

Ageing-in-place in HDB Estates: An Ongoing Process of Negotiation



Background & Research Motivation

Singapore is set to become a super-aged society by 2026 (Lau, 2024), with rising median ages and a shrinking younger population (Figure 1 & 2). Ageing-in-place initiatives to help one stay active and continue ageing in the community are crucial, such as a studio apartment (SA) that enables independent living for older adults with social support structures like active ageing centres (AACs).



Year	Median Age
2010	37.3 Years
2020	41.5 Years
2024	42.8 Years

FIGURE 1: ESTIMATED MEDIAN AGE OF RESIDENTS, SINGAPORE^{1,2,3}

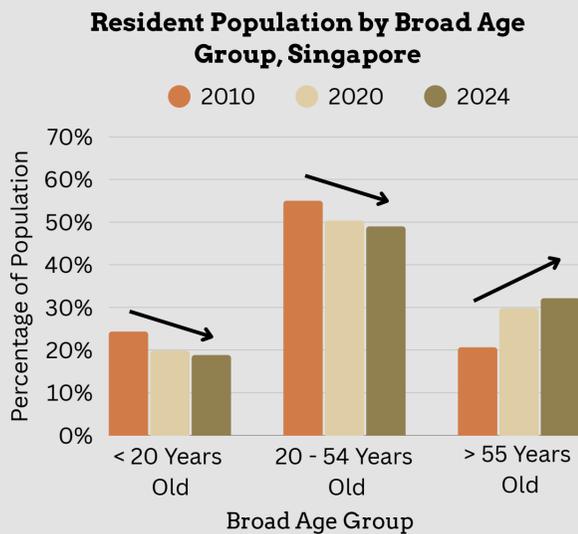


FIGURE 2: RESIDENT POPULATION BY BROAD AGE GROUP, SINGAPORE^{4,5,6}

With shifting socio-demographics and lifestyle choices, younger generations of older adults have differing needs. More are choosing to stay alone (Thang & Hong, 2015). There are also changes in expectations of filial piety and family in providing care (Cheng & Chan, 2006). This could have implications on the meaning of family relationships to older adults. With changing family structures, there is a need to shift away from solely relying on family for care.

Family and friends can encourage social participation, which has a positive effect on health and well-being, by providing opportunities to form connections (Shiraz et al., 2020; Tiew et al., 2024). These resources, including AACs, facilitate ageing-in-place by mitigating limitations arising from obstacles like declining mobility & health.

Investigating lived experiences of older adults living in SAs could shed light on their **evolving needs** as they **negotiate with their environment**. It is crucial to understand their reactions as they experience the **relational and negotiated process of ageing**.

Research Question

How do older adults meet their needs as they age within their community and HDB studio apartments in Singapore?

Sub-Research Questions:

Perceptions of AACs and Formal Care

How do older adults perceive the role of formal social infrastructures such as Active Ageing Centres (AACs) in their ageing-in-place experiences?

Relationships and Community Networks

What is the meaning of social relationships to older adults as they age in their communities?

Perceptions of Social Interactions

How do social interactions affect older adults' experiences of ageing as they attempt to fulfil their needs?

Study Area & Site Selection

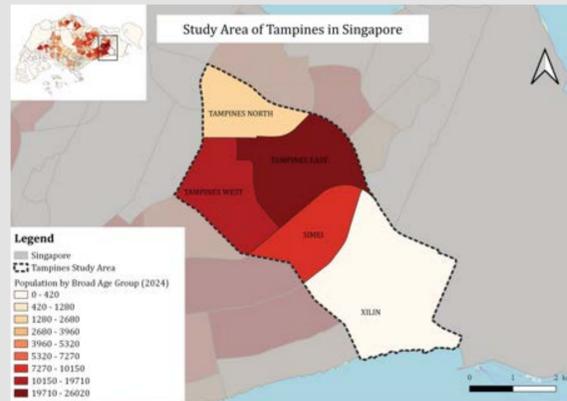


FIGURE 3: STUDY AREA OF TAMPINES^{7,8,9}

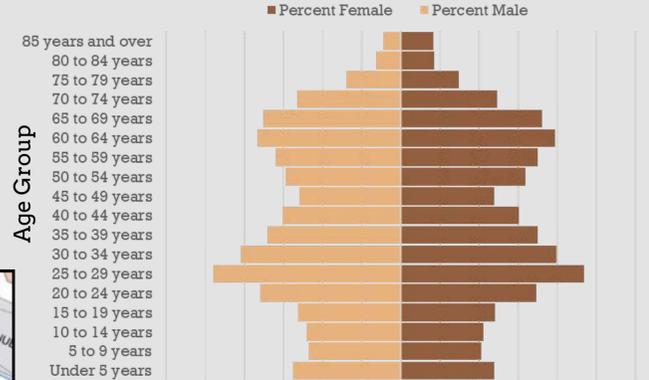
Tampines is located in the Eastern part of Singapore with a significant population of older adults aged 65 years & above and an ageing trend (Figure 3 & 4). It is also one of the four areas where the first development of SAs from 2002 are located.

