

Bond University
Research Repository



Review of community facilities in Australian retirement villages: A content analysis

Xia, Bo; Skitmore, Martin; Zuo, Jian; Buys, Laurie

Published in:
Australasian Journal on Ageing

DOI:
[10.1111/ajag.12153](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajag.12153)

Licence:
Other

[Link to output in Bond University research repository.](#)

Recommended citation(APA):
Xia, B., Skitmore, M., Zuo, J., & Buys, L. (2015). Review of community facilities in Australian retirement villages: A content analysis. *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, 34(3), 144-148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajag.12153>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

For more information, or if you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact the Bond University research repository coordinator.

Review of community facilities in Australian retirement villages – a content analysis

Abstract

Aim: Facilities in retirement villages form a supportive environment for older residents. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the provision of these facilities in retirement villages, which are regarded as a viable accommodation option for the ever-increasing ageing population in Australia.

Method: A content analysis of 124 retirement villages operated by 22 developers in Queensland and South Australia was conducted for the research purpose.

Results: The most widely provided facilities are community centres, libraries, barbeque facilities, hairdressers/salons and billiards/snooker/pool tables. Commercial operators provide more facilities than not-for-profit organisations and larger retirement villages normally have more facilities due to the economics of scale involved.

Conclusions: The results of the study provide a useful reference for providing facilities within retirement villages that may support the quality lifestyles for the older residents.

Key words: retirement villages, facilities, ageing population, content analysis, Australia

Introduction

Given the ageing of the Australian population, providing affordable housing and accommodation for older people is one of the foci of government policies. With an ageing population, Australia faces significant challenges in providing supportive accommodation and care for older people who need both secure and comfortable homes and appropriate social environments to support ongoing interactions within the community [1]. Retirement villages are one type of accommodation that provides age-specific housing for older adults. The term 'retirement village' in the Australian context normally refers to a community, or complex, containing residential premises that are occupied predominately or exclusively by retired persons [2]. The exact definition of retirement village varies to some degree across the

nation, as defined in the Retirement Villages Act of each state. In some villages, serviced apartments and low/high care accommodation are also provided and operated according to government regulations. Each Australian State and Territory has specific legislation (Retirement Villages Acts and Regulations) that regulates the industry and protects residents. Legally, a retirement village is a premise where older members of the community or retired persons reside, or are to reside, in independent living units or serviced units, under a retirement village scheme [3].

Currently, retirement villages accommodate over 160,000 older Australians with an increasing take up [4]. It is estimated that around 4 to 5 percent of Australians aged 65 years or over currently live in around 1850 retirement villages [5]. Some states, such as Western Australia and South Australia have significantly higher rates, with proportions of around seven percent and eight percent respectively [6]. Driven by a growing acceptance of living in a retirement village, an estimated 7 to 8 percent of Australians aged 65 years and over will live in retirement villages in the next decade [5]. As a result, there is likely to be a significant rise in demand for the development of new retirement communities.

There are several reasons why older people move to retirement villages. Most of these relate to health or physical abilities, changing lifestyle, closeness and security of relatives or friends, need to maintain property, need to be independent of family members, physical support and financial situation [7-13]. The older residents generally value the combination of independence and security with the additional benefit of the support and companionship of their fellow residents, and they often develop strong friendships and a sense of belonging in the retirement village community [14]. Some older people place more importance on social interaction than an active lifestyle or aspects of home [12, 13]. Having physical space for relatives or even pets and a comfortable physical environment are also important [13]. An additional need is the interaction between residents, residence managers and staff [15]. Finally, it should be noted that residents in retirement villages report they would prefer to have their facilities more environmentally friendly [16].

The facilities within a retirement village aim to create an environment that provides unique leisure and educational activities enabling the formation of social cohesion, camaraderie and a sense of belonging [12, 14]. Indeed, retirement village developments aim to provide a unique leisure and lifestyle for the older population [17]. The facilities provided in retirement

villages should serve as an essential component of the living environment for residents, and play an important role in supporting their individual and social activities [18]. However, little is known of the specific type and scale of facilities that exist in retirement villages to fulfil these aims. Thus the purpose of this paper is to review the extent of public facilities actually provided by retirement villages across a large region of Australia and obtain an indication of the extent to which these fulfil the generally accepted needs and aims identified in the literature.

