Aging in place and the places of aging: A longitudinal study

Camilla Lewis*, Tine Buffel

Department of Sociology and Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, UK

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ABSTRACT

Aging in place policies have been adopted internationally as a response to population aging. The approach historically referred to the goal of helping people to remain in their own homes so that they can retain connections with friends and family in their community. However, the places in which people grow old are often hostile and challenging, presenting potential barriers to the policy ideal of aging in place. This may be especially the case in cities characterized by rapid population turnover and redevelopment of buildings through urban regeneration. Yet, to date, there has been limited research focusing on the places of aging, and how these affect the experience of aging in place over time. This paper addresses this gap by presenting four in-depth case-studies from a qualitative longitudinal study of older people living in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of deprivation and rapid population change. The analysis illustrates how aging in place is affected by changing life-course circumstances and the dynamics of these neighborhoods over time. The conclusion suggests that further attention must be given to the changing dynamics of the places where people grow older. It also makes policy suggestions for how aging in place could be supported, taking account of the needs of people as they grow older as well as changes in the communities in which they live. The paper extends theoretical understanding of the interrelationship between aging in place and the places of aging, revealing how these processes change over time.

Introduction: aging in place

‘Aging in place’ is a popular term in social policy, referring to an approach which helps older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. Although often driven by concerns over the cost of residential and nursing homes, aging in place policies are supported by an extensive literature demonstrating older people’s preference to stay in their homes as they age (Means, 2007). This reflects and reinforces a sense of attachment to home and neighborhood, with improved well-being and social connectedness as a result (Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2012).

Over the past decade, there has been growing emphasis on the role of the local environment in promoting aging in place, as reflected in debates around lifetime neighborhoods, liveable communities and age-friendly cities (Buffel, Handler, & Phillipson, 2018; Scharlach & Lehning, 2013; World Health Organization, 2007). Research has increased our understanding about how to create neighborhoods that support the needs of people as they age, both in terms of adapting the physical environment (e.g., infrastructure, transport and housing) as well as social dimensions (e.g., social and civic participation, community care and neighborhood support) (Buffel, Phillipson and Rémillard-Boilard, 2019; Gardner, 2011). While there is growing understanding of how physical and social infrastructure affects wellbeing in later life, there has been limited research into the experiences of people who are aging in place in areas characterized by environmental pressures such as urban regeneration and deprivation (Bailey, Kearns, & Livingston, 2012).

Sociological studies demonstrate how the neighborhoods in which people age may prove to be hostile and challenging environments, influenced, in part, by urban change arising from globalization, urban regeneration and austerity (Buffel et al., 2018). Significant inequalities exist within the older population, most notably between those able to make conscious decisions about where and with whom to live, and those whose lack of material resources restricts decision making (Phillipson, 2007; Scharf, Phillipson, & Smith, 2005). Aging in neighbor- hoods which are perceived to be unsafe, can generate exclusion, detachment and a sense of ‘being out of place’ (Phillips, Walford, & Hockey, 2011; Phillipson, 2007). The psychological experience of inequality has a profound effect on health, referred to as the “social determinants of health.” How much control you have over your life and the opportunities you have for social engagement and participation are crucial for well-being and longevity (Marmot, 2005). There is emerging evidence that urban environments can contribute to older people experiencing exclusion and loneliness (Prattley, Buffel, Marshall, &

* Corresponding author at: Henry Daysh Building, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 7RU, UK.
E-mail address: camilla.lewis@newcastle.ac.uk (C. Lewis).

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Nazroo, 2020), as the social wellbeing of older people is more sensitive to population change (Bullen, 2016). However, as Gardner argues ‘identifying and understanding the important contexts of aging’ (2011: 263) remains a critical oversight in the aging in place literature.

This paper addresses this gap, exploring the relationship between aging in place and the places of aging, for older people living in neighborhoods undergoing urban change. In doing so, the article contributes insights into the fields of geographical (Andrews, 2017; Skinner, Cloutier, & Andrews, 2015) and environmental gerontology (Rowles & Bernard, 2013; Wahl, Iwarsson, & Oswald, 2012), both of which have given an important impetus to what has been termed the ‘spatial turn’ in social gerontology (Cutchin, 2009). A key argument of this paper is that a focus on locality, and the places of aging, provides a constructivist, distinct and essential contribution to the interdisciplinary study of aging, old age and older populations’, advancing understanding of the experiences of aging in place in changing environments around the world (Skinner, Andrews, & Cutchin, 2017: 6). The study takes a novel approach by exploring detailed narratives of older people’s experiences of aging in place over time, using a longitudinal perspective.

Theoretical perspectives on aging and place

The relationship between environmental issues and aging has emerged as an important area of research within gerontology. Three theoretical strands within this literature help to analyze the places of aging and aging in place. First, ecological theories of aging developed by Lawton (1982), highlight the importance of physical contexts (PC) and the home environment in promoting or restricting quality of life and healthy aging. His model suggests that personal behavior and satisfaction are strongly linked to an individual’s ability to face the demands of, and take the opportunities provided by, her/his environment. The PC model, alongside its variants and elaborations (e.g. Wahl et al., 2012) has been especially influential in showing how mismatches between personal needs and environmental options to fulfill these needs can undermine wellbeing in later life.

