Chapter

Introduction
Chapter 1

1.1 Motivation for this study

"Whose help? Everyone is working" (Ramesar, 2012).

This is the headline from a Dutch newspaper article on the consequences of budget cuts on domestic help for older people who are living in their own home and neighbourhood (i.e. ‘ageing in place’). An 86-year-old woman, Ms. Van Esveld, who was being interviewed for this article expressed her worries regarding who would provide practical support now that the time the domestic worker had to clean her house would be reduced from 3.5 hours to 30 minutes a week. She worried about needing to move to a care home as she could not always rely on her children and grandchildren for help as they were busy working, as were her neighbours. Although she valued living in her own home, she missed a sense of conviviality in the immediate locality as her younger neighbours were seldom around. This woman’s story casts light on the subjective dimensions of ageing in place. The Dutch government, as have many other Western governments, has implemented ageing in place policies in order to postpone and decrease expensive institutionalised care (Wiles et al., 2012). These policies are promoted by stressing that growing old in one’s own home and neighbourhood is in the best interests of older adults as they can then age within a familiar and predictable environment that is supportive of their social, emotional and instrumental needs (Davies and James, 2011; Milligan, 2009). In both research and policy, it is generally assumed that older adults prefer to age in place as the number of home moves in later life declines with increasing age and older people are also less inclined to consider moving than younger adults (PBL, 2013; Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Ogg, 2014). Aging in place can help in preserving a sense of independence, identity, social embeddedness and emotional attachment with the home and community, thereby conferring wellbeing (e.g. Cutchin, 2003; Wiles et al., 2012). However, as the newspaper article suggests, “the reality [of ageing in place] is not straightforward” (Sixsmith and Sixsmith, 2008, p. 219) as austerity measures and constraints on younger people’s time in providing support can impede the supposed benefits of ageing in one’s familiar surroundings. This thesis provides a critical perspective of ageing in place through highlighting older adults’ experiences of everyday life in urban neighbourhoods.

Ageing has a “nascent profile” within the field of human geography (Skinner et al., 2014, p. 1). Schwanen et al. noted that geographers used to show interest in the spatialities of later life, but “over the past 15 years or so the balance has tipped towards the study of childhood” (2012a, p. 1). They call for a more sustained engagement with ageing and old age in human geography and list several reasons for this. One is the shift in Western societies towards ageing in place and care in the community, where the organisation of social support, housing and care for older people is increasingly transferred
from the public domain to the private domain in the form of family, friends, neighbours and older adults themselves (Schwanen et al., 2012a). Given these “significant changes in landscapes of care” (Schwanen et al., 2012a, p. 2) and their potential consequences for older adults’ quality of life, the subjective dimensions of ageing in place deserve closer scrutiny. In this thesis, older adults’ experiences are viewed as an outcome of the complex and dynamic interplay of self, others, place and time. This relational approach emphasises that older adults’ experiences are “entwined becomings” (Schwanen et al., 2012a, p. 4, see also: Andrews et al., 2012; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Skinner et al., 2014). In this thesis, this approach is adopted as it does not position older adults’ experiences as merely idiosyncratic, but frames them in a broader perspective: showing how various elements, including the built environment, public policies and societal perceptions of old age, play a role in their engagement with place.

The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding of the elements that play a role in the subjective dimensions of ageing in place. In particular, the focus is on the neighbourhood as a place of ageing. The starting point of the analysis is a set of in-depth interviews and walks that were conducted with older adults in their homes and neighbourhoods in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. In deepening understanding of older adults’ engagement with place, this thesis concentrates on exploring the elements that influence how older adults experience everyday life in their neighbourhood, rather than the advantages or disadvantages of ageing in certain types of urban neighbourhoods. In so doing, this thesis addresses various themes regarding older adults’ engagement with place: the discontinuities of ageing in place in relation to neighbourhood transitions (Chapter 2); the meaning of local social contacts (Chapter 3); everyday practices (Chapters 2 and 4); and the daily temporal orderings of ageing in place (Chapter 5). Together, these chapters advance the conceptualisation of the notion of ageing in place.