Method

Content analysis of public websites was used to identify the provision of village facilities. As an observational method, content analysis has been widely used to analyse the symbolic content of a variety of types of recorded communications in a systematic manner, which helps to identify the major facets of a set of data by counting the frequency of events or a depicted topic [19, 20].

The online databases of the Retirement Village Association (<http://www.rva.com.au/>) and Villages Publishing (<http://www.villages.com.au/>) were also used for initial sample identification. Additional retirement villages were located through an on-line search using Google and other search engines. More than 200 retirement villages were identified with 124 having publically available websites containing detailed facility information. This convenience sample 124 retirement villages operated by 22 companies in both Queensland and South Australia therefore was examined online in July to August 2012.

Seven retirement villages were located in rural areas, with the remaining being in suburban areas. Information from the websites was converted into portable document format (pdf), and then analysed using NVivo software. The information relating to the facilities of each retirement village was recorded along with other village characteristics, including village size (small, medium and large), village type (not-for-profit developers and private developers), accommodation type (unit/villas, apartments, mix of apartments and units), and location. Some facilities with different names but providing the same function (e.g. hairdresser and salon, gymnasium and fitness centre), were coded into the same category.

The profile of the villages is summarised in Table 1. The majority of these villages are operated by private developers (83 out of 124). Additionally, the major accommodation types are units or villas (95 out of 124), as most of the villages are operated for independent living residents.

Table 1. Summary of retirement village information

Retirement village features for the content analysis		Number
Retirement villages		124
Retirement village developers/operators		22
Retirement village size	Small (less than 50 units)	39
	Medium (50-100 units)	36
	Large (more than 100 units)	49
Retirement village type	Not-for-profit	41
	Private	83
Location	Queensland	81
	South Australia	43
Accommodation type	Units/villa	95
	Apartment	21
	Mix of units and apartment	8
Location	Rural area	7
	Suburb area	117

Statistical analysis was also conducted to compare the number of facilities provided by private and not-for-profit organizations in different sizes of retirement villages. The Mann-Whitney U-test was used to compare the number of facilities in retirement villages with different financial types (i.e. private and not-for-profit), while the Kruskal-Wallis H-test was used for different sizes (i.e. small, medium and large).

Needs-aims index

A seven-point needs-aims index was developed to identify the extent to which the villages' facilities fulfil the needs and aims of the residents and companies (Table 2). The index for each facility was calculated by adding together which of the seven criteria was fulfilled by the facility. For example, a Community Centre/Function room fulfils criteria A, B, C, D and E (Table 2) and therefore achieves a Needs-Aim score of 5.

Table 2. Needs/aims index criteria

	Criterion	Need/aim	Ref
<i>A</i>	<i>Comfort</i>	Comfortable physical environment	[13]
<i>B</i>	<i>Independence and security</i>	Need to be independent of family members,	[7-13]
		Supporting their individual and social activities	[18]
		Independence and security	[14]
<i>C</i>	<i>Social interaction and belongingness</i>	Social interaction vs an active lifestyle or aspects of home	[12, 13]
		Social cohesion	[12, 14]
		Camaraderie and a sense of belonging	[12, 14]
		Support and companionship of fellow residents	[14]
		Strong friendships	[14]
		Sense of belonging in the retirement village community	[14]
		Interaction between residents, residence managers, staff and residents	[15]
<i>D</i>	<i>Physical support</i>	Physical support	[7-13]
<i>E</i>	<i>Leisure and fitness activities</i>	Leisure activities	[12, 14]
		Unique leisure and lifestyle requirements of the older population	[17].
		Fitness	[12,17]
<i>F</i>	<i>Educational activities</i>	Educational activities	[12, 14]
<i>G</i>	<i>Environmentally friendly</i>	Environmentally friendly	[16]

Results

Table 3 provides a rank ordered list of the facilities provided in the retirement village sample and associated need/aim scores. The most widely provided facilities include community centres, libraries, barbeque facilities, hairdresser/salons and billiards/snooker/pool tables. Private operators provide more facilities than not-for-profit organisations and large retirement villages normally have more facilities than smaller villages.