Second, between the 1980s and 2000s, theoretical approaches focused on experiential dimensions of the interaction between aging and the environment. Rowles (1983) developed the concept of ‘place attachment’, drawing upon phenomenological approaches. His research demonstrates that older people who have resided in the same community for a long period of time maintain three different types of attachment to their environment: physical insiderness, reflecting an intimate familiarity with the physical configuration of the environment; social insiderness, arising from integration within the social fabric of the community; and autobiographical insiderness, reflecting the way in which lifelong accumulation of experiences in a place can provide ‘a sense of identity’ (302). While studies on place attachment made theoretical advances in thinking about the relationship between older people and place, they pay little attention to the changes taking place in the neighborhoods within which people are aging (Burns, Lavoie, & Rose, 2012) or the actual place itself, referred to as “aging in the right place” (Golant, 2015). Developing this work on person-environment exchange further, Chaudhury and Oswald (2019) suggest that a more holistic and dynamic understanding of person-environment exchange can be achieved by examining the agency-believable dynamic and a life-course perspective.

Third, relational approaches challenge prevalent ideas of place as a bounded and static concept, suggesting instead, that place is permeable, fluid, and networked at multiple scales (Andrews, 2017). Since Harper and Laws’ (1995) call for geographers to engage with aging at multiple scales, there has been a rapid expansion in geographical gerontology, developing new knowledge about the spatially uneven and place-embedded implications of population aging (Skinner et al., 2015). As a result, relational approaches have spread throughout the social sciences, drawing on Doreen Massey’s (2005) work which argues that places are made through interactions and are always developing and changing over time. In this view, it is not that people are exposed to place, but rather that one’s history and those of others become ‘bound up in place’ (Degn, 2016:18). The relational making of people and places has been part of several noteworthy conceptualizations on person-environment interaction (Andrews, 2017), emphasizing the ‘interrelatedness of place’ (Skinner et al., 2015).

Following a relational approach, Peace, Holland, and Kellaher (2011) explore how the relationship between environmental context and personal identity is shaped by a range of social, psychological and physical issues. Developing this perspective further, Van Dijk, Cram, Van Exel, and Nieboer (2015) propose that the person-environment fit is not static, given that both communities and older people change. They point out that different neighborhood characteristics interact with each other and highlight the need to consider physical and social neighborhood characteristics simultaneously. In this view, aging in place is a process which ‘recognises that the individual experience of place is layered and that knowledge of personal biography and experience in time and space leads to greater understanding of the complexity of person-environment interaction’ (Peace et al., 2011:754). A relational perspective recognizes that older persons are inextricably embedded in particular kinds of environments, rather than separating individuals from their place-based contexts as objects of study (Hopkins & Pain, 2007).

While relational approaches have advanced understandings of the fluid and relational nature of place, there has been limited attention to how places of aging themselves change over time. To address this gap, the present paper explores both the spatial and temporal dimensions of older people’s attachments to place, with a particular focus on how urban change affecting low-income neighborhoods intersects with people’s changing experiences of aging in place. Drawing on longitudinal data, the analysis examines aging in place in relation to both changing life-course circumstances and the dynamics of the neighborhood over time simultaneously. In doing so, the paper contributes to knowledge by developing understandings of aging in place that focus on the interrelationship with the places of aging.

Methods

This study involved a secondary analysis of qualitative longitudinal data, using a case-study approach. Longitudinal qualitative data is well-suited for this study given the deliberate way in which temporality is central to the research process, thus making change or continuity through time a core feature of analytic attention (Thomson & Holland, 2003). By exploring longitudinal interviews, it is possible to discern lived experiences of aging in place against the backdrop of changing neighborhood environments and to explore how, why, and under what circumstances, changes in the experience of place occur (Neale, 2013). A case-study approach was chosen because it allows for a detailed analysis of the ‘holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events’, such as neighborhood change (Yin, 1989: 14). This involves looking at discrete parts, cases or contexts within the dataset and documenting something about those parts specifically (Mason, 2002).

This approach enabled us to explore a complex set of experiences in detail and to recount the role of life events and neighborhood change over time (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991) as well as the impact of persistent qualities of neighborhoods (Lekkas, Paquet, Howard, & Daniel, 2017).

Secondary data were derived from a panel study which represented one strand of a large-scale project called ‘Step Change: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study on Travel, Transport and Mobility’ (Miles et al., 2018).

The study explored how people made use of transport, how this related to their circumstances and community relationships, and how external factors and events influenced mobility and travel patterns over a period of four years (2012–2015). The data offers a unique vantage point to explore the process of aging in place over time, given the
inclusion of questions about place, neighborhood attachment, and community change in the semi-structured interviews. The secondary study presented here, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, UK, was based on a sample of 24 participants aged 50 and over living across two neighborhoods of Greater Manchester, all of whom were interviewed three times over the course of the study. The interviews lasted between sixty to ninety minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim as part of the primary study.

