Chapter 2

Dealing with change in old age: negotiating working-class belonging in a neighbourhood in the process of urban renewal in the Netherlands

Abstract. 'Ageing in place' policies presuppose that growing old in one's own home and neighbourhood is in the best interests of older adults, as a familiar and predictable environment fosters autonomy and wellbeing in old age. However, discontinuities of place can challenge the relationship between older adults and their neighbourhood. This paper addresses the impact of neighbourhood transitions on older adults' sense of belonging in the Netherlands by exploring how they deal with changes in the neighbourhood in their everyday life. The context of this qualitative research is a former working-class neighbourhood in the process of urban renewal. Our findings show how a sense of belonging is negotiated in relation to everyday places and interactions within the neighbourhood, providing a sense of continuity despite neighbourhood change.

Keywords: ageing in place, older adults, neighbourhood transitions, belonging, relationality, the Netherlands.

2.1 Introduction

In response to the increasing costs of ageing societies, Western governments have implemented policies that foster ‘ageing in place’ (i.e. growing old in one’s own home and neighbourhood) in order to postpone and decrease expensive institutionalised care (Wiles et al., 2012). Ageing in place policies presuppose that growing old in one's own home and community is in the best interests of older adults, as they can age within a familiar and predictable environment (Davies and James, 2011). Informal support and care, as well as knowledge of the physical neighbourhood, should enable older adults to maintain a sense of autonomy and wellbeing when health and mobility deteriorates (WHO, 2002). However, this idealised notion of ageing in place may not correspond to the everyday lives of community-dwelling older adults (Milligan, 2009). The urban sociologist Arnold Reijndorp (2007) has criticised ageing in place policies for not considering how neighbourhood transitions, such as population change and the upscaling of facilities, can transform urban neighbourhoods into unfamiliar environments. Not much is known about the meaning of neighbourhood transitions for older adults themselves. This paper draws attention to the discontinuities of ageing in place by examining the impact of neighbourhood transitions on retired older adults’ sense of belonging.

In the past decade, the neighbourhood as a context of ageing has received more attention from policymakers (Global Age-Friendly Cities guide by WHO, 2007) and researchers. Several authors in a wide range of disciplines have identified the important role of the neighbourhood in older adults' sense of belonging and wellbeing (see Gardner, 2011; Wiles et al., 2012). Local informal social networks, including neighbours, service personnel and people on the street, contribute to wellbeing in the everyday lives of older adults (e.g. Gardner, 2011; Peace et al., 2006; Russell, 2005; Van Hoven and Douma, 2012; Wiles et al., 2012). Recent research by Ziegler (2012) and Buffel et al. (2013) indicates how a changing neighbourhood can challenge older adults' sense of belonging and social relationships, thereby increasing the likelihood of social exclusion. However, studies focusing on the impact of neighbourhood transitions on older adults’ everyday encounters and places remain scarce (Phillipson, 2010).

Social and physical transformations of place can challenge one’s social and emotional connections with the neighbourhood, especially when these changes are rapid and intense (Jones and Evans, 2012). This can lead to feelings of disorientation, grief and alienation (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Fried, 2000; Fullilove, 1996; Hörschelmann