More than 50 percent of the villages have a community centre, library and hairdressing/salon, with the community centre/function room being the most common facility. Within the community centre, there is usually a lounge, dining room, library, games room and billboard/snooker/pool room. In most villages, residents have access to a range of social activities and services that promote interaction with other residents or family members. In villages that mainly consist of independent units or villas, the community centre is often located at the centre of the village; and usually on the ground floor of villages consisting of

multi-storey apartments. Some smaller villages do not have a community centre but are in close proximity to aged care centres operated by the same developer.

Table 3 Summary of facilities provided in retirement villages

Rank	Community facilities	Frequ. (%)	Type of retirement village		Size of retirement village			Need-aim score
			Not-for-profit	Private	Small	Medium	Large	
1	Community centre/function room	75%	61%	82%	64%	72%	86%	5
2	Library	66%	54%	72%	54%	64%	78%	5
3	Barbeque area/facilities	56%	46%	60%	36%	53%	73%	4
4	Hairdresser/salon	50%	41%	54%	36%	44%	65%	4
5	Billiards/snooker/pool tables	46%	15%	61%	23%	42%	67%	4
6	Swimming pool	44%	17%	57%	13%	36%	73%	4
7	Restaurant/dining room/coffee	43%	22%	53%	18%	47%	59%	4
8	Art or craft room	39%	17%	49%	26%	31%	55%	6
9	Indoor bowls	35%	24%	41%	26%	28%	49%	4
10	Lock-up garage	32%	32%	33%	38%	25%	33%	2
11	Community garden	28%	20%	33%	26%	28%	31%	5
12	Gymnasium/exercise room/fitness centre	28%	10%	37%	15%	25%	41%	5
13	Bar	23%	5%	26%	8%	22%	35%	4
14	Medical room	23%	5%	31%	5%	17%	41%	3
15	Bowling green/lawn ball/bocce/petanque	19%	2%	28%	5%	6%	41%	5
16	Workshop room	17%	0%	25%	0%	6%	39%	5
17	Security screens	15%	15%	16%	7%	19%	10%	3
18	Home theatre/media room	15%	7%	19%	8%	14%	22%	5
19	Caravan/boat storage	15%	2%	20%	5%	0%	33%	2
20	Community kitchen	12%	5%	16%	15%	8%	12%	4
21	Spa (hydro) or sauna	12%	4%	15%	3%	6%	24%	4
22	Games room	11%	15%	10%	8%	6%	18%	4
23	Mini golf/putting course	10%	2%	14%	3%	8%	18%	5
24	Croquet lawn	10%	5%	12%	3%	0%	22%	5
25	Dance floor	10%	2%	13%	3%	0%	22%	4
26	Table tennis	9%	0%	13%	0%	0%	22%	4
27	Tennis court	9%	0%	13%	0%	8%	16%	5
28	Water tank or water management	8%	7%	8%	10%	11%	4%	1
29	In house solar power	7%	2%	10%	8%	8%	6%	1
30	Chapel	5%	10%	2%	3%	8%	4%	3
31	Jetty	2%	0%	4%	0%	3%	4%	2
32	Chook house	2%	0%	2%	0%	3%	2%	5

A total of 53 out of 124 (43 percent) of the retirement villages provide a village bus to city areas (e.g. CBD, shopping mall, medical centre and cinema). For villages without a bus, the residents have access to public transportation, normally with nearby bus stops and local communities and facilities (e.g. libraries and shopping malls).

Facilities such as caravan/boat storage, mini golf/putting, chapel and boat jetty are limited to only a few villages. For example, chapels are normally located in villages operated by religious organisations, which are the major not-for-profit operators. Mini golf/putting courses are normally available only in private luxury villages near a golf club.

Additionally, the provision of facilities relates to the number of units within the village, with larger villages offering more facilities. For example, large villages with more than 100 units have more outdoor space to provide facilities such as a swimming pool, tennis court and croquet lawn; while some small villages may only provide housing and access to a community hall with some basic facilities, e.g. games room, billiards/snooker and media room. The provision of facilities in different types and sizes of retirement villages is also shown in Table 3.

Table 4 shows the result of the statistical analysis, which compares the number of facilities provided in different types of retirement villages. With $p=.000$ in both cases, there are significantly more facilities provided by for-profit organisations and larger villages in the sample than would occur by chance alone.