Drawing on analyses of those 24 participants aged 50 and over, four cases were selected purposefully to reflect diversity in aging trajectories, and to include older people experiencing different forms of place attachment over time. The selected cases shared similar demographic characteristics; all were White working-class, in their mid-fifties to seventies and had lived in lower-income neighborhoods of north Manchester (Ancoats and Crumpsall) for the majority of their lives. All four participants wanted to stay living in their current home and neighborhood in the future (i.e. ‘age in place’), but the analysis demonstrated how their experiences of place were different, due to changing life-course circumstances and neighborhood dynamics, over time.

The data analysis consisted of four steps. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading the three transcripts of each of the 24 participants. Second, all interviewees were coded and analyzed using Nvivo, a computer software program designed to facilitate content and thematic analysis. A ‘trajectory analysis’ approach was used in order to preserve the ‘chronological flow’ and understand individual’s experiences of place over time (Grootoehoe & Lipstein, 2016). Twenty codes were identified (including place attachment, family relationships, neighborly relations). In order to ensure the analysis was conducted in a robust manner, the coding frames and strategies were subject to systematic review by the research team and refined through a process of consensus. Third, and following the selection of the four case-studies presented in this paper, the analysis focused on how the themes were interrelated for each of the participants cross-sectionally. The next step involved focusing on the longitudinal process or people's changing experiences over time. Finally, the four cases were analyzed in relation to one another in order to identify common themes across the data.

The study locations: Ancoats and Crumpsall

The two study areas, Ancoats and Crumpsall, are both located in north Manchester, a large and heterogeneous area of approximately 130,500 residents in the north of England. Households in north Manchester wards have lower incomes and higher unemployment rates than the city average. Older residents suffer from long term limiting illnesses at an earlier age than national averages, and tend to experience high levels of social exclusion as a result of poverty and neighborhood deprivation (Bullen, 2016).

Ancoats is a neighborhood with a population of 16,000 Office for National Statistics (2016), located at the northern edge of Manchester city center. During the Industrial Revolution, the area was the heart of intense urban growth, a space of industrial production. Since the 1970s, the city suffered from deindustrialization. Ancoats has undergone rapid, extensive regeneration which has led to a socio-economically mixed population and a variety of housing types. The area includes a former council estate, mills and warehouses converted into flats and new developments for ‘young professionals’, houseboat dwellers and new styles of social housing. The council has also enhanced the former industrial landscape through redeveloping the canals and former mill buildings. A relatively low percentage of residents were home owners (23% compared to 38% in Manchester and 70% in England). Nearly a third (32%) social rented1 (31% Manchester) and 44% private rented2

Barbara: 'I feel more at home here than I would anywhere else'

Barbara (aged 76–79 during the study) was born in north Manchester and had resided in Ancoats for over 50 years. She had lived alone in the same public housing property for the past 26 years which was rented from the local authority through a social housing provider. Growing up, her family struggled for money as she was one of eight children. After leaving school early and working in a factory, Barbara married, aged 19, and lived close to an extended network of family who helped her to look after her five young children. She had various jobs throughout her life, including working in factories and catering, but had to retire early, due to health problems, including a slipped disc in her back. Recounting her life history, Barbara mentioned a number of traumatic events (including the death of one of her children, divorcing her husband and suffering from ill health including anxiety). However, she stressed a continuous sense of place attachment and emphasized the enduring importance of her social network. Barbara's interviews focused mainly on her extended family members who lived in neighboring areas of Manchester, who she saw regularly. She explained: “You know people say, 'I feel surrounded by love,' well that's how I feel with my family because I can turn to any one of them, you know.” Barbara had an intimate knowledge of Ancoats and a strong sense of belonging. She described: “I feel more at home here than I would anywhere else I think. It takes a long time to become acclimatised.”

For Barbara, attachment to place strengthened over time. Barbara felt ‘at home’ because she had good neighbors, who often got in touch to ask if she needed anything, and because people in the wider neighborhood recognized her. In explaining why she felt she belonged, she illustrated a strong sense of ‘social insidiness’ (Bowles, 1983). She described: 'I've been in the area so long, I'm quite well known. Even the kids say, 'Hello Mrs Smith, are you all right Mrs Smith, do you want me

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1 Socially rented housing is provided by housing associations (not-for-profit organizations that own, let, and manage rented housing) or a local council. It is (30% Manchester). In 2007, 10% (compared to 33% in Manchester) of the population of Ancoats were from a non-White ethnic group, and 74.2% of people living in Ancoats were born in England, which is a higher percentage than other boroughs in Greater Manchester (Manchester Locality Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, 2010).

