leaving the stores (Roth, R., 2007).

Modifying the commodities & services: The stores also reduced portion sizes to suit the needs of smaller households. They installed emergency call buttons for assistance and also includes a ‘relaxation zone’ with massage chairs accompanied by newspaper racks. Calling a cab from within the store was also made free (RetailNet Group, 2010).

Innovation in cart design: Perhaps the biggest innovation that these stores brought in was the shopping cart itself. These were made lighter to increase convenience and fitted with a small ledge on the front where one could sit to catch a break. The carts even came with a magnifying lens to read product labels.

The store’s measures have been widely discussed in the media. A CBS video article recorded many seniors expressing their satisfaction with the store’s remodelling (Roth, R., 2007). These claims have also been supported by the sales figures. The store management has claimed that this has pushed the sales up by 30% (Roth, R., 2007). The Daily Mail, in one of their online articles also presents similar figures. It says:

“Since the Kaiser store opened in 2005, sales have increased by 25 percent above forecast figures, with more than 60 percent of its customers aged over 50.” – Sims, P. (2008)

This success story has inspired many other chains to start similar ventures. In the United Kingdom, Tesco, another retail store chain soon declared plans for ‘pensioner friendly’ friendly stores in 2010 (Sims, P., 2008).

The store management has claimed that this has pushed the sales up by 30 %



Photo Credit: Alamy.com

Figure 5: Magnifiers hanging from the shelves at Kaiser’s Supermarket.

Accessible Historic Buildings: Manitoba Legislative Building

The study region has its fair share of historic buildings. Some noteworthy examples include the Ukrainian catholic churches in Elphinstone and Sandy Lake. Both these are built on high plinths with a flight of steps leading to the front doors but no ramps. Also, to make the towns age-friendly, many of the stores, post offices, and banks have been retrofitted with timber or concrete ramps providing universal access. These are sturdy and functional but stand



Figure 6:
Accessible pool
entry at Sergeant
Tommy Prince
Place

Photo Credit: Bridgman Collaborative Architecture Ltd.

Limestone used for constructing this addendum was sourced from the same quarry that supplied stone for the main building

out as retrofits. Similar interventions to the region’s historic buildings will have to be carefully thought and designed to look like an integral part of the same building. The addition of a universal access ramp to Manitoba Legislative Building, Winnipeg, in 2007, is one such intervention.

Formally opened in 1920, the building has been classified as a provincial heritage site (Province of Manitoba, n.d.). Apart from the flight of steps as per the original design, ramps were added to the sides of the building in the 1970s, but they posed several problems (Bridgman Collaborative Architecture Ltd, n.d.). Thus a new solution was required. Any addition to the building, however, would have to follow the established aesthetics of the historic building.

Bridgman Collaborative Architecture Ltd.’s proposal for this ramp consisted of two flights connected via a large landing. To maintain continuity, Tyndall limestone used for constructing this addendum was sourced from the same quarry that supplied stone for the main building (Bridgman Collaborative Architecture Ltd, n.d.). Further, to ensure that the stainless-steel double handrails do not look out of place, they were screened off by black metal railings. The design of these railings was identical to the ones already used in the façade. Also, the parking bays at the immediate foot of the ramp were marked as disability-friendly. The structure is kept detached from the main building to ensure complete reversibility (Bridgman Collaborative Architecture



Photo Credit: Bridgman Collaborative Architecture Ltd.

Figure 7: Manitoba Legislature Building: Continuity in the old and new construction.

Ltd, n.d.).

Accessible Pools: Sergeant Tommy Prince Place

The accessible pool entry at The Sergeant Tommy Prince Place in Winnipeg is another noteworthy precedent. Designed by Bridgman Collaborative Architecture Ltd. as a part of other renovations to the complex, the ramp with its double handrail was retrofitted to the existing olympic-sized pool in 2010. This retrofit now provides a safe yet engaging opportunity to personnel with limited mobility to enter the waters. The complex also has accessible change rooms and lifts. This precedent may provide valuable lessons applicable to the pool & park complex in Binscarth, which claims to have the largest outdoor heated pool on Yellowhead Highway 16 (Binscarth Park & Pool, 2017).

Final Thought

These precedents reveal that there are easy yet necessary alterations that built spaces may need to become accessible to seniors. While some interventions such as to historic buildings and existing amenities may involve more careful consideration as discussed above, the benefits from these are profound.

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