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2 In Dutch policy, the age at which people are labelled as ‘older’ depends on the policy area, for example, labour participation of older people concerns those aged 50-65 years, while in the care sector, older people are those aged 75+ years (Van Nimwegen and Van Praag, 2012). In the context of this research, we adopt the current retirement age (65+) to define older adults, since from this age onwards they are likely to spend more time in the home and neighbourhood. This may be especially the case for men who used to be the breadwinner of the family.
Neighbourhood transitions can be particularly challenging for older adults’ sense of belonging as reduced mobility, decreasing health, and retirement heightens the importance of the neighbourhood as a central setting of experience (e.g. Phillips et al., 2005). Those who receive only a state pension\(^3\) may be even more restricted to their locality since they lack the financial means to venture or move outside the neighbourhood, while more affluent older adults can choose their living environment by moving to retirement communities, for example (Phillipson, 2007). Less affluent older adults often live in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. In the Netherlands, the social and physical character of many of these neighbourhoods is constantly and significantly transformed as a result of state-led urban renewal strategies. These strategies are aimed at improving the liveability of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in order to address urban problems such as crime and disturbance of public order (Uitermark et al., 2007). To achieve this, municipalities and housing associations attract middle-class households to the neighbourhood in order to ‘civilize’ its predominantly working-class residents (Uitermark et al., 2007, p. 138). A relatively high proportion of older adults in the Netherlands have lived their whole life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (30% compared to 18% in non-deprived neighbourhoods) (Van der Meer et al., 2008). Those who have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time may have problems adapting to their changing surroundings as new norms and practices evolve, making them feel ‘out of place’ (Milligan et al., 2005; Rowles and Watkins, 2003). The rejection of local working-class values and segregation practices of the middle class may further threaten older residents’ sense of belonging to the neighbourhood (Paton, 2009; Savage et al., 2005).

This paper investigates how retired older adults in an urban neighbourhood in Groningen, a city in the Northern Netherlands, experience and negotiate neighbourhood transitions in everyday life. This neighbourhood, the Oosterpark, is a former Dutch working-class neighbourhood that is in the process of urban renewal. First, we discuss how the relationship between ageing and place, and the way in which older adults deal with discontinuities of place, have so far been approached. We then examine a relational approach to ageing and place in an attempt to understand “the complex patterns of continuity and change [in] individuals’ interactions with their social and physical environment” (Ziegler, 2012, p. 1). Next we introduce the research location, the qualitative data collection methods and the respondents. The analysis focuses on places and interactions through which the respondents negotiate a sense of continuity and belonging in everyday life.

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\(^3\) In the Netherlands in 2013, singles received a state pension of €1025 per month and cohabiting partners received €708 per person (SVB, 2013).
2.2 **Place making in old age: functional and affective dimensions**

The main understandings of the relationship between ageing and place were developed in the 1970s, in the fields of geography, and social and environmental gerontology (Andrews et al., 2009). This decade produced two strands of research, one in which the person-environment relationship was understood in functional terms, and one in which the experiential and affective bonds with places were stressed. The former is represented by the Ecological Theory of Ageing (ETA), developed by Lawton and colleagues (Lawton and Nahemow, 1973; Lawton, 1977). In ETA, the relationship between an ageing person and his/her environment is understood in functional terms (i.e. how places are helpful in engaging in everyday activities). Older adults’ behaviour is explained as the outcome of personal competences (e.g. physical and mental health) and environmental press (aspects of the environment which can have a demanding character) (Lawton, 1977). An imbalance between competences and press results in a misfit between people and place which leads to maladaptive behaviour and negative affect. A recent example of work using ETA is a study by Van der Meer et al. (2008), who found that vulnerable older adults (those lacking personal and household resources) experienced more environmental stress in deprived neighbourhoods (where environmental press is high) than in non-deprived neighbourhoods.

In the second strand of research, in which the affective and experiential dimensions of the person-environment relationship are highlighted, Rowles’ research (1978, 1983) takes centre stage. Rowles developed the concepts of social, physical and autobiographical ‘insideness.’ These result from the norms and rules of behaviour (social), spatial routines and habits (physical), and the remembrance of events that develop with place over time (autobiographical). The familiarity and sense of self that people derive from places contribute to the development of place attachments (i.e. affective bonds with places) (Altman and Low, 1992). In old age, place attachments provide a sense of continuity of identity, serving as a way to keep memories of the life course alive (Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992). Furthermore, familiarity, attachment and identity are thought to be especially important with regard to older adults, as they can relieve the negative impacts of physical and mental deterioration (Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992). Fullilove (1996) has argued that these three themes – familiarity, attachment and identity – are the main psychological processes that confer a sense of belonging, which in turn contributes to psychological wellbeing.