Crumpsall lies 3 miles (5 km) north of Manchester city center and has a population of 15,959 Office for National Statistics (2016). In the nineteenth century, Crumpsall was a suburb where merchants and professionals lived (Manchester City Council, 2008) but workshops and industry changed the area forever. In the twentieth century demolition, deindustrialization and new development brought about permanent change. The area is characterized by inter-related economic, social and physical issues. Over a quarter of the population in Crumpsall is classified as income deprived, with almost 40% of the neighborhood's older people experiencing deprivation related to income (Bullen, 2016). Crumpsall has a higher percentage of people owning their home (47%) compared to the city as a whole (38%), but the quality of housing is often poor (21% is social rented and 31% private rented). Crumpsall is more ethnically diverse and has a higher proportion of non-White residents (26.8%) compared to Ancoats (10%) and the city as a whole (23%). The majority of older ethnic minority residents have lived in the UK since arriving as post-war immigrants. In Crumpsall, there is a large Pakistani ethnic population, with the remainder mostly of Indian and Black African origin (Manchester Locality Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, 2010). The four case-studies include a woman and a man who lived in Ancoats (Barbara and Collin) and two women in Crumpsall (Jean and Diane).

2 Private rented housing is property owned by a landlord which is leased to a tenant.
to carry your bag?’” Barbara's comments show how places are implicated in networks of relationships between people and activities through time (Bennett, 2015).

Barbara described how the area had changed dramatically over the last fifty years, due to multiple waves of regeneration, with existing houses being demolished and new developments built. She had mixed feelings about these changes. On the positive side, Barbara described how Ancoats was a ‘growth’ area which had become more inhabited and livelier. She liked the appearance of the regenerated public spaces, such as the canals where people were living on barges, and commented on the cleanliness of the area. Barbara also mentioned that the social housing provider responded quickly if there were any problems, and although she did not attend resident meetings, she felt she could pass on messages to councillors if she had any concerns. On the negative side, she commented that the cuts to council spending had resulted in the local library being closed down. She also felt that the pace of change in some areas was too slow, commenting on how some houses stood empty for over twenty years. Barbara was also concerned that in the future there would be less affordable housing in Ancoats due to the rise in private developments.

While Barbara mentioned the physical changes in the neighborhood, she retained a deep sense of optimism about Ancoats and desire to age in place. She was involved with a number of groups for older people and had played an active part in her church community for over 50 years. Barbara felt that there were many services and groups that catered to older people in the neighborhood. She remarked how her social network was much more extensive compared to her mother's and grandmother's, who did not attend any groups and spent all their time in the local community, never travelling further than the two or three streets where their extended family network lived. In contrast, Barbara regularly went on holidays abroad with her sister and friends she had met at the various clubs.

Compared to her earlier life, when she had issues with anxiety and other health problems, she explained how she felt ‘better’ and more confident in later life. One critique of aging in place policies is that they reinforce the notion of ‘old age’ as an inevitable process of decline that is distinct from the rest of the life course (Park & Ziegler, 2016). In contrast, Barbara's case demonstrates how in older age she felt more independent, and used public transport often as her extended family around Manchester. Barbara lived in a community which had drastically changed, but across the three-year period of the study, she stressed how the extended family and neighbors had remained the same. In the second and third interviews, Barbara was concerned about her worsening mobility. She was fearful about becoming housebound and a burden to her children, yet determined to stay active and involved in the community. Despite the dramatic changes to the physical environment, her sense of place therefore remained strong. She wanted to age in place because of her strong family network and active social life. In sum, Barbara's case reveals how a strong sense of place attachment may develop over time, despite dramatic changes to the local environment and challenging life events.

Colin: ‘My tribe is Ancoats’

Colin (aged 56–59 during the study) was born in north Manchester. A lifelong resident of Ancoats, he currently lived alone in public housing run by a local authority social housing provider for five years. As a child he moved in and out of care homes as his father had alcohol problems and was violent to his mother. These events had a lifelong impact on Colin, resulting in mental health issues and tensions between his seven siblings. In his twenties, Colin became a single father and brought up his three children in various terraced houses in Ancoats. He explained how throughout much of his life he had suffered from financial insecurity. Colin had a succession of jobs including working as a bouncer at a nightclub, collecting scrap metal, running a café and being a taxi driver, but had to give up work in his early fifties due to ill health including respiratory disease. Colin described himself as ‘a working-class Mancunian’ (a resident of Manchester) and felt an enduring connection to the history of the area because of his family ties. One of his motivations for being part of the study was to share his family stories about Ancoats. When his mother had died, he felt saddened that all her stories were lost, and wanted them to be on record. He explained: ‘my tribe is Ancoats; it’s Manchester’ revealing a sense of ‘born and bred’ belonging and attachment to place (Edwards, 2000). However, his place attachment was complex and conflicted: although he wanted to age in place, he felt deeply concerned about changes affecting the local area. Colin's sense of connection to Ancoats simultaneously grew stronger over time, and at the same time, had become contested.