Not only does this thesis contribute to research within the ‘geographies of ageing’ (see Skinner et al., 2014), it also provides input for policy. Since the World Health Organization launched the Global Age-Friendly Cities guide (WHO, 2007), there has been an increase in the number of policy agendas that stress the importance of making the physical and social infrastructure of cities and neighbourhoods ‘age-friendly’ in order to contribute to the active and healthy ageing of older adults and to let them live independently for as long as possible. The recent launch of the European thematic network of innovation for age-friendly environments (AFE-INNOVNET, 2014) shows a range of stakeholders committed to improving older adults’ quality of life across Europe. The chapters of this thesis discuss issues relevant to public policy and planning practice in realising such age-friendly environments, namely: the impact of neighbourhood renewal on older adults’ sense of belonging (Chapter 2); social, physical and temporal obstacles to and opportunities for local social interactions and informal support (Chapters 3 and 5); and the
walkability of the neighbourhood for older residents (Chapter 4). In broad terms, these issues relate to the policy domains of neighbourhood change, care in the community, mobility and the social integration of older adults.

In the remainder of this chapter, a background to the study is first provided by discussing the importance of the neighbourhood as a place of ageing. Then, how relational thinking informs the way in which older adults’ experiences of everyday life are interpreted in this thesis is discussed. Next, the policy context of ageing in place in the Netherlands, the research methods and the context, and the aim and outline of the thesis are addressed.

1.2 The neighbourhood as an important place of ageing

The focus in this thesis is on older adults’ experiences of everyday life in urban neighbourhoods. As a result of ageing in place policies, there is an increased interest in the past decade or so in the neighbourhood as a place of ageing from a variety of disciplines, such as social and environmental gerontology (e.g. Buffel et al., 2013; Peace et al., 2006; Phillipson et al., 1999), health studies (e.g. Cramm et al., 2013; Day, 2008; Gardner, 2011; Walker and Hiller, 2007) and transport and planning studies (e.g. Banister and Bowling, 2004; Gilroy, 2008; Hockey et al., 2013). This research emphasises that the neighbourhood, as a physical and social place of ageing, is more important for older adults’ wellbeing than for younger and employed people (Buffel et al., 2012). In this section, a brief overview is provided of the main explanations for the apparent importance of the neighbourhood for older adults.

Generally, older adults spend more time in their locality than their younger and employed counterparts (Buffel et al., 2012). To an extent, this has to do with retirement, which marks a shift from the workplace to the residential environment (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2005). Further, decreasing physical mobility and diminishing health can limit the time and energy available to engage in “demanding activities far from home” (Droogleever Fortuijn et al., 2006, p. 363). As older adults spend increasing amounts of time in their proximate environment, the neighbourhood, as an experiential setting, gains in importance. Local social contacts are important to older adults’ wellbeing in terms of experiencing sociability in the public places of the neighbourhood (e.g. Gardner, 2011; Lager et al., 2012; Peace et al., 2006). With diminishing institutionalised resources and older adults’ diminishing levels of independence, these local social contacts can become particularly important in securing social, emotional and instrumental support (Buffel et al., 2012). In the past five decades or so, friends and neighbours have taken a more prominent place in the social networks of older people, which were once dominated by family ties (Phillipson et al., 2001). This further increases the importance in older adults’ everyday lives of the neighbourhood’s social infrastructure.
The extent to which support is received is related to older adults’ social embeddedness in their neighbourhood: people need to know each other in order to identify when an older person is in need of support (Droogleever Fortuijn, 2010). Social embeddedness comes into being through extensive periods of living in a neighbourhood (Gardner, 2011). Residential stability may result in a strong place attachment to the locality, an aspect that is of particular importance in older adults’ wellbeing. Place attachment stems from a person’s physical, social and autobiographical ‘insideness’ (Rowles, 1983). This ‘insideness’, or familiarity with a place, results from spatial routines and habits (physical), integration in local social networks (social) and the remembrance of events that develops through length of residence (autobiographical) (Rowles, 1983). Familiarity with the materiality of a neighbourhood can be beneficial in carrying out activities of daily living, such as grocery shopping, when physical and/or cognitive functions decrease in later life. This, in turn, can confer a sense of safety, control and independence (Buffel et al., 2012; Wiles et al., 2012). Place attachment has a functional dimension as well as an affective dimension. Experiences and feelings about the home and the neighbourhood can produce an emotional attachment to these places. This attachment can serve as a means to keep memories of the life course alive, thereby contributing to maintaining a sense of continuity of the self (Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992).

