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The Geography of Aging: Preparing Communities for the Surge in Seniors

By Gerald Hodge

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press 2008: 320 pages.

REVIEWED BY PAMELA SHAW, PHD, MCIP

THE GEOGRAPHY OF AGING:

Preparing Communities for the Surge in Seniors is a well-timed text. As noted by the author, Gerald Hodge, the challenge of an aging population "has been too little considered both by the many professions whose actions impinge on the daily lives of seniors and by those elected officials whose policies shape Canada's communities."¹ And Hodge is the right author for this text. His career in urban planning began when the Baby Boom children and households changed Canadian communities; these same individuals are now shaping communities as seniors, and Hodge counts himself among this age cohort's members.

Gerald Hodge is familiar to planning students and professionals across North America as the author (now with David Gordon) of *Planning Canadian Communities* (2008 5th edition, Thompson Nelson, Toronto) and as the former director of the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Queen's University. He has written extensively on the viability of small communities, regional development issues, and public policy. Among many accomplishments, Gerald Hodge was also the recipient of the 2008 Canadian Institute of Planners' President's Award, which honoured his half-century of scholarship and practice.

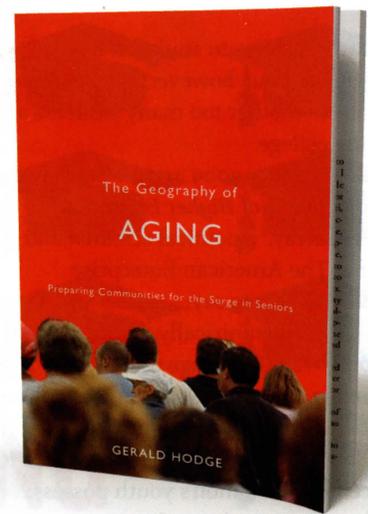
In this text, Hodge celebrates the diversity found among seniors, noting the differences among the approximately 50 percent considered *old* (65-74), the more than 30 percent falling into the *old-old* (75-84) category, and the remainder in the *very old* (85 and over) category. Hodge addresses the simplistic way that researchers often portray those over 65, noting that "we need to remember that they comprise a range of ages and differ in a host of other variables, such as gender, income, health, ethnicity, and living arrangements."² The activity patterns and residential choices of persons over 65 also vary significantly within this age cohort. In addition, Hodge addresses issues of cultural diversity, aging in

Aboriginal communities, and changes in living arrangements. In short, he dispenses with the stereotypes that typify many discussions on seniors' populations.

The Geography of Aging is divided into four parts: *Where Canada's Seniors Live, How Seniors Use Community Space, Future Seniors and their Communities, and Preparing Communities for the Senior's Surge*. Part One provides a socio-demographic analysis of Canada's seniors. Limitations in readily available statistical data are discussed, and Hodge expands on the use of more creative sources of information. Part Two traces through the literature on seniors and aging from 1950 forward, revealing gaps in what we think we know about the daily life of seniors. Examples are provided on how senior's lives unfold within a series of environments: from home, to the neighbourhood, to the community, and the wider region beyond.

Part Three then looks to the future. Hodge notes that by 2011, the proportion of seniors' populations in Canada will begin to expand relative to other population cohorts, and by 2031 there will be nearly double the number of today's seniors. The source, scale, and spatial parameters of this change are detailed in this section. Part Four asks the key question: what should communities do to prepare for the coming surge in seniors? The short answer is to become "Senior-Smart" and Hodge presents several tools that can be used for appraising existing communities and planning for a senior-enabling future.

The text provides some additional resources, useful to both the casual reader and the researcher. *Guiding questions* are presented in each chapter to highlight the chapter's key themes and create continuity through the text. Short *vignettes* are also distributed through the book, adding first-voice richness. Photos of the speakers or authors would have been a welcome addition to further personalize their comments, although it is recognized this would have



added to production costs. An extensive list of Internet resources on aging and community environments is also provided.

While not the focus of this text, it would be interesting to shift that focus internationally and examine the geography of aging across developed and developing nations, particularly as it compares with the Canadian context.

A quote by Powell Lawton in Chapter 1 sums up the theme of the book: "older people are, on the whole, pretty much like the rest of us."³ The desire of most seniors is to live in a place that is safe, comfortable, and meets their needs, an aspiration held by non-seniors as well. The recognition of the needs of seniors by planners and policy makers will help to develop communities that work for all ages. ■

PAMELA SHAW, PHD, MCIP, is a UC Professor at Vancouver Island University (VIU), planning consultant, and author. Shaw notes that Gerald Hodge recently lectured at Vancouver Island University on his text and once again was an inspiration to the students. His visit prompted the declaration of Gerald Hodge Day at VIU. Shaw recently published "A Field Guide to Communication" with Oxford University Press. Her second text titled "Boxed In: Searching for the Public Good in the Retail Landscape" is under development and scheduled for publication in spring 2011.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. See page xviii.
2. See page 8.
3. Lawton P. *Environment and Aging*. Monterey: Brooks Cole Publishing; 1980.