Colin lived in sheltered housing, specifically designed for older people to allow them to live independently. All properties have their own front door, kitchen and bathroom, so residents can continue to live independently but also have an on-site warden and 24 h emergency alarm system. Living there provided Colin opportunities to socialize including shared meals, second hand clothes sales and gardening as well as more informal opportunities to socialize in the laundry or community room. Importantly, he stressed that the neighbors would also leave him alone and insisted that he enjoyed ‘his own company’. He felt that the flats were ‘good quality’ and was grateful for the onsite wardens. Explaining that he could phone for help if he needed anything, he said: ‘I just couldn’t think of a better place to live’. Colin described how there was a ‘community within itself’. But while he felt a strong sense of connection to his immediate surroundings, he was deeply concerned about changes taking place across Ancoats. The places which were once familiar were fast disappearing: local shops and pubs were closing down. ‘Ancoats has been ethnically cleansed’, he said, with many houses being demolished and new residents moving in. As a result, he no longer recognized the neighborhood where he had lived for the majority of his life.

Colin's narrative shows how some older people living amidst growing affluence experience the reshaping of place as largely beyond their control (Buffel & Phillipson, 2019; Burns et al., 2012). Asked about whether he felt a sense of attachment, he answered:

Well I would do if there was anything to feel attached to but they've ethnically cleansed us love, they really have, yeah, ethnically cleansed us. All these apartments, they don't call them flats now they say apartment [because] it's ten grand dearer [more expensive]. Yeah they must have had great plans, [...] but there was nothing wrong with them houses which has helped the pubs to shut down; the shops are shut down [...] Madness.

Throughout all three interviews, Colin commented that multiculturalism was not working, emphasizing that Ancoats had become ethnically diverse to the detriment of ‘local people’. This subjective experience, however, does not necessarily reflect the reality of the neighborhood changes, especially in regards to the proportion of the visible minority population (less than 10% were from a non-White ethnic group at the time of the interview). This disparity between the perceptive and actual change in population requires us to ask why Colin considered new residents threatening. Colin's narrative is rather complicated in relation to the subject of racism. When he was younger he attended anti-Nazi protests and fought intolerance within his family, challenging his father's treatment of his mixed-race children. However, a wider societal shift had changed his views, he said, because White

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4 Sheltered housing is accommodation specifically designed for older people to allow them to live independently. It usually consists of self-contained flats with communal facilities.

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A terrace house is one of a row of similar houses joined together by their side walls.
working class people have become politically disengaged, ignored and side-lined in wider society: ‘The resentment that’s out there is unbelievable. Unbelievable’, he concluded. In this context, Evans (2012) suggests that assertions of ‘born and bred’ belonging have taken on a renewed meaning among some White working class people, as large-scale immigration has led to long-standing residents feeling under threat from outsiders, with a strong sense of protectionism as a result. Discrimination against, and suspicion of, outsiders can therefore occur alongside a strong sense of ‘territorial belonging’ or ‘place-ism’ (Evans, 2012). Colin’s analysis reveals that it is vital to explore the changing relationship between personal biography and community, over time.

Over the three-year duration of the study, Colin’s mental and physical health deteriorated rapidly. He described having difficulty breathing, walking for short distances and carrying his shopping up three stairs to his flat. He explained how he had been attacked walking home in Ancots by a drug addict, which combined with his ailing physical health made him feel ‘vulnerable’. These accounts contrasted sharply with Colin’s description of his younger life when he was physically fit and strong. He made boastful claims about how he made a living from stealing flagstones and suggested that bringing up his children prevented him from becoming involved in ‘shadier scams’ and criminal behavior. These comments demonstrate how participant’s pasts shape their present, particularly in terms of the way in which they make sense of their life-history (Andrews, 2017). In the third interview, Colin’s health had deteriorated further, and he explained how he lived ‘vicariously through this children’. Even though he did not see them very often, hearing news of their success gave him a ‘buzz’.

Alongside his declining health, Colin’s social network had also diminished over the three-year period of the study. He often felt lonely, and missed having a partner, close friends and regular contact with his children and grandchildren. His family lived within a mile, but he did not see them as much as he would like. In the final interview, Colin barely left the house. He enjoyed reading at home but felt sad that he did ‘nothing’ with his time, joking that he would feel depressed when the interviewer left. While Barbara emphasized how her social ties had become more extensive in later life, Colin’s network had narrowed. Despite a sense of place attachment developed over the life course and a strong desire to age in place, Colin felt alienated from Ancots, which he attributed to processes associated with gentrification and population turnover. These findings align with previous studies of neighborhoods undergoing urban change, where older people experience feelings of strangeness, insecurity and social exclusion (Buffel & Phillipson, 2019; Burns et al., 2012). Colin’s case provides insights into how these feelings may be exacerbated when people’s health worsens and personal resources weaken in later life. The other two cases, Jean and Diane, lived in the neighboring area of Crumpsall.

Jean: ‘the neighborhood has changed’

Jean (aged 69–72 during the study) lived in Crumpsall with her husband in the same house for 46 years and raised two children there. The couple bought the house because they ‘liked the district’ and thought it was convenient, close to local shops and amenities. Jean was born in south Manchester and worked as an administrator before meeting her husband and having children. At the time of the first interview, she worked part time in a hospital kitchen, but had retired when she was re-interviewed a year later. Jean held a strong sense of belonging but her attachment centered on the home rather than the neighborhood. She explained:

[…] with living in the same house it's made a nice environment for us. It's our little cocoon, if you understand what I mean, we've made a home here and we're happy to stay here. I've no intentions of moving unless I have to.

