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## **Book review: Robert Hagan**

Ward, R., Clark, A. & Phillipson, L. (2021). *Dementia and place: Practices, experiences and connections*. Policy press.

Often dementia has been perceived in the public imagination as a personal tragedy, which inevitably impacts upon one's ability to live a full public and civic life (Reed et al., 2017). The primary message to take away from this book is that this should not be the case. Dementia may lead to significant changes in individuals' lives over time but this should not lead to a complete diminution of one's participation in the outside world, or being active and engaged in the surrounding neighbourhood or community.

At the heart of the matter is a conflict between two ideas that affect engagement: risk and autonomy. As is highlighted in the introduction to this book, previously ideas around risk and care led to institutionalisation to ensure those with dementia were kept safe, but without taking account of people's lived histories, or desires to remain rooted in familiar and meaningful locations, redolent with memories, friendships and attachments that ensured a sense of security or stability. Risk, too, still informs how those with dementia who live independently are perceived today, and especially, as is discussed by Odzakovic et al. in chapter five here, those who live alone. This has led to how risk assessments for individuals lead not only to adaptations in the home but also surveillance, even at an informal level. In this construction, the person with dementia who ventures outside their front door becomes the person who 'wanders' rather than someone who explores or purposefully engages with their neighbourhood.

By contrast, the consistent message being delivered by the chapter authors herein recognise the benefits for individuals having access to a life outside their front door and how this could be a necessary counterpoint to those with dementia having a shrinking social world imposed upon them. Brorsson in chapter four picks up on how there are new challenges for those with dementia, highlighting the extra time needed to prepare to go out and also wrestling with the minutiae of having to navigate new ways of understanding short excursions to shops and even via zebra crossings.

However, by and large, the book's narrative is more interested in the reciprocal exchange of the individual and environment as those with dementia retain connection to their communities. Although risk is not the book's main concern, the text does highlight the value in promoting design in the surrounding environment, such as clear signage, well maintain pavements, extra seating, and reliable and accessible public transport. Nevertheless, the writers identify that the idea of communities needing to be 'made safe' reinforces the notion that those with dementia are

vulnerable, in danger or even dangerous. As such, the editors conclude that the concept of making environments 'dementia friendly' may not always be helpful, as the diverse experiences of those with dementia means that a space that is supportive for one individual with dementia may be less helpful for another.

Neighbourhood here is defined (in both chapter seven (Ward et al.) and the conclusion (Clark et al.), to drive the point home) as not so much as somewhere we inhabit as in something we do. This recognises the importance of familiar spaces and places as well as the reciprocal exchanges therein with others. Both chapters five and 11 recognise the importance of spontaneous encounters, but these will probably only happen in locations where individuals know each other already, so a sense of being embedded in the community may be especially important. In Chapter eight, Seetharaman et al. note that being in a familiar location helps people with dementia feel confident in being out and about, and brings reassurance that they can locate sources they trust to gain assistance if in trouble in any way. This reinforces the idea that earlier directions of practice, in terms of moving people to 'safe' institutions far from known neighbourhoods, may have exacerbated confusion, threatened well-being, and misunderstood individuals' capacity and ability to live well and autonomously.

The book highlights some innovative methodology in gathering findings and insights from participants. Both chapters two (Clark et al.) and 11 (Brennan-Horley et al.) use mapping to gather views on the meaning of the local area. Chapter 11 is particularly strong, assisted with some good visual data to highlight places that are commonly used, those enjoyed for their own sake, and those less accessible. This last point is especially useful, as the authors suggest that, when this overlaps with the other two areas, it may highlight the environments that need targeting in terms of ensuring better access.

Another strength in the book is the use of four vignettes from individuals with dementia or their carers to reflect on their own relationships to place. Of these, Wendy Mitchell's reflection on how Covid-19 actually increased her engagement with her local community is especially valuable. In fact, this is one of the few chapters to consider how things may change in the light of the recent pandemic. As noted in the conclusion, the book maybe could have explored one or two other areas: one that might have been especially valuable, especially as the editors indicate early on how fluid definitions of neighbourhood may be, is how online communities have developed and become increasingly meaningful in recent years. Perhaps further work will examine this.

In summary, the book makes a cogent argument that neighbourhoods transcend the idea of merely being physical spaces but instead have highly symbolic meaning, ensure chosen social interactions,

and even imbue security through familiarity. Neighbourhoods promote a sense of belonging, connection, friendship and even love. As such, they should not be ignored in any assessment of the needs of people with dementia and sensible risk management should be promoted as a result.

## **Reference**

Reed, P., Carson, J., & Gibb, Z. (2017). Transcending the tragedy discourse of dementia: An ethical imperative for promoting selfhood, meaningful relationships, and well-being. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 19(7), 693-703.