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Chapter 14
Introduction: Framing Community and Spatial Exclusion

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14.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the community and spatial aspects of social exclusion. For this introduction, we define the community aspect of exclusion as the unintended reduction of participation in local life and spatial aspects of exclusion as the unintended reduction of mobility outside and inside of a person's home. Fighting against social exclusion of older adults is a priority due to the negative effects of exclusion on older adults' quality of life as well as on the equity and cohesion of an ageing society as a whole (adapted from Levitas et al. 2007 in Walsh et al. 2017, p. 83). Place, as a socio-spatial phenomenon, can shape older adults' lives and their experiences of social exclusion. It encompasses dimensions such as social and relational aspects of place, amenities and built environment, place-based policy and experiential belonging. The purpose of this chapter is to briefly introduce some allied concepts related to older people's relationship with their place and environment, and broadly illustrate the relevance of this relationship to old-age social exclusion. The chapter closes with a short introduction to each contribution within this section.

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14.2 To Age in a "Good Place"

The majority of older adults wish to age-in-place and avoid having to move to other neighborhoods or particularly to care institutions (Rioux 2005). Defined as the ability of older people to live in their own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, ageing-in-place has become a priority policy agenda for many countries (WHO 2015). However, when considering the challenges of community and spatial exclusion, it may be more relevant to focus on ageing in a "good place".

The risk of social exclusion in older-age is increased due to physical, psychological, cognitive and social changes that might threaten an older person's capacity to adapt to their environment. As highlighted by the ecological theory of ageing (Lawton 1983), autonomy and well-being are linked to a good person-environment fit or, in other words, when older adults' competencies correspond with the demands of their environment. Consequently, experiences in later life can be dependent upon the quality of an older person's immediate social and physical surrounding. When environmental demands overwhelm an individual's biopsychosocial resources, a person's capacity to age-in-place is reduced (Greenfield 2012). Despite this, the role of the environment, as well as the importance of processes of belonging to place, remains relatively overlooked in gerontological research (Wahl et al. 2012).

14.3 Spatial Aspects of Social Engagement During Ageing

The idea of contributing to society is emphasised by the concept of *active ageing*, whereby older people can remain active contributors to their families, peers, communities and nations. Active ageing is the "process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age" (WHO 2002, p. 12). Adapted physical environments and safe housing are two main aspects to promote active ageing and reduce the risk of social isolation.

To better illustrate the intersection of multilevel spatial environments and the needs of older adults with respect to engagement and inclusion, we propose the model of life-space locations (Webber et al. 2010) which allows for a better understanding of the different scales of life-space that constitute the physical environment. Vidovićová et al. (2013) proposed a modification to this original model to incorporate seven (plus one) life-space locations of older adults. It is presented as a system of overlapping circles from the smallest, most immediate of environments, such as a room, through a graduated environmental scale of the home, the outdoors, the neighborhood, the surrounding areas and the world, all wrapped in an online world (Vidovićová and Tournier 2020). This model can serve as an inventory of different levels of policies which are needed to address major challenges with respect to person-environment interactions, and the sort of exclusions that may occur within or as a result of those interactions (Fig. 14.1).

Fig. 14.1 Adapted framework model of life-space locations

The level of the "world" may serve, for example, as a reminder that the environmental issues of sustainable development and the related challenge of climate change need global action, while their impact is very local and is differentiated by age (Pillemer et al. 2011; Pope et al. 2016). The surrounding areas and neighbourhood levels raise questions about supported mobility, travel and accessible transport (*e.g.* frequency, timing of connections and barrier-free vehicles), as well as social cohesion and connectivity (*e.g.* safety and the absence of crime; dense social networks). Policy makers also face a challenge in fostering processes that enhance a sense of belonging to place through community-building policies (Barrett and McGoldrick 2013; Buffel et al. 2014).

The outdoors' level encompasses the need for policies to address walkability, greenery, aesthetics and surveillance zones (*e.g.* respect for pleasant views from houses when revitalising or building new neighbourhoods), comfortable benches, and accessible and centrally located public toilets (Tournier et al. 2016).

Additionally, there are policies which need to have a more direct effect on the homes of older people, combating housing related risks of exclusion in older-age by addressing challenges in home maintenance, heating/cooling costs, affordability, and sustainability (Kneale 2016; Martin-Matthews and Cloutier 2017). The room level indicates the importance of this environment in relation to addressing exclusion around care provision, in the case of increased frailty, or where, for example, injuries and falls may be prevented.