Recently, Smith (2009), in a qualitative study on ageing in deprived urban neighbourhoods in Canada and England, reconceptualised the person-environment relationship by merging ETA with place attachment. By doing so, older adults’ behaviour in relation to place was explained by functional as well as affective motivations. This approach challenged the unidirectional relationship between personal competences and
environmental press. For instance, Smith found that although older adults experience strong environmental press, attachment to the neighbourhood can mitigate negative consequences of such an environmental press on their wellbeing. Furthermore, Smith highlighted the agency of older adults by showing how they are able to negotiate everyday life in a high-crime neighbourhood. The agency of older adults in dealing with discontinuities of place and self has also been stressed by Rowles and Watkins (2003), who talk about ‘place making’ practices that people can use in order to re-establish disrupted place attachments. In earlier work on the geographical experience of older adults in a deteriorating inner-city neighbourhood in the United States, Rowles (1978) noted that older adults intensify their feelings about certain spaces as a strategy for maintaining a sense of identity in a changing environment. However, Phillipson et al. (2001, p. 259) in their work on changes in the family and community life of older adults in three urban areas in the United Kingdom, indicated that, depending on the nature of change, such strategies may not always be successful: “Whatever this urban world had been designed for, it was not obviously anything that had older people in mind.”

In addition to the nature of neighbourhood transitions, personal characteristics, experiences and histories also play a role in how older adults deal with discontinuities of place (Findlay and McLauglin, 2005). In a study on the experiences of housing renewal and forced relocation of older adults, for example, Ekstrom (1994) pointed out how role patterns established over the life course influenced whether an older person accepted or tried to influence their displacement process. And Peace et al. (2006, p. 66) noted that previous experiences of relocation inform older adults’ capacity to deal with place changes. The meaning one associates with ageing can be another factor in how older adults deal with change (Findlay and McLauglin, 2005). The internalisation of ageist stereotypes (e.g. being a burden when using a walker) can prevent an older person from visiting busy places. However, place changes can also evoke positive emotions, as a new or changed place offers new opportunities for identity formation (Ekstrom, 1994; Peace et al., 2006; Speller et al., 2002).

The discussions cited above suggest that place making in old age needs to be understood through both functional and affective dimensions. However, in the above-mentioned accounts, people and place have been treated as separate entities that fit or do not fit together depending on whether older adults possess the competences to adapt to change (Ziegler, 2012). In the next section we will discuss and argue for a relational understanding of the person-environment relationship, which will throw light on the dynamics of interaction between older adults and the changing neighbourhood.
2.3 Dealing with neighbourhood transitions: towards a relational approach

Recently both geographers and gerontologists have begun to advocate the use of a relational approach which does more justice to the complex, dynamic nature of the relationship between older adults and place (see Andrews et al., 2012; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Schwanen et al., 2012; Ziegler, 2012). This approach goes beyond the conceptualization of the person-environment relation in terms of 'fit' or adaption to place (Ziegler, 2012) by understanding people and places as being produced in relation to each other (Duff, 2010; Law, 1999). This means that older adults’ experience and negotiation of neighbourhood transitions only come into being in their interaction with place. How a person experiences and negotiates change depends on which factors become relevant and intersect with the person-environment relationship (Hopkins and Pain, 2007). Ziegler (2012), who used a relational approach to examine the social participation of older women in a deprived neighbourhood in the United Kingdom, showed how social class, gender and age intersected with the way the research participants gave meaning to and negotiated their social interactions. In a similar vein, Van Hoven and Douma (2012) showed how feelings of being old and immobile are shaped within and can vary between everyday places and interactions in one village.

In order to understand how older adults experience and negotiate neighbourhood transitions from a relational perspective, Cutchin’s model of place integration (2001) offers a useful starting point. This model emphasises how people’s interaction with places are in constant flux and require ongoing negotiation in order to establish and maintain a sense of continuity and belonging. Discontinuities trigger thought and action, through which new meanings are created to re-establish a sense of continuity and belonging to place (Cutchin, 2001). Referring to Cutchin’s place integration model, Wiles et al. (2012, p. 358) describe the process of ageing in place as follows:

“It is a complex process, not merely about attachment to a particular home but where the older person is continually reintegrating with places and renegotiating meanings and identity in the face of dynamic landscapes of social, political, cultural, and personal change.”