Urban neighbourhoods can pose both advantages and challenges with regard to older adults’ wellbeing (Phillipson, 2014). On the one hand, urban environments can “produce advantages for older people in respect of access, to specialized medical services, provision of cultural and leisure facilities, and necessities for daily living” (Phillipson, 2014, p. 1). This variation in places can bring about a range of positive emotions, such as relaxation, invigoration and excitement (Negrini, 2015). On the other hand, research on ageing in changing and deprived neighbourhoods has shown how urban environments can confer environmental stress and contribute to older adults’ social exclusion (e.g. Scharf et al., 2005; Van der Meer et al., 2008). In particular, this can jeopardise the wellbeing of older adults who lack the financial means to venture or move beyond the neighbourhood and thereby get ‘stuck’ in these places (Phillipson, 2007).

The literature cited above establishes the neighbourhood as an important place of ageing. Nevertheless, some authors have suggested that this may not be the case for all older people. According to Phillipson (2007, p. 327), global developments, such as the emergence of transnational communities, have resulted in “a more mobile form of social ageing” in which older people have a larger array of places available from which they can draw a sense of belonging and wellbeing. In a similar vein, Milligan (2009) noted that the nature of place attachment may change for future generations of older people since their working lives are marked by a greater residential mobility than those of current generations (see also Rowles, 1983). The importance of the neighbourhood as a social place in
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older adults’ wellbeing may also diminish because ICTs allow social interactions to take place beyond the locality (Means and Evans, 2011; Milligan, 2009).

1.3 The co-creation of older adults’ experiences

This thesis, in examining the elements that influence how older adults’ experiences of everyday life in their neighbourhood come into being, adopts a relational approach. Whereas traditional geographic perspectives on ageing understand experiences of place as “happening” to older people, a relational approach stresses how these experiences are “co-created by older people, other bodies, and objects” (Skinner et al., 2014, p. 14). In a relational approach, research on the relationship between ageing and place has shown that older adults also possess agency in the ways in which they experience and make use of neighbourhood space. Several authors have emphasised older adults’ place-making ‘ability’ in relation to neighbourhood change and life in deprived urban neighbourhoods (e.g. Rowles, 1978; Rowles and Watkins, 2003; Smith, 2009; Wiles et al., 2012). These studies highlight that older people are not necessarily ‘passive victims’ of problematic and changing environments, but that they can draw a sense of belonging from these places and experience safety and sociability (see also Buffel et al., 2013). However, as such research mainly focuses on individual agency, little is known about, for instance, how other people are involved in the co-creation of older adults’ experiences. In this thesis, in seeking to understand what elements are involved in this co-creation, older respondents’ experiences of everyday life in urban neighbourhoods are viewed from the perspective of everyday life.

In everyday life, societal structures and individual agency come together in the ways in which people go about and experience the day-to-day (Eyles, 1989). From everyday life “we derive a sense of self, of identity, as living a real and meaningful biography” and, as Eyles argued, it is therefore “crucial for understanding human life and society” (1989, p. 103). To date, little is known about how older adults’ experiences of the everyday relate to the broader context of societal structures. However, recently, in *Geoformation’s* themed issue on the spatialities of ageing (see Schwanen et al., 2012a), attention was paid to how various aspects of the everyday, such as mobile phone use, social participation in the neighbourhood and personal mobility (see, respectively: Hardill and Olphert, 2012; Ziegler, 2012; Schwanen et al., 2012b) are experienced by older adults, and how these experiences are co-constructed by societal norms and values. For instance, Schwanen et al. (2012b, p. 1314) showed how older adults’ positive connotations with self-reliance and unaided functioning relates to the Anglo-American “ideal of the autonomous, self-actualising individual”.