While holding a strong sense of connection to her home, like Colin, Jean lamented what she perceived as the loss of community. Years ago, she recalled how there were street parties for the Coronation or Jubilee, which everyone participated in, but Jean said ‘you don’t hear of that anymore now, no, no, unfortunately. It’s just the way things have changed over the years.’ Jean’s case shows how the home is not just a physical setting of residence but also enables the older person to connect to memories of their life history and maintain a continuous sense of identity (Iecovich, 2014).

Jean expressed a strong sense of belonging and a desire to age in place, but at the same time, feelings of dislocation from the wider community. She felt that Crumpsall was changing rapidly, becoming more ethnically diverse and less and less familiar. The neighborhood had once been a safe and convivial place but when asked about whether there was a sense of community, Jean answered: ‘not as it used to be, no.’ When probed further, she said:

Well it's completely changed since we first moved here. When we first moved into this area, we were the younger, how can I put it, we had a lot of elderly people living here round us and we were the youngsters. Now we're the elder ones and we've got youngsters moving in of different ethnic background obviously. Yeah, and it's [sighs] how can I put it? To me it's not as safe as it used to be. I don't know why, I mean there's good and bad in every, erm, how can I put it? Don't matter what colour or creed you are, you know, there's always good and bad in it, but yeah, it's okay. Well we stay here till we die. We like the area and we've had neighbors next to us for 40 odd years, so you get used to your own little niche and it's convenient for us.

A conflicted sense of place attachment is evident in this excerpt, relating to different types of temporal experiences. First, Jean expresses a strong sense of connection to her immediate neighbors, developed over the 40 years of living in the area, but also a sense of isolation from the wider community due to population change and loss of familiarity. This finding supports other research which shows that in some neighborhoods, population turnover can challenge older residents’ sense of ‘home’, even when they have lived in the neighborhoods for a long period of time (Buffel, Phillipson, & Scharf, 2013; Van Dijk et al., 2015). Second, Jean stressed a sense of discontinuity between generations. When she moved into her house, she perceived the community as made up of older people, whereas in the present, she felt out of place and time, due to the number of younger residents. She also suggested that new residents were different to her because they were from ethnic minority backgrounds. In this context, Jean described how the neighborhood felt less safe compared to when her children were growing up. Even though Jean described her home as a ‘cocoon’, her sense of place attachment was threatened due to her feeling of difference from the neighbors and lack of ‘social insideness’ (Rowles, 1983).

In addition to her comments about the social aspects, Jean also lamented the changing physical environment, with the loss of local shops and other facilities within walking distance seen as a particular issue:

Cheetham Hill is our local, it’s called Cheetham Village. It’s our local area, it’s about twenty minutes walk from our house to there which we do about once a week. It’s got the banks, it’s got [a supermarket], it’s got [a pharmacy] on it, it’s got [frozen food shop], cash shops, money lending places. That used to be, when we first moved here, the place to visit, it was all the rage. It was lovely shops, toy shops, children’s shops, it’s when you could rent a TV before, which you can’t, you don’t see much of that now. But yeah, it was a proper little busy area. Now it’s fast food of various kinds, erm, the odd shop, the odd bank and that’s it.

In the second and third interviews Jean’s sense of exclusion from the neighborhood had increased as a result of the social and physical changes affecting her immediate surroundings. Whilst she had made considerable investments in her home and locality, Jean felt she had limited control over the surrounding environment (see also Thomése, Buffel, & Phillipson, 2018).
Living in a familiar environment has been identified as a crucial factor in the desire to remain at home for older people. The argument holds that aging in place as an adaptive strategy is employed to support ‘inner psychological continuity’ through daily routines in the surrounding neighborhood (Stones & Gallifer, 2016). However, Jean’s narrative reveals how community can be associated with a sense of continuity and discontinuity, simultaneously. Her everyday habits and sense of home retained their significance, strengthening her sense of belonging. But at the same time, demographic change (resulting in more young people and a different ethnic make-up of the area) challenged her sense of familiarity and place attachment. Jean held a strong sense of attachment to her home, but had few social ties within the community. She explained how she was not involved in any local groups, or committees, preferring instead to ‘get on with my own little niche in life’. Jean described how there were other people in Crumpall who she referred to as ‘neighbourhood people’ who enjoyed being involved and were ‘happy doing it’. She planned to stay living in Crumpall in the future, remarking that when her husband died she could move to live with one of her children but would probably stay. If she were to move away, Jean said that she would miss the ‘hustle and bustle of Manchester and I think if I moved to a quieter area I would miss that.’ In sum, Jean’s case showed how her desire to age in place was strong due to her connection to her home, but her place attachment was tentative because of her concerns about wider population changes.