In this paper we will adopt the notion of ageing in place as proposed by Wiles et al. (2012) in order to explore how older adults make sense of and negotiate neighbourhood transitions in everyday life. To understand the specific neighbourhood changes which our respondents experience, we will first introduce the research location.
2.4 The Oosterpark: a former working-class neighbourhood in the process of urban renewal

The Oosterpark neighbourhood is located in Groningen, a city in the Northern Netherlands. In 2012 the Oosterpark had around 11,575 residents, 8% of whom were aged 65 and above (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2012). The Oosterpark was built in phases, starting in the 1910s when the municipality built a temporary village and a workhouse in a meadow away from the city, to shield the bourgeoisie from the poor and homeless (Hofman, 1998). In the interwar period, the municipality continued to build for the working class according to the principles of the garden village. The aim of the garden village was to ‘civilise’ the working class through the creation of community feeling by building small-scale districts and introducing architectural design and green spaces (Ekhart, 2003; Hofman, 1998). Pubs were not allowed in the area so that residents would not be exposed to the ‘evil temptations’ of alcohol (Ekhart, 2003, p. 1). The 1930s saw the construction of a soccer stadium and several playgrounds in the Oosterpark as a result of residents’ initiatives, and during that time the municipality opened a community centre, the first in the Netherlands (Hofman, 1998).

After the Second World War, the Oosterpark was expanded. From the 1970s onwards, the social composition of the neighbourhood changed as a result of large-scale renovations of pre-war homes. Families who had temporarily moved out of the neighbourhood did not return as the small pre-war homes no longer suited their housing preferences. Most older people stayed and younger singles moved into the Oosterpark (Van Burik and De Savornin Lohman, 1990). A report commissioned by the municipality of Groningen in 1990 stated that the changing social composition led to a decrease in social control and an increase in drug-related crime, through which the neighbourhood deteriorated (see Van Burik and De Savornin Lohman, 1990). The Oosterpark made national news when riots broke out on New Year’s Eve in 1997 (Hofman, 1998). In 1998 the municipality, together with housing corporations, set a neighbourhood renewal programme in motion in order to improve the liveability of the Oosterpark. The aim of this programme was to create a more diverse population by attracting middle-class families from outside the neighbourhood through the provision of private housing (Gemeente Groningen, 2000). Social housing corporations sold a part of their housing stock, smaller homes were combined and sold, and some of the run-down social housing stock was demolished and replaced by new private dwellings (Duivenvoorden, 2008; Gemeente Groningen, 2010). To meet the demands of older residents who wanted to grow old in the Oosterpark (those who stayed as well as those who wanted to move back), several senior flats and a retirement home were built. In 2005 the Oosterpark lost its land-

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4 In senior flats the rooms of the apartments are located on one level. Facilities vary, but can include a personal alarm system, a common room and care offered by the local care home.
mark, the city’s soccer stadium; town houses now occupy the site of the former stadium. In 2007, the municipality, together with local housing corporations, initiated the ‘New Local Agreement’ which shifted attention to social neighbourhood renewal aimed at increasing resident participation and social cohesion in the urban renewal neighbourhoods. The municipality claimed that the character of the Oosterpark had changed drastically since the commencement of the neighbourhood renewal process: it stated that the Oosterpark had been transformed from a close-knit working-class neighbourhood to an urban neighbourhood where more highly educated singles and families were the dominant group (Gemeente Groningen, 2010). It is within this socio-spatial context that we examine how older residents experience and negotiate these changes in their everyday life.

