



KEYNOTE LECTURE

Lived, sensed and contested: ageing in a smart city

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Bio

Cultural Anthropologist, Dr. Tiina Suopajärvi works as a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Oulu in Finland. Her main research interest lies in the intersections of age, gender and place. Theoretically Suopajärvi is inspired by feminist technoscience studies, the notions of emplacement, and design anthropology. Recently she has started to explore the methods of sensory ethnography in the study of public urban places. In her current research project, Suopajärvi focuses on ageing as both lived experience and socio-cultural phenomenon in the northern Finnish city of Oulu. This includes both the place-making practices of +65-year-old city dwellers and the processes of public service design with/for senior citizens. In this study she combines the ethnographic methods of walk-along and collaborative design.

Abstract

The growing number of seniors prefers to live in the city centres where the services they need are easily accessible by walking or using public transportation. Therefore urban places have become important environments for ageing citizens, too. Ageing urban citizens thus occupy many public spaces in their daily practices. They are mobile and active city dwellers but their ageing bodies affect the ways they use these spaces, as well as how they experience moving around in the city. Acting bodies are however more than physical entities; cultural beliefs and social norms are inscribed in them, and the shared norms are re-negotiated by individual experiences on “being in the body” (Joyce & Mamo 2006). The cities are often experienced through mobility, like walking, where walkers make spatial orders both to exist and to emerge (de Certeau 1988); and consequently these spatial practices express and even shape their identities.

To understand how the ageing citizens of Oulu in northern Finland experience walking via their everyday routes in the city centre, I walked with five women and four men aged between 66–89 years in the spring 2013. In these kinds of walk-alongs “people weave previous knowledge and biography into immediate situated action” (Kusenbach 2003); thus multiple temporal layers and momentary sensory and other embodied experiences become unfolded during the walks. Through analysing our walks by following anthropologist Sarah Pink’s (2011) notions of emplacement, I will consider them as specific “place-events” but also as processes with histories. In addition, I will discuss how these entanglements disclose the complexity of spatial experiences of the seniors, which challenges the urban (computing) design. I will also raise the questions of the accountability of designers in the construction of power relations in public urban places.

References

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