Table 4 Comparison of numbers of facilities with different types and sizes of retirement villages

Groups of retirement villages		Average number of total facilities in retirement villages	Nonparametric test of facility numbers
Finance	Not-for-profit	4.5	$P=.000$ (Mann-Whitney U-test)
	Private	9.4	
Size	Small	4.8	$P=.000$ (Kruskal-Wallis H-test for types)
	Medium	6.5	
	Large	11.1	

Table 5 compares the sizes of not-for-profit and private villages. From this, it can be seen that the private villages tend to be larger than the not-for-profit villages. These differences are also highly significant, with $\chi^2_{(2df)} = 26.110$ ($p=0.000$).

Table 5 Relationship between village size and type of owner

Finance type	Size			Total
	Small	Medium	Large	
Not-for-profit	23	14	4	41
	56.1%	34.1%	9.8%	100.0%
Private	16	22	45	83
	19.3%	26.5%	54.2%	100.0%
Total	39	36	49	124
	31.5%	29.0%	39.5%	100.0%

Environmental sustainability was also assessed. 30 percent of the websites use the term “sustainability” directly while 65 percent indirectly express this in terms of “environmentally friendly” or “eco-friendly”. This is realised in some villages in the form of rainwater harvesting, water-efficient fittings, energy-efficient light fixtures, solar hot water with a gas booster, low volatile organic compound materials and paints, using bamboo for flooring in living areas and low allergy carpets. In other villages, it amounts to making the best use of natural ventilation and sunlight, rain flush tank storage systems, etc., being built for a target rating of seven-star energy homes with precisely positioned rooms and windows and low-toxic materials used in construction.

Discussion

Older people need and want to be active in their everyday lives and participate in social activities [21], as social activities and social relationships are critical for maintaining their quality of life (e.g. [22, 23]). This necessitates the provision of good facilities [24] and the number and kind of facilities provided in retirement villages, to some extent, reflects the quality of the living environment within the village. As the needs/aims index in Table 3 indicates, most of the facilities in the villages support this by simultaneously fulfilling several need-aims in the form of communal/activity areas such as community halls, craft rooms, etc.

Although the provision of a wide range of facilities may pose a challenge due to financial restrictions, the costs incurred appear to be viable in developments with more than 50 units. Thus, the size of the retirement village is a significant issue affecting the amount of facilities available. Retirement villages were once provided solely by not-for-profit organizations, which sought to meet a community need and provide services and security (normally for those on a pension) who need assistance but could still live independently to some extent [11]. In the current retirement village market however, there are a growing number of retirement villages that are operated by private companies - normally property developers with retirement divisions. Some of these are developing luxury retirement communities to address the needs of wealthier baby boomers. With the exception of the chapel and game rooms, all the facilities are provided more frequently in retirement villages operated by private companies, perhaps an expected outcome considering that private retirement villages are normally more expensive than are their not-for-profit counterparts. Similarly, private villages are comparatively larger than non-for-profit ones, which is arguably the reason that more facilities and services are provided.

The limitation of this study is that only 124 retirement villages in Queensland and South Australia with on-line websites were included while over 1800 retirement villages exist across Australia [4]. In addition, some websites may be out of date and may not cover all the detailed information of facilities and services. Furthermore, many retirement villages, especially not for profit ones, do not have their own websites or their online presence is often under-developed and fails to feature facilities. The overview of the facilities provided here, therefore, may not be representative of the entire industry. In addition, the quality, support and maintenance of facilities of the same type remain unknown. Larger scale field studies covering all states and territories would provide a broader understanding of the different quality of facilities provided by retirement villages. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the provision of facilities in retirement villages does not effectively reflect their need. Future research is needed to understand the real requirements of the retirement village community through examination of the preferences of residents for individual facilities and their frequency of use.

The findings from this study have practical implications for the retirement village industry. For retirement village developers, the types and frequencies of facilities provided can be used as a benchmark for future planning. Moreover, with information available concerning the cost

of providing and maintaining facilities over a certain period of time, the best value for money can be determined. For potential retirement village residents, a close examination of facilities is necessary for move-in decisions, as good facilities are important to their quality of life. Additionally, future retirement village developments and potential residents would benefit from applying the criteria developed in this paper in assessing the capacity of individual villages to fulfil resident needs and expectations. The criteria also offers a checklist for government agencies or inspectors in ensuring an appropriate level of welfare of retirement villagers as well as providing the basis for future surveys aimed at determining the quality of retirement village living.