2.5 Research approach and methods
The research reported in this article is based on single, one-to-one in-depth interviews with 4 men and 9 women in their own homes. The aim was to elicit personal experiences and stories concerning the Oosterpark, and the meaning of home and everyday life in the Oosterpark. Five of the respondents were also willing (and able) to participate in a follow-up ‘go-along interview’ (see Kusenbach, 2003), which was conducted whilst walking through the neighbourhood. The go-along interviews were used to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of everyday life in the Oosterpark through being ‘in place’ with the respondents, where the multi-sensory experiences of being in the neighbourhood acted as ‘walking probes’ (Evans and Jones, 2011; Trell and Van Hoven, 2010). The respondents determined the route and duration of the walk within the confines of the neighbourhood. The go-along interviews were also used as a means to observe respondents’ interactions, activities and environment (Kusenbach, 2003).

Potential respondents were recruited through a senior sounding board group, coffee mornings and a senior computer course in the neighbourhood, and by snowball sampling. The respondents were diverse in age, household situation and location of residence within the neighbourhood. They were all white, received a small pension or no pension in addition to the state pension, had completed primary education and had lived in the Oosterpark for more than 10 years. Five of the respondents grew up in the Oosterpark (see Table 1 for main characteristics), and most respondents had made several moves during their lives to other neighbourhoods, towns and villages. These moves out of the neighbourhood were not forced although some had to move temporarily within the neighbourhood as a result of restructuring in the 1970s and 1980s. Being 65+, the

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5 This argument is backed by statistics. In 2000, 42% of the population of the Oosterpark were lower educated and 30% higher educated. In 2008, the lower-educated population decreased to 14% and the higher-educated population increased to 61% (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2010).
main reason for respondents moving within the neighbourhood was the need for an age-appropriate residence. Marinus and Corrie moved because of noise and nuisance caused by drug addicts and dealers in their street, but stayed in the neighbourhood. At the time of the interview, all respondents (except Trijntje) expressed a desire to grow old in the Oosterpark.

The respondents were informed about the research through a letter of introduction that they received about a week before the interview. At the start of the interview the researcher explained the interview procedure and gained informed consent. Respondents’ names and any other information that could be traced were changed to ensure anonymity. Transcripts were coded using qualitative data analysis software, (NVivo8), applying thematic analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Childhood in the Oosterpark</th>
<th>Length of residence in total</th>
<th>Type of housing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>Private housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna* &amp; Harm*</td>
<td>Female &amp; Male</td>
<td>65 &amp; 91</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No &amp; No</td>
<td>45-50 &amp; 55-60</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greetje*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirk*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trijntje</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Single/divorced</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>Private rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinus*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Single/divorced</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No*</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>Private rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>Private housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75-80</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrie*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacoba</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>Social housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Characteristics of the respondents

* Respondents that participated in a go-along interview

*Johanna was already acquainted with the neighbourhood before moving to the Oosterpark as her husband grew up in the Oosterpark and his family members lived in the neighbourhood.

*Anna and Harm are married and they were interviewed together.
2.6 Negotiating belonging in the Oosterpark

Our data analysis revealed how the changing character and appearance of the Oosterpark evoked feelings of nostalgia for a lost community, mirroring other studies on place attachment in changing neighbourhoods (e.g. Buffel et al., 2013; Mah, 2009). Still, most respondents expressed a strong sense of belonging to the Oosterpark. Our focus on everyday life showed how this sense of belonging is actively negotiated in everyday places and interactions within the neighbourhood, providing a sense of continuity over the course of the neighbourhood change. The ways in which changes are experienced and negotiated intersect with a working-class insideness, in which the neighbourhood acts as a “meaningful aspect of urban social life” (Fried, 2000, p. 193). We identified three main themes from the data through which this insideness is reworked: informal encounters and support, shaping neighbourhood space, and negotiating place identity. The themes also demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between the changing neighbourhood and the respondents.