Investigating ageing-in-place initiatives could yield insights into their effectiveness for future generations of older adults.



FIGURE 5: LAYOUT OF TAMPINES GREENWOOD ESTATE¹¹

Resident Population, Tampines, Singapore, 2024



Percentage of Population in Planning Area

FIGURE 4: POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS OF TAMPINES¹⁰

Blocks 868B/C of Tampines Greenwood Estate are part of a newer development of SAs. Amenities in close proximity include an AAC, a community garden, a pavilion and a fitness corner (Figure 5).

Data Collection Methods



Semi-structured Interviews



Non-Intrusive Observations



Fieldnotes & Transcripts

Fieldwork was conducted to investigate and understand the **lived experiences of older adults**, focusing on their **daily lives, relationships** with family members and fellow residents as well as their **perceptions** of their environment.

Participants' Profile

Interview Participant Statistics

Group	N	Gender (M/F)	Age (70s/80s)
Older Adults	11	3, 8	9, 2
Staff/Volunteers	3	2, 1	-

Older Adults' Responses arranged in a 2x2 matrix, mapping their **Orientation of Engagement** (Group - Individual) against **Mode of Engagement** (Formal - Informal) (Figure 6).

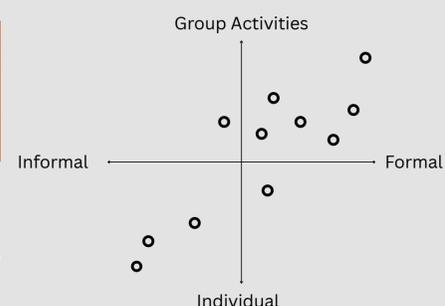
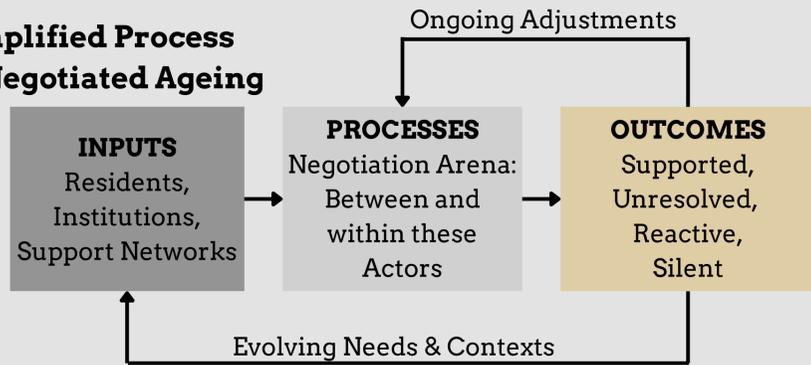


FIGURE 6: OLDER ADULTS' ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

Conceptual Framework: Negotiated Ageing

A grounded, ethnographic concept that captures the ongoing, relational and uneven negotiations older adults engage in to maintain autonomy, identity and care in public housing contexts.

Simplified Process of Negotiated Ageing



CONCEPTUAL TOOLS	CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK
IRP (Interests-Rights-Power)	How decisions are shaped through negotiation based on personal needs, entitlements or authority.
Capability/Coping	How older adults adapt internally or endure challenges when structural support is limited
Resilience/Reactive	How ageing is sustained through shared adaptation with family, friends or community.
Person-Environment Fit (Contextual)	How an older adult's interests, abilities and identities align with the demands of their physical and social environment.

A multi-framework approach is used to analyse ageing-in-place as a dynamic process shaped by individual adaptation, social negotiation and social contexts. These concepts explain how older adults navigate ageing across four thematic outcomes:

Supported, Unresolved, Reactive and Silent Negotiation.

Negotiated Ageing Framework: How Older Adults Navigate Support, Constraints and Identity

INPUTS	NEGOTIATION ARENA		OUTCOMES & [Frameworks]	
Residents' Needs & Preferences [Coping / Capability] Housing Environment [Capability] Support Networks [Resilience / Reactive] Institutional Supports [IRP]	Supported Negotiation [IRP + Capability]	Unresolved Negotiation [IRP + Capability]	Reactive Negotiation [Resilience]	Silent Negotiation [Coping + Capability]
Conversations & Feedback [IRP] Shared problem solving & adaptation [Resilience / Reactive] Personal Coping & Self directed adjustments [Coping]				

Supported Negotiation When Needs Are Aligned

With alignment comes engagement and participation. Success of formal programs and social infrastructures are the result of:

- High levels of engagement with formalised programs within the centre reflect a **good fit between needs and capabilities of institutions and older adults.**

"A highly involved older adult, Mdm V frequently goes above and beyond participation, co-organises meetups, gatherings and art workshops to encourage socialisation among her neighbours."