To disentangle the ‘entwined becomings’ of older adults’ experiences (Schwanen et al., 2012a) requires attention to ‘place’ and ‘time’ as organising principles


of everyday life (Eyles, 1989). Places are not simply backdrops to social life but processes that acquire meaning through everyday interactions between people and their environment (Cresswell, 2004). As such, places can be considered as social constructs in which people recognise social norms and values, and hold perceptions of particular groups of residents. Laws (1997) argued that residential environments communicate how society perceives older people whilst, at the same time, these environments come into being through these perceptions. For instance, Laws (1997) showed how the passage of the Social Security Act in the US at the beginning of the 20th century changed societal perceptions of old age, that used to be viewed as marked by disease and poverty, to one where older people were seen as deserving and respectable. This change was accompanied by a boom in the construction of private homes for the elderly that offered a more ‘home-like’ atmosphere than alms houses (Laws, 1997). This example shows how older adults’ ‘place’ in society is construed both in discourses and the built environment. In the current era, older people’s place in society has shifted from age-segregated places, such as care homes, to ageing in place. This shift has been accompanied by neo-liberal-informed ‘active ageing’ discourses, in which older people are seen as subjects desiring an active role in society (Schwanen and Ziegler, 2011). In seeking to understand how older adults’ experiences are co-created, the neighbourhood should be considered in terms of the messages it communicates about older people’s ‘place’ in society. Here, ‘time’ should also be into account (Eyles, 1989; Schwanen et al., 2012a). Traditionally, time has been regarded as a component of older adults’ attachment to place, in the sense that familiarity establishes itself through length of residence in a community (see Cutchin, 2001; Rowles, 1978, 1983). However, ‘time’ can also be understood in terms of people’s daily rhythms. This can be illustrated through the newspaper article which was mentioned in Section 1.1. There, Ms. van Esveld spent most of the time in her home and locality, whilst her neighbours were seldom around as they were in their places of work. As a result of these different time-space routines, Ms. van Esveld lacked a sense of conviviality in her locality. In this thesis, the focus will be on the role of these daily temporal orderings of ageing in place in understanding older adults’ experiences of everyday life (see Chapters 3 and 5).

### 1.4 Ageing in place in the Netherlands

The research for this thesis was conducted in the Netherlands and the respondents’ experiences must be considered within the context of the country’s ageing in place policies. Davies and James (2011, p. 111) noted that there is nothing new about ageing in one’s own home and neighbourhood, but that “the worldwide adaptation of ageing in place as a guiding principle for managing ageing populations” is a more recent phenomenon. In the Netherlands, the foundations for ageing in place were already laid in the 1970s in
national policy regarding the older population. After World War II, in order to solve the shortage of housing for young couples with children, older people were encouraged to move to homes for the elderly (Van Egdom, 1997; Van Den Heuvel, 1997). As the number of homes built, and older people living in these homes grew, the government became concerned about the increasing costs of this policy and tighter criteria for admission to homes for the elderly were developed to stimulate ageing in place (Van Egdom, 1997; Van Den Heuvel, 1997). From the 1980s onwards, ageing in place was further stimulated by a reduction in the number of places in homes for the elderly despite the ageing population (Van Den Heuvel, 1997). In 2013, the process of ‘extramuralising’ (deinstitutionalisation) was set in motion entailing even stricter admission criteria: people who were previously entitled to move into a care home now had to receive care in the community (PBL, 2013).