2.6.1 Informal encounters and support

In a typology of Dutch working-class neighbourhoods in the 1960s and 1970s (Simonse, 1977), the street was identified as an important element in the social life as a result of dense housing and small-sized or non-existent private gardens. Social contacts revolved around family and neighbour networks situated within the neighbourhood. Simonse (1977) noted how the renovation of Dutch working-class neighbourhoods in the 1970s disturbed familiar patterns of interaction as the social composition of these neighbourhoods changed and some residents had to move out of their neighbourhood. Respondents in our research revealed that renovations in the Oosterpark, starting in the 1970s, were a turning point at which the Oosterpark gradually transformed from a close-knit working-class community to an individualised neighbourhood. Over the course of this process informal encounters and support practices were renegotiated in the neighbourhood space.

Through the renovations, indoor living spaces increased in size and it became less necessary to socialise in the street. The disappearance of local shops, the building of high-rise flats, and family homes were mentioned as factors that limited opportunities for chance encounters. These physical changes were experienced as a social “distancing process” (Ziegler, 2012, p. 7) between the respondents and the new middle-class residents. Anna (female, 65), for example, pointed out how a new private housing block precluded opportunities for establishing contacts with the new residents:
"It’s an enclave within the neighbourhood and you can’t make contact with them. Of course it’s nice for the parents that their children can play safely in between the houses [closed off by fences]. But you can’t make contact in front of the house, [because] on the front side they have their kitchen. You never see anything."

In the face of this changing street space, older residents kept up familiar ways of street life in order to retain the social value of the street. Sitting on the front porch, which Simonse (1977) identified as typical for working-class neighbourhoods, was stressed by Dirk (male, 70) as being important for older residents’ wellbeing and a sense of continuity of community:

"Sitting outside together. It still exists. The people who live here ... they carry a little table to the [common] garden and hand each other a chair through the window ... It’s typical for the Oosterpark. But in [other working-class neighbourhoods in Groningen] you see the same. It’s something you have to preserve. I once asked [people in the senior flat where I live]: why do you continue with this? [They say] well, it’s a feeling of solidarity."

Social practices such as these were not just remnants from the past which respondents held on to in the face of change, but they created a social atmosphere in the neighbourhood that became discernible to those who were not familiar with these practices (Duff, 2010). This social atmosphere shaped the social interactions of respondents who did not grow up in the Oosterpark. This was illustrated by Johanna (female, 73), who did not grow up in the neighbourhood and was not used to greeting people and being greeted in the neighbourhood where she previously lived:

"When you live here long enough [in the Oosterpark] you become closer with the people. That’s very pleasant. There are people who greet me and I greet them back. Previously [in the neighbourhood where I lived before] I would never have done that."

While respondents retained a sense of community through reproducing the street as a meeting place, the ageing process made it hard to continue these interaction patterns. As a result of reduced mobility and energy most preferred indoor meeting places in their vicinity, such as the care home restaurant, the multi-purpose buildings of the playground associations and the common spaces of senior flats. Within these spaces familiar ways of interacting were continued and actively negotiated when possibilities for encounters were limited. Tine (female, 77), for example, established an opportunity for encounter
in her senior apartment block. She sent a suggestion to the housing corporation that a bench be placed in the lobby of the block for a neighbour who was physically impaired. The bench attracted residents of the senior flat and brought them in contact with each other. Tine sometimes sits there for a while, chatting with passers-by.

In the past, working-class neighbourhoods were characterised by poverty and it was common for neighbours to provide mutual aid (Hardill and Baines, 2009; Simonse, 1977). Respondents believed that these times of solidarity would not return, as prosperity had increased and the informal forms of support and care, on which neighbourhood life was based, had become institutionalised. However, the practices of solidarity with which they were familiar now provide a resource for giving social and functional support to other older adults, such as doing chores and preparing meals for one or the other and keeping an eye on each other. Some respondents stressed that their upbringing in poverty confirmed their commitment to help vulnerable and disadvantaged residents. This was especially true in the case of female respondents, who maintained the care roles they had held within the community and for their family over their life course by volunteering in the residential care home, facilitating and organising social gatherings, and