Diane: ‘I’ve always said I’ll never, ever move out of my house’

Diane (aged 67–71 during the study) lived in Crumpall in a rented, social housing property for 35 years. She had various jobs throughout her life, waitressing in a hotel, working in a biscuit factory and as a caterer in a hospital. Diane moved to Manchester from the south of England as a child, got married in her twenties and had three children. She later divorced when her children were grown up. At the time of the first interview, Diane was living with a partner who she had met 28 years before. She had taken early retirement 15 years before after being made redundant from the hospital where she worked. Compared to the other three cases, Diane was heavily involved in her local community and had intimate knowledge of her neighbors. She spent a great deal of time volunteering, as a tree warden, in a multicultural group and a tenants association. Asked about whether she felt that she belonged, she answered, ‘Yes, Yes. Full stop. I didn’t hesitate then, did I?’ Diane’s sense of community was unambiguous and she wanted to age in place, explaining:

I’ve got the hospital up the road, I’ve got a library. I do drive, right? I’ve got shops nearby. I can use a computer, so when I get old I can order things online and get them delivered. I’ve known nearly every person on the estate, so [...laughs] the majority know me as well. So the point is yes, I do belong. I do belong. I feel as if I belong. I’ve always said I’ll never, ever move out of my house. Honest.

During the time she had lived in Crumpall, Diane noted a number of changes, including the demolition and rebuilding of housing, local shops closing down and new residents moving to the area. Compared to Jean, who viewed these changes as threatening, Diane saw them as inevitable:

We used to have a pub there and a pub there, they’re gone, but the old post office, it’s not a post office anymore but he’s got a license, an alcoholic license, but the point is people won’t buy off him when they can get it for two pounds cheaper at [large supermarket]… So it’s no good saying, put a shop down here, you know, they hardly go up there and buy a loaf of bread from the old post office [...]. He’s making a scratching for a living.

Diane held a strong sense of civic responsibility and a positive attitude that she could play a role in bringing about change in the community. For example, she had been involved in activities to improve the physical environment, such as litter picking and planting trees and flowers. She also explained how she had complained to the council about the drains being faulty, which created a large puddle at the end of the road, suggesting she knew how to access help. Compared to Jean and Colin, who felt disempowered, Diane was confident that she could play a role in changing the neighborhood, through her close relationships with the social housing association. She urged her neighbors to become involved and to change things in the community where they lived.

Two years later, in the second interview, Diane’s life was very different. She had reduced the number of time she spent volunteering because she had split up from her previous partner and re-married. Her new husband had moved into her home, which they then bought together under Right to Buy, a government scheme designed to help tenants in council housing buy their homes at a discounted price. Diane explained how she had given up most of her voluntary roles, so she could enjoy her newly married life, commenting: ‘The world’s our oyster, we can do what we want, when we want.’ In the third interview, twelve months later, when Diane was interviewed again, she spent even less time volunteering, but continued to feel a strong attachment to her community, and enjoyed seeing the impact of the work she had been carrying out, such as the installation of bird boxes and flowers being planted in the passageway next to her house. In contrast to Jean, who felt deeply concerned about the impact of new people moving into the neighborhood, Diane was much more optimistic. She described how there was a ‘mixture’ of people on the estate and how she had ‘respect’ for everyone living there, explaining:

The neighbors all speak to us don’t they, all the different religions and everything, no, no problem there, I don’t feel threatened because they are living next door or something, it doesn’t bother us.

Bailey et al. (2012) describe how higher levels of population turnover are often seen as eroding attachments on the basis that they reduce the opportunities for people to form social connections. However, this case shows that, for some participants, living in areas with new residents did not threaten their sense of community. Diane said she would never move out of her house and wanted to age in place, showing her sense of community attachment remained strong whilst its significance had changed. Rather than volunteering in the local area, she spent more time going on holidays with her husband. Nonetheless, Diane held a long-lasting sense of connection to the physical environment and community.

Discussion

In existing research on aging in place, the changing dynamics of the places of aging have received little systematic attention (Gardner, 2011). To address this gap, this paper has provided a longitudinal analysis based on four case-studies to demonstrate how aging in place is connected to both life-course circumstances and the changing dynamics of the neighborhood over time. The analysis suggests that Barbara and Colin both held a strong sense of belonging to Ancoats, but stark differences in how place attachment was experienced. Despite major transformations of the physical environment, Barbara’s attachment to Ancoats strengthened, because of her involvement with a local network of family and friends as well as participation in various groups. In contrast, for Colin, Ancoats had become unfamiliar and threatening. He lamented the loss of places where he had once socialized, such as the local pub, and was anxious about the future, due to his diminishing social networks and worsening health. These findings demonstrate that aging in place is not a continuous, uniform experience but varies in its ‘do-ability’ depending upon evolving life-course needs (Hillcoat-Nallesamby & Ogg, 2014: 1787) and importantly, people’s relationships to the changing physical and social environment. The analysis reveals how spatial inequalities may enhance the vulnerability of older populations and how the qualities of older persons and the places they live
may support resilience and keep decline at bay (Skinner et al., 2015).