Acknowledgements

The work described in the paper was supported by the Research Trust of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

References

- 1 Cotter, N., Monahan, E., McAvoy, H., & Goodman, P. Coping with the cold—exploring relationships between cold housing, health and social wellbeing in a sample of older people in Ireland. *Quality in Ageing and Older Adults*. 2012; **13**: 38-47.
- 2 Parliament of Australia. Inquiry into older people and the law. Canberra, 2007.
- 3 Australia Institute of Health and Welfare *National evaluation of the Retirement Villages Care Pilot*, Canberra 2006. Available on <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=6442454142>
- 4 Retirement Village Association (RVA) A sustainable population strategy for Australia: Submission to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Submission to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Retirement Village Association 2011.
- 5 Zuo J., Xia B., Skitmore M. Green buildings for greying people: a case study of a retirement village in Australia. *Facilities* 2014; **32** (in press).
- 6 Retirement Village Association and Aged and Community Services Association of NSW and ACT. *Retirement Villages Bill 2010 (ACT)*. Available at website: <http://www.agedservices.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/ACT-Legislation-Submission-090810.pdf>.

- 7 Gardner, I.L. Why people move to retirement villages: Home owners and non-home owners, *Australasian Journal on Ageing* 1994; **13**: 36–40.
- 8 Buys, L. Care and support assistance provided in retirement villages: expectations vs reality. *Australasian Journal on Ageing* 2000; **19**: 149–151.
- 9 Buys, L. Life in a retirement village: Implications for contact with community and village friends. *Gerontology* 2011; **47**: 55-59.
- 10 Buys, L. & Miller, E. The physical, leisure and social activities of very old Australian men living in a retirement village and the community. *Geriatrics* 2007; **25**: 15-19.
- 11 Stimson, R. The retirement village industry in Australia: Evolution, prospects, challenges. Brisbane : Univ. of Queensland Press, 2002.
- 12 Grant, B. C. Retirement villages: More than enclaves for the aged. *Activities, Adaptation & Aging* 2007; **31**: 37-55.
- 13 Tanner, B, Tilse, C. and de Jonge, D. Restoring and sustaining home: The impact of home modifications on the meaning of home for older people. *Journal of Housing for the Elderly* 2008; **22**: 195-215.
- 14 Evan S. ‘That lot up there and us down here’: social interaction and a sense of community in a mixed tenure UK retirement village. *Ageing and Society* 2009; **29**:199-216.
- 15 Torrington, J. Evaluating quality of life in residential care buildings, *Building Research & Information* 2007; **35**:514-528.
- 16 Barker, J., Zuo, J., Xia, B. and Zillante, G. *Sustainable retirement living: what matters*, Proceedings, NSW: 37th Annual Conference of Australasian University Building Educators Association (AUBEA), 2012.
- 17 Bernard, M., Bartlam, B., Sim, J., & Biggs, S. Housing and care for older people: life in an English purpose-built retirement village. *Ageing and Society* 2007; **27**: 555-578.
- 18 Nathan, A., Wood, L., & Giles-Corti, B. Environmental Factors Associated With Active Living in Retirement Village Residents Findings From an Exploratory Qualitative Enquiry. *Research on Aging* 2013; **35**: 459-480.
- 19 Fellows, R. and Liu, A. Research methods for construction, 3rd Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Science, 2008.
- 20 Nayak, N.V. and Taylor, J.E. Offshore outsourcing in global design networks, *Journal of Management in Engineering* 2009; **25**: 177-184.

- 21 Valdemarsson M, Jernryd E, Iwarsson. Preferences and frequencies of visits to public facilities in old age-a pilot study in a Swedish town center. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* 2005; **40**: 15-28.
- 22 Cattan, M., White, M., Bond, J., & Learmouth, A. Preventing social isolation and loneliness among older people: a systematic review of health promotion interventions. *Ageing & Society* 2005; 25: 41-67.
- 23 Borglin, G., Jakobsson, U., Edberg, A. K., & Hallberg, I. R.. Older people in Sweden with various degrees of present quality of life: their health, social support, everyday activities and sense of coherence. *Health & social care in the community* 2006; *14*: 136-146.
- 24 Gabriel, Z., & Bowling, A. Quality of life from the perspectives of older people. *Ageing and Society* 2004; *24*: 675-691.