Care in the community should be considered in conjunction with the transition from a welfare state to participatiesamenleving (the Dutch equivalent of civil society) (Companje, 2013). In terms of policies for the older population, this process was already visible in the 1980s in policy memoranda in which older adults’ responsibility in organising care and housing and in healthy ageing were emphasised (Van Den Heuvel, 1997). The implementation of the Social Support Act (Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning, WMO) in 2007 has further stimulated the shift from governmental to greater individual and community responsibility in the organisation of social support, housing and care (Jager-Vreugdenhil, 2012, see also Chapter 3). The Act’s emphasis on individual self-reliance and civil society assumes that people will first address their social network before seeking professional support and care, and that neighbourhoods will act as supportive communities to their older and vulnerable residents (Jager-Vreugdenhil, 2012). Further, this act transferred the responsibility for health and social care services from the national government to regional and local authorities. In addition to being a means to contain costs, an idea behind this decentralisation was that regional and local authorities were better at responding to residents’ needs (Broersma et al., 2013). This latter aspect has also recently been emphasised in the ‘Transition Agenda for Longer Independent Living’ by the Minister of Housing and the Central Government Sector and the State Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (see Blok and Van Rijn, 2014). Local authorities, together with housing corporations and healthcare services, are now responsible for devising ageing in place strategies.

The shift towards ageing in place and care in the community has spatial implications in terms of housing, infrastructure and service demand and delivery (Davies and James, 2011). In the Social Support Act, as well in the Transition Agenda for Longer Independent Living, emphasis is placed on the neighbourhood, as demarcated by administrative boundaries, for implementing ageing in place strategies. In several Dutch munici-
palities, integrated service areas (ISAs) have been developed in which service provision and age-adapted housing are concentrated in a village or neighbourhood (see De Kam et al., 2012). These ISAs are supposed to facilitate independent living and enhance older adults’ quality of life (De Kam et al., 2012). However, as these policy developments are recent, local and regional authorities, housing corporations and healthcare service are still adjusting to their new roles and responsibilities (RLI, 2014). Given that the pathways towards managing ageing in place have yet to be stipulated, it is a timely moment to consider how older adults experience everyday life in their neighbourhood. These ‘realities’ of ageing in place can inform policymakers in giving shape to ageing in place agendas.

1.5 Researching ageing in place
To explore the subjective dimensions of ageing in place, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents and walking interviews in the neighbourhood. The aim of the in-depth interviews was to elicit experiences, feelings and memories of everyday life in the neighbourhood.

![Figure 1](image_url) The city of Groningen: the city centre and the three neighbourhoods in which fieldwork was conducted are indicated (Tamara Kaspers)
The walking interviews were carried out to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of the respondents’ experiences of everyday life in their neighbourhood (e.g. Kusenbach, 2003). Walking is an important mode of mobility for older adults living in urban neighbourhoods (e.g. Banister and Bowling, 2004; Fobker and Grotz, 2006), and so walking interviews are particularly useful for exploring the everyday experiences and use of a place (see Chapter 4 for an elaborated description of this method).

The semi-structured interviews and the walking interviews were conducted with 53 older adults in 2010, 2012 and 2013. In selecting and recruiting participants, the Dutch retirement age of the time (65) was chosen as the threshold as it acts as a societal marker in ‘defining’ older adults and, from this age on, people are generally likely to spend more time in their home and neighbourhood. Data collection took place in three neighbourhoods in Groningen, a city in the northern part of the Netherlands (see Figure 1). The various themes regarding older adults’ engagement with place discussed in this thesis emerged during the course of the data collection through the interplay of the respondents’ stories, existing theory and literature and public debates concerning ageing in place. To explore the discontinuities of ageing in place, interviews were conducted with 13 older adults in the Oosterpark neighbourhood, an area undergoing urban renewal, in 2012 (for a detailed description of the research context see Chapter 2). In developing a geographical account of older adults’ social capital, interviews were conducted in 2013 with 17 older adults in Corpus den Hoorn, a neighbourhood that was originally designed to encourage social interactions among neighbourhood residents (for a detailed description of this research context, see Chapter 3). To gain deeper and more detailed understandings of how the interviewees in the Oosterpark and Corpus den Hoorn districts related to their neighbourhoods, follow-up walking interviews were conducted with twelve of the respondents. In the Selwerd neighbourhood, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted with older adults in 2010. This neighbourhood is known for its rapid residential turnover and studentification. In exploring the daily temporal orderings of ageing in place, Chapter 5 draws on the analysis of the interviews in all three neighbourhoods.