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It should be noted here that Tine is known and respected by the municipality and housing corporation for her 40 years of volunteer work in the Oosterpark.
giving informal care to non-kin. In doing so, these women actively maintained community life beyond their own home (Phillipson et al., 1999; Simonse, 1977). It should be noted that the local social networks of the respondents mostly comprised other older adults, since their kin had moved out of the neighbourhood and they did not establish contacts with younger new residents. Intergenerational support through neighbour networks, which was common in the old days, had vanished according to the respondents, as most younger women were working and did not have time to invest in the neighbourhood. Respondents were very much aware that the Oosterpark was no longer a community based on solidarity and that the older residents were left to support each other, as Maria (female, 72) highlighted with some indignation: “older people help older people”.

2.6.2 Shaping neighbourhood space

In Dutch working-class neighbourhoods, residents were active in grass-roots initiatives such as tenants associations and action groups, in which issues that were directly related to the liveability of the neighbourhood could be raised (Simonse, 1977). Simonse (1977) stated that participation in top-down administrative and political structures was not popular because these bodies represented the authorities and middle-class culture. This was reflected in our data, as Albert (male, 65) illustrated when describing the Oosterpark residents of his youth: “they were always against the authorities, against the establishment”. There was a strong sentiment among the respondents that the municipality, housing associations and service providers should be aware of and act according to residents’ needs and wishes. They felt that the support and information desk for older adults and disabled people, situated in the community centre (the former workhouse), was not attuned to older residents’ needs. These desks were initiated by the municipality and social services in Groningen neighbourhoods to provide residents with easily accessible support. However, the physical accessibility of the building was mentioned as an obstacle for entering the community centre (see Figure 2). Furthermore, respondents mentioned that the people who worked at the desk did not make their way into the neighbourhood themselves and as a consequence older adults with physical impairments could not benefit from the desk’s support. This was described by Corrie (female, 78) when discussing the needs of older adults in the care home:

“They answer a lot of questions there [at the support desk], that’s very good. However, what annoys me is that people fall by the wayside because they are unable to go to the support and information desk.”

Being familiar with the practices of self-organisation proved beneficial for giving shape to the neighbourhood. Residents from one senior flat started organising their own social
activities (e.g. traditional board games evenings, and coffee mornings) and support for older adults (e.g. help with filling in tax forms and information evenings about how to use a walker) in their own community centre. As this example shows, older adults are not only “passive victims of issues related to urban change” (Buffel et al., 2013, p. 103) but can actively negotiate the process so that they retain a sense of belonging for themselves and other residents. Dirk (male, 70) talked about how the community centre in the senior flat became a recognisable feature of the neighbourhood for older residents:

“People want landmarks. They have always wanted that. In the past there were landmarks in the Oosterpark, such as the local police station on the corner of the Hortensialaan. You could always walk in there with questions about safety issues. We [the community center in the senior flat] are a landmark now.”

Respondents not only contested formal structures but also used them as opportunities to re-create a sense of continuity in their sense of place. The ‘New Local Agreement’, aimed at increasing resident participation and involvement in the course of the neighbourhood renewal process, provided an opportunity for this. Part of this agreement were the senior sounding board groups, in which five of the respondents were involved. During meetings of the sounding board group, they voiced their concerns regarding the liveability of the neighbourhood for older adults, such as the width of new pavements for wheelchairs and the availability of benches. However, ageing in place not only related to concerns about the age friendliness of the neighbourhood but extended to the liveability of the Oosterpark for children. The Oosterpark was a child rich neighbourhood up till the 1970s (Hofman, 1998), which created an intergenerational sense of ageing in place for the respondents, as Corrie (female, 78) explained: “You should not only be concerned about whether the bus stop is close enough to the care home. Children have the future.” Housing corporations attracted young families by building family dwellings, and as more families moved to the Oosterpark, the ‘lively’ and ‘vibrant’ character reminiscent of the time before the 1970s returned to the neighbourhood. During neighbourhood committee meetings some respondents advocated the provision of playgrounds and sports facilities in order to ‘keep’ children in the neighbourhood. The presence of children in public space provided them with a sense of continuity of community.

