



**HAL**  
open science

## Giving a fairer face to urban space: Progress on the long road to dementia prevention

Timothy Daly

► **To cite this version:**

Timothy Daly. Giving a fairer face to urban space: Progress on the long road to dementia prevention. International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, inPress, 10.1002/gps.5657 . hal-03445605

**HAL Id: hal-03445605**

**<https://hal.sorbonne-universite.fr/hal-03445605v1>**

Submitted on 24 Nov 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Giving a fairer face to urban space: progress on the long road to dementia prevention.

Timothy Daly<sup>1</sup>, MA

1 Sorbonne Université, Sciences Norms Democracy, UMR 8011, Paris, France.

[Timothy.daly@paris-sorbonne.fr](mailto:Timothy.daly@paris-sorbonne.fr)

The qualitative survey by Susanne Röhr and colleagues recently published in the journal (Röhr et al. 2021) on changing urban spaces to reduce dementia risk marks a step towards what they term the “co-creation” of risk-reducing urban environments (p. 1, *ibid*). It also marks an important conceptual shift away from the individual to the environment’s role in dementia prevention.

This shift is empirically supported by the robust finding that animals and humans exposed to rich physical, mental, and social environments across the lifespan have healthier bodies and brains at all ages (van Praag, Kempermann, and Gage 2000). It also has an important ethical dimension by framing discourse around dementia prevention in terms of access to rich environments instead of an emphasis on personal motivation, which can invite moralising attitudes and public health campaigns with an onus on individuals changing their “lifestyles” (Carey et al. 2017; Brown, Maslen, and Savulescu 2019). Reductive talk about lifestyle may distract away from the fact that social determinants of health not only increase dementia risk but also appear to reduce participation in the very lifestyle interventions designed to reduce it (Coley et al. 2021). The clear wealth—brain health link may not be explained by “lifestyle” (Nakahori et al. 2018).

Any city dweller knows that urban space reflects major socio-economic inequalities. Disparities in access to stimulating environments could be one possible pathway from low SES to dementia in urban environments. If that sounds far-fetched, a recent study

from Denmark suggested that just living in a neighbourhood exposed to high amounts of traffic noise was associated with a higher risk of all forms of dementia (Cantuaria et al. 2021). Perhaps not surprisingly, spatial variation in residential noise reflects SES, with the poorer living amongst more noise (Casey et al. 2017).

Röhr and colleagues recognise that their small sample (n=10) is not reflective of urban society—they “were not able to recruit individuals with low levels of education nor individuals with an emigrational background” (p. 16, *ibid*). And yet those very people are those most in need of changes to urban space. Furthermore, environmental measures are likely to be most useful for risk reduction in the long-term. Thus, as recognised by Röhr et al., the young and middle-aged need to have their voice heard (p. 16, *ibid*).

In conclusion, a broad and representative democratic debate across generations about urban environments is sorely needed, so that cities can be used to build not only a dementia-friendly, but also a dementia-resilient, society. The work of Röhr and colleagues is a vital step in that direction.

## References

- Brown, R. C. H., H. Maslen, and J. Savulescu. 2019. "Against Moral Responsibilisation of Health: Prudential Responsibility and Health Promotion." *Public Health Ethics* 12 (2): 114-129.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/phe/phz006>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31384301>.
- Cantuaria, M. L., F. B. Waldorff, L. Wermuth, E. R. Pedersen, A. H. Poulsen, J. D. Thacher, O. Raaschou-Nielsen, M. Ketznel, J. Khan, V. H. Valencia, J. H. Schmidt, and M. Sørensen. 2021. "Residential exposure to transportation noise in Denmark and incidence of dementia: national cohort study." *BMJ* 374: n1954. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1954>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/34497091>.
- Carey, G., E. Malbon, B. Crammond, M. Pescud, and P. Baker. 2017. "Can the sociology of social problems help us to understand and manage 'lifestyle drift'?" *Health Promot Int* 32 (4): 755-761.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dav116>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26747659>.

- Casey, J. A., R. Morello-Frosch, D. J. Mennitt, K. Frstrup, E. L. Ogburn, and P. James. 2017. "Race/Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, Residential Segregation, and Spatial Variation in Noise Exposure in the Contiguous United States." *Environ Health Perspect* 125 (7): 077017. <https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP898>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28749369>.
- Coley, N., D. Coniassé-Brioude, V. Igier, T. Fournier, J. P. Poulain, S. Andrieu, and ACCEPT study group. 2021. "Disparities in the participation and adherence of older adults in lifestyle-based multidomain dementia prevention and the motivational role of perceived disease risk and intervention benefits: an observational ancillary study to a randomised controlled trial." *Alzheimers Res Ther* 13 (1): 157. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13195-021-00904-6>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/34560903>.
- Nakahori, N., M. Sekine, M. Yamada, T. Tatsuse, H. Kido, and M. Suzuki. 2018. "A pathway from low socioeconomic status to dementia in Japan: results from the Toyama dementia survey." *BMC Geriatr* 18 (1): 102.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-018-0791-6>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29703157>.
- Röhr, S., F. S. Rodriguez, R. Siemensmeyer, F. Müller, R. Romero-Ortuno, and S. G. Riedel-Heller. 2021. "How can urban environments support dementia risk reduction? A qualitative study." *Int J Geriatr Psychiatry*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.5626>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/34571579>.
- van Praag, H., G. Kempermann, and F. H. Gage. 2000. "Neural consequences of environmental enrichment." *Nat Rev Neurosci* 1 (3): 191-8.  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/35044558>.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11257907>.