

Enhancing everyday life, care, and the physical environment in nursing homes:

A collaborative project between occupational therapists, architects, and planners

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Introduction / Rationale

- Aging populations and multimorbidity increase demand for nursing homes and long-term care
- Supporting resident participation promotes mental health, wellbeing, and social inclusion
- Improved design, everyday life, and occupational therapy are essential



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The 4Q Project

Overall aim: to create a deeper understanding of the relationships between care, the physical environment, and everyday life in nursing homes

Builds on research that identified four qualities (the 4Qs) anchored in the ongoing everyday life at nursing home and the relationships involving care, everyday life, and the physical environment (Johansson et al., 2022):

(Q1) **A cornerstone for stability and everydayness**

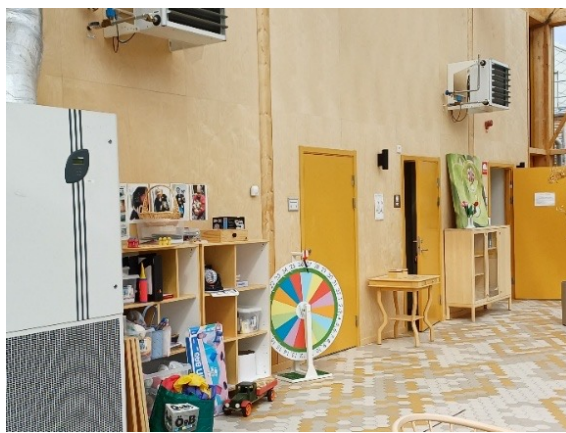
(Q2) **The beating heart**

(Q3) **Spatial dynamics**

(Q4) **Magnetic places**

Ongoing collaborative process:

- Three-year collaborative ethnographic project
- Involves occupational therapists (OTs), interdisciplinary researchers, professionals (in care, architecture, landscape architecture, planning, and development) as well as nursing home residents, their significant others, and staff
- Data from observations, interviews, and architectural plans in four Swedish nursing homes
- Analysed using a qualitative interpretative approach



OTs contributions to the collaborative process:

- Conceptualisations of the holistic relationship between personal, environmental and occupational elements
- Activity-based design (occupation-centred design)

Results / Implications

- Our preliminary findings suggest that this collaboration can promote everyday life for residents, relatives, and staff by optimising the physical environment and aligning it with activities residents need and wish to engage in
- What could a collaborative framework look like?

Strengths, challenges and opportunities of doing this type of collaboration (so far):

Strengths	Challenges	Opportunities
Complementary expertise (OT research & architectural design)	Different professional language despite shared core values	Develop a shared interdisciplinary vocabulary
Shared human-centred, activity-focused principles	Key concepts interpreted differently (e.g., activity-based design = open-plan workspaces)	Reframe activity-based design to include occupation, participation, and wellbeing
Promotes interdisciplinary learning and reflection	Time needed to align concepts and expectations	Co-create integrated framework(s) linking evidence and design
Enables more holistic, evidence-informed outcomes	Disciplinary norms shape priorities differently	Influence future research and design practices

Significance to the occupational therapy profession

- Through the process of developing a collaborative framework, we aim to support occupational therapists and researchers in collaborating with architects, planners, residents, staff, and the broader nursing home community
- Such collaboration has potential to inspire change and innovation in nursing home planning and design

Selected references

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