Aging in place policies assume that the home and surrounding neighborhood will remain familiar and predictable for older people. However, this longitudinal analysis has revealed how place attachment changes over time and can be highly unpredictable. One's history and those of others become 'bound up in place' (Degnen, 2016;18) and this analysis shows how attachment fluctuates over the life-course, and over relatively short periods of time, as illustrated over the four years in which the longitudinal interviews were conducted. Attachments to place strengthen or recede, depending on personal circumstances and broader community change. People and places do not develop independently of each other but are 'co-constituted' (Lager, Van Hoven, & Huigen, 2013). Understanding the temporal ebb and flow of neighborhood and 'identifying if and how this evolution gets under the skin' is integral to strengthening understandings of aging in place (Skinner et al., 2015: 240). Barbara and Diane did not perceive community change to be threatening, because they retained strong networks in their communities, through various groups and family networks. In contrast, Colin and Jean felt out of place due to diminishing social ties and worsening health. As Degnen (2017: 95) describes, 'Place can be used to build a sense of identity and belonging, but can also be alienating and used to exclude; place is mobilized to express power relations but is also imbued with sociality and social relations'.

Taking a relational approach, the analysis reveals how the life histories of older people may make them more or less sensitive to their current environmental features, or have increased or decreased abilities to deal with current stresses (Golant, 2003). This analysis extends that argument, demonstrating how the interrelationship between the places of aging and aging in place change over time. For example, during the four-year period of the study, Jean became more isolated and less connected to her neighborhood but still wished to age in place. In contrast, Diane was an active member of the community, supported by an extended network of family and friends. However, during the duration of the project, she remarried and her voluntary roles and local neighborhood became less significant. This analysis underscores that the person-environment fit is not static, given that both communities and older people change (Van Dijk et al., 2015). Physical environments change over short to medium periods of time and social roles can simultaneously reshape the nature of agency and belonging (Chaudhury & Oswald, 2019). Therefore, places cannot be regarded merely as coordinates, locations or study sites; rather, people's lives unfold in places that are complex social and cultural 'fields of action' that are occupied, acted and 'deeply felt' (Andrews, Evans, & Wiles, 2013:1344). Therefore, conceptual attention must be given to both aging in place and the place of aging and their interrelationship.

From a methodological viewpoint, longitudinal research enables us to explore older people's inter-relationships with place as heterogeneous and dynamic, transpiring in evolving sociocultural and socio-historic circumstances (Lekkas et al., 2017). Also, a narrative perspective provides useful tools for understanding the subjective constructions of particular person-environment exchanges through autobiographical accounts of person-environment interaction over time (Chaudhury & Oswald, 2019). However, while this study identifies important dimensions of the experiences of place among older people in low-income neighborhoods undergoing urban change, the research also has some limitations. First, the research was restricted to Manchester, UK, and further studies are required in contrasting areas in respect of demographic, economic and social characteristics. Second, the participants were all White working-class. Future studies should incorporate the views of ethnic minority groups to examine the experiences of marginalized populations. A third challenge is that the interviews were conducted for a different study and therefore the themes on aging and place attachment are uneven in the interviews. Fourth, the interviews were conducted over a four-year period which is not a very long duration for a longitudinal study. Notwithstanding these limitations, a key contribution of this research comes from reanalyzing existing qualitative longitudinal data in order to produce novel ways of understanding the interrelationship between aging in place and the places of aging, and how these processes change over time.

Conclusion

With policy, theory and empirical evidence pointing in apparently similar directions, it has become difficult to challenge the position that aging in place in one's home could be anything but a desirable outcome (Hillcutt-Nalletamby & Ogg, 2014:1775). However, limited research has examined both the positive and negative impacts of aging in place or focused on its meaning for older people. This paper fills an important gap by exploring detailed narratives of older people's experiences of aging in place over time, using a longitudinal perspective. The case studies complicate the logic underpinning aging in place policies, which presupposes that sense of attachment to community necessarily strengthens over time or that a private home is the only place one can 'age in place.' Instead, the discussion illustrates the interrelationship between the places of aging and aging in place, which fluctuates over time, according to changing personal circumstances and broader environmental pressures.

From a policy perspective, the development of 'age-friendly' communities coincides with new pressures affecting community life, notably those associated with the impacts of globalization and widening inequalities within and between cities (Thomése et al., 2018). Policies regarding aging in place would benefit from deeper understandings of the changing neighborhoods in which people live. Given the rapid changes in urban areas, new approaches to examining older people's relationship to place are urgently required (Phillipson, 2007). Detailed investigations of aging in place in situ provide more detailed accounts of the lived experience of older adults in ways that 'generic treatment' of neighborhood may not (Kelly-Moore, Thorpe, Whitfield, & Baker, 2012). Therefore, by examining how structural and socio-political determinants shape residential contexts over time, aging in place interventions may be enriched (Lekkas et al. 2017). Rather than assuming that attachment to place will strengthen over time, further attention is required to explore the dynamic and changing constitution of the places of aging, and how these conditions affect aging in place. Understanding the places of aging as well as older people's changing place attachment over time are critical to debates about aging in place.

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