- **Agency and choice** at the forefront, with residents being given **freedom of choice** to engage in activities that suit their **preferences, identities and needs**

"Everyday after lunch, the regular crew of residents gather for their daily board games session, lasting up till closing time. These residents seem very familiar with each others' company"

Unresolved Negotiation: Institutional & Circumstantial Barriers

Absence as an **expression of choice and agency**. **Willingly** disengage from formal programming as a **response**.

This friction may be due to;

- **Identity**, where programs, social norms and expectations **do not align** with the perceived identities, capabilities and preferences of older adults.

"[The men] rarely come here, they rather meet at the kopitiam across here to sit and just talk" (Mr Z, staff)

- **Institutional** capabilities may cause a self-perpetuating cycle of underrepresentation, skewing to cater to the residents who are present in the centre, further widening the mismatch.
- **Circumstantial**, these can be reinterpreted as capabilities that affect their ability to participate in such activities, due to obligations or personal challenges.

Silent Negotiation: Alone but not (Completely) Unsupported

Home visits by AAC staff/volunteers illustrate the **hidden realities on ground** - the silent battles being fought by the unseen and unheard, the socially isolated.

- AAC staff/volunteers and older residents have echoed the **difficulties** they face when **encouraging** older residents to participate in the AAC

"There are still residents 'hiding behind their doors...not willing to come out' and the staff 'cannot force them'". (Ms A, ex-staff, current volunteer)

- **Lack of manpower and time**, and **fixed AAC opening hours** could lead to individuals falling through the cracks

"Seniors 'need someone to talk to them, to listen to them'", but 'the centre cannot provide the time'... 'On weekends, the centre is not open. When there is an emergency, who is going to help them?'". (Ms A)

However, these individuals are not alone, as there are available resources such as family, neighbours and the AAC

- Finding ways to access these resources, and **helping older adults overcome barriers** in participating could support their ability to **establish agency**

Reactive Negotiation: Resilience & Adaptation

As residents and AAC staff/volunteers **react to their circumstances**, **adaptation** results from **negotiations** with their environment, needs and preferences.

- Older adults have found **alternative ways to adapt & remain active on their own terms** (Aw et al., 2017, Guell et al., 2016)

"Mdm F, who usually keeps to herself and prefers to be alone, frequents the centre to read newspapers, which has become part of her daily routine."

"An ex-participant at the AAC, Mr H has a daily routine that involves getting out of the house as he will 'never stay at home in the daytime'".

- This enables older adults to thrive by staying active and achieving P-E fit, even if just perceived (Lien et al., 2015).

- AAC staff/volunteers **support older adults agency and autonomy** by **engaging them in ways they are receptive to**. This enables them to **see themselves as fit, active** (Øye et al., 2023), **empowered & respected** (Weintraub & Killian, 2007).

"Though initially resistant, after encouragement from the staff, the elderly lady nodded her head and began walking towards the room to participate in the activity, seemingly more excited now." (Observations, AAC, 13th June 2025)

IMPLICATIONS: What Negotiated Ageing Tells Us

ACCOUNT FOR INFORMAL PARTICIPATION & AGENCY

Residents who choose to exclude themselves from formal programs may not be fully captured, resulting in a misreporting of true activity and engagement levels of older adults.

BEYOND SUCCESS METRICS

Attendance sheets and surveys do not fully encapsulate what it means to be meaningfully engaged

SENSITIVITY TO IDENTITY

Identity, culture and gender greatly affect engagement of residents with their social environments

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Designing with Negotiation in Mind

SNAPSHOTS



MORE INCLUSIVE METRICS

Indicators that account for informal visits, peripheral participation, and keeping in touch by passive presence

VALUING STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Providing more resources to support AAC staff and volunteers, while recognizing the value of their work and efforts



PROGRAM INNOVATION

Flexible, low risk planning that does not displace current activities - enables a greater variety of programs to be piloted and implemented

CO-DESIGNING WITH RESIDENTS

Ensure voices of older residents are heard by including them in discussions. This could empower them and make them feel acknowledged.



REFLECTIONS & FUTURES

CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Negotiated Ageing frames ageing-in-place as an active process shaped by:
Interests (Personal desires)
Rights (Entitlements)
Power (Ability to act or participate)

FUTURE RESEARCH

Longitudinal ethnographic study
Research into the roles of AAC staff & volunteers and the value of their work

REFLECTIONS & TAKEAWAYS

Value of ethnography
Reflexivity & Positionality
Flexibility & Adaptability

Sources & Acknowledgements

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