The conclusions drawn in this thesis regarding older adults’ experiences of everyday life should be situated within the context of the research encounter between me, a young female early-career researcher, and the older interviewees. Age is a relational construction that is negotiated in everyday practices and places (Hopkins and Pain, 2007) and, as such, age is produced in the research encounter (Tarrant, 2014). In considering intergenerational interviewing, Grenier (2007, p. 719) noted that “the ways in which people perform age and interact based on age-based assumptions and/or social-cultural norms” impacts on the research process. For a relatively young interviewer, this may concern shying away from questions that are deemed inappropriate for discussing with
older people (e.g. sexuality) and for the older interviewee this can involve adopting the role of a grandparent when engaging with the interviewer (Tarrant, 2014). It is important to be aware of age-based assumptions and roles in order to avoid reproducing ageist stereotypes of older people when interpreting and disseminating the research outcomes. Ageist stereotypes can powerfully affect how older people are treated (directly by other people and indirectly through public policies), how they behave and, consequentially, their health and wellbeing (Levy, 2009). In the conclusions of this thesis (Chapter 6), I reflect further on the meaning of the intergenerational research encounter in relation to the knowledge produced about the subjective dimensions of ageing in place.

1.6 Research aim and thesis outline

The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding of the elements that play a role in the subjective dimensions of ageing in place. In particular, the focus is on the neighbourhood as a place of ageing. This study’s focus on the neighbourhood can be viewed in light of current ageing in place policies and a growing body of research that stresses the importance of the physical and social infrastructure of the neighbourhood for older adults’ quality of life.

This thesis highlights various themes concerning older adults’ engagement with their neighbourhood: the discontinuities of ageing in place in relation to neighbourhood transitions (Chapter 2); the meaning of local social contacts (Chapter 3); everyday practices (Chapters 2 and 4); and the daily temporal orderings of ageing in place (Chapter 5). The individual studies conducted for these chapters are all embedded in the policy context of ageing in place in the Netherlands. In linking this research to this context and to influencing the policy discourse, these studies involve issues and concepts that have meaning beyond the academic world. These include the impact of neighbourhood renewal on older adults’ sense of belonging (Chapter 2), social, physical and temporal obstacles to and opportunities for local social interactions and support (Chapters 3 and 5) and the walkability of the neighbourhood for older residents (Chapter 4).

Chapter 2 challenges the presumption, inherent in ageing in place policies, that growing old in one’s own home and neighbourhood provides a sense of familiarity and predictability. Here, this chapter draws attention to the discontinuities in ageing in place by examining the impacts of neighbourhood transitions on older adults’ sense of belonging. The analysis focuses on how, in everyday life, older adults negotiate belonging to a former working-class neighbourhood in the process of urban renewal. It discusses how a working-class belonging and a sense of continuity through neighbourhood change are practiced in everyday neighbourhood interactions.

In Chapter 3, the concept of social capital is discussed in order to understand the meanings of, opportunities for and obstacles to older adults’ social contacts in their
neighbourhood. Social capital is a popular concept in research and policy, and has been used to stress the value of social contacts for the health and wellbeing of older adults. This chapter examines how social capital comes into being on the neighbourhood scale in the everyday lives of older adults. It discusses the role of the built environment, body capital and time geographies of both older and younger residents in the development of social capital.

The methodology used and knowledge that was produced through carrying out walking interviews are addressed in Chapter 4. In this chapter, the practiced dimension of ageing in place is discussed by viewing the act of walking as a means of place making. It examines how this place making occurs through routes, and how these routes inform on older adults’ various engagements with place.

Chapter 5 builds on the understanding of the daily temporal orderings of ageing in place, a theme that emerged from studying older adults’ social capital in Chapter 3. It discusses how a greater knowledge of these everyday temporalities can enhance understanding of how older adults experience daily life in their neighbourhood. To this end, the rhythmic orderings of older adults’ everyday lives and the ways in which these rhythms affect their sense of time are examined.

Finally, Chapter 6 presents an overview of the main findings from Chapters 2 to 5. This chapter also reflects on issues related to researching ageing in place and suggests directions for future research.

References


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