The overarching "online world" expresses the (not so) new impact of technologies and communication devices in altering our living spaces and how we use them. Although not physical in the original meaning of the term, it represents a place,

derived from enabled connections across spatial environments, where both social relations are established and maintained and care provided (Blackman et al. 2007).

The centric circles and their variant sizes are especially relevant for older adults because everyday routines tend to become more and more centered around their immediate locale, leading to a reduction of their life-space mobility, with their radius of action more centered around their home (Rantakokko et al. 2015). This also affects their sense of belonging, which according to Wahl et al. (2012) refers to environment-related experiences linked to subjective evaluations and interpretations of place (*e.g.* place attachment). The potential for a sense of belonging to increase with age (due to the accumulation of ties and long-term tenure within environments), together with a physical "shrinking" of the action radius, may explain why old, and particularly very old, adults are hesitant to undertake repeated relocations, show high stability and regularity in their out-of-home-related activities (*e.g.* preferred places and travel patterns), and value their familiar home and neighborhood environment, even if they present inherent risks (Wahl et al., 2012, p. 309).

14.4 Outline of this Section

The three chapters in this section, through theories and case studies, examine various aspects of how community and space impacts older adults' lives within their environments and influences their overall experiences of exclusion in later life.

Drilling et al. (Chap. 15) present a model of "Age, Space and Exclusion - ASE-Triangle" as a multifaceted concept for the analysis of situations of social exclusion and their causes. In this model, the authors rely on Lefebvre's (1991) work according to whom space is designed as a product of dynamic relations between materialisations (spatial practice/perceived space), conceptions (representations of space/conceived space) and experiences (representational spaces/lived space). Drilling et al. present two case studies, from Ireland and Cyprus, to illustrate how their ASE-triangle is supported by empirical work and can help explain real-world interactions between age, space and exclusion. As a result, authors stress the need to include all stakeholders in the planning process, including older adults, to ensure that spatial and local civic exclusion does not occur.

The second chapter presented by Urbaniak et al. (Chap. 16) relies on empirical cases from data collected in Poland, Germany and Ireland to illustrate how place, social exclusion and life transitions are closely interrelated. The authors focus on bereavement and retirement (two types of life-course transitions considered as normative in old-age) to explore how the person-environment exchange processes of agency and belonging have the potential to mediate social exclusion that might result from life-course transitions. Urbaniak et al. conclude with a focus on the importance of policy and practice to enable older adults to exert spatial agency and develop a sense of belonging within a community in the context of key life transitions.

The final chapter approaches the question of ageing in rural environments. Vidovićová et al. (Chap. 17) remind us that rurality is seldom mentioned in national ageing policies despite the fact that a large proportion of older adults are living in rural places. Through the example of three neighboring countries (Czech Republic, Germany and Poland), this chapter addresses to what extent social exclusion in later life is linked to the organization of care in rural areas, underlining the multifaceted nature of various exclusionary processes. The authors highlight the necessity for state, non-governmental, civil society and private actors of the older adult care sector to learn from each other in order to develop more inclusive approaches to provision in heterogenous rural contexts.

These topics resonate also with the effects the global COVID-19 responses in various ways. The call addressed in many countries specifically to older adults to "stay at home" and "to cocoon" has directly affected their use of space and community involvement. These safety measures might have aggravated the exclusion of especially those living alone, disrupting their access to care and social relationships by building both physical and symbolic barriers, and negatively affecting both their mental (United Nations 2020) and physical health (Pelicioni & Lord 2020).

14.5 Improving Social Inclusion of Older Adults Through Spatial and Community Aspects

To conclude this introductory section, let us stress once again, that the places where (older) people live influence the risk of social exclusion, by being a threat or a significant resource to their participation within society. As emphasised earlier, place, as a socio-spatial phenomenon, can fundamentally shape older adults' lives. The maintenance and quality of communities and relational connections are essential components of everyday life that directly impact numerous spheres such as emotional well-being, quality of life or even the maintenance of cognitive skills during ageing (Mendes de Leon et al. 2003; Ylvisaker et al. 2005). Despite current efforts of communities to become more age-friendly, older adults with specific needs can be at high risk of social exclusion. For example, people living with dementia, that represent approximately 21 per cent of the 85–89 age group, and more than 40 per cent of the 90 years and over age group (Alzheimer Europe 2019), face several specific obstacles (*e.g.* cognitive and behavioral changes, social isolation, stigma) that threaten the continuity of their participation in local environments. Like in other groups who can experience forms of spatial displacement and disconnection, for them the lack of connectivity to local neighbourhoods and communities can be a complex and under attended challenge (Schölzel-Dorenbos et al. 2010). This needs to be more extensively addressed to foster more inclusive communities for all older people.

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