Through long-term residence and time spent in the neighbourhood, most respondents possessed a rich knowledge of the physical appearance of the Oosterpark, and people quickly noticed and reacted to changes that posed a threat of discontinuity, as illustrated by Anna’s (65, female) work to preserve the neighbourhood’s physical heritage. For over 30 years, together with her husband Harm (male, 91), she pursued her interest in the architecture and art of the Oosterpark. When Anna found out that an
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old building with two artworks embedded into its walls was targeted for demolition, she requested money from the ‘New Local Agreement’ to preserve the art for the neighbourhood. She approached the architect of a new apartment building to use the pieces, to which he agreed (see Figure 3). Through her effort, Anna helped ensure the continuity of the neighbourhood’s physical appearance for other respondents. As Johanna (female, 73) noted: “New houses have been built, but the place stays. The place is familiar.”

2.6.3 Negotiating place identity

The previous sections have shown how a working-class frame of reference informed the ways in which respondents negotiated neighbourhood transitions. In this section, particular attention is drawn to how the identity of the Oosterpark as a working-class neighbourhood is negotiated. This working-class identity came to the fore when certain events that took place were perceived as a threat to this identity. Some respondents indicated that working-class residents were not recognised sufficiently in the neighbourhood renewal process, as the housing corporations had not built affordable housing for them. They asserted that private housing is leading to a social division within the neighbourhood, in which working-class residents are not taken into account. Tine (female, 77) said:

Figure 3 ‘The antelope’: an artwork rescued by Anna and now embedded in the wall of a new building
(photo: Amanda Thijsen, 2012)
“I find it such a shame that affordable social housing is turned into private housing. I don’t know how to explain [it], it’s the feeling of, ‘I own a home and you are just a renter.’ 7

In contrast to the aim of the municipality to improve the liveability of the Oosterpark through attracting middle-class residents, respondents revealed the merits of being working class, such as straightforwardness, which helped them cope with inappropriate behaviour and disturbances in the neighbourhood. Maria (female, 72) explained:

“Recently I was walking in another neighbourhood. There was a guy ... And very expensive houses there. And he was yelling! If that would happen in the Oosterpark, older people would say, ‘Hey fella, can’t you do that on another day!’ ... I thought to myself, it’s not that bad to live here.”

Although the neighbourhood is now dominated by higher-educated singles and middle-class families, respondents held on to the image of the Oosterpark as a working-class neighbourhood. As hooks (in Mah 2009, p. 307) argues, nostalgia for a lost community can “illuminate and transform the present”. For our respondents, remembering and talking about events that occurred in the Oosterpark confirmed their belonging to the neighbourhood. The soccer stadium played a central role in their memories. Remembering the vibrant atmosphere of the soccer matches and the rituals around the matches (such as drinking coffee with neighbours and family before the match) conferred a sense of continuity of a collective identity, as Marinus (male, 71) describes:

“The emotions all return [when talking about the stadium with friends]... on a Sunday it’s very quiet now, there’s nothing to do. That’s the difference. Together we used to look forward to Sundays, to the soccer matches. It was fun. It was close by.”

Reminiscing about past places and events together with other people, as this quote shows, can act as a way of situating oneself and other people in the history of the neighbourhood and creating a sense of belonging in the face of change (Degnen, 2005). But keeping a sense of continuity in neighbourhood identity should also be related to respondents’ life stage. Constrained mobility, reduced energy and retirement have made them spend more time in the Oosterpark, which in turn may have intensified their feelings regarding the neighbourhood and increased the importance of retaining a positive 7 In a 2006 documentary about the neighbourhood renewal process in the Oosterpark, residents showed similar concerns about the increase of private housing by indicating that they felt that the working-class residents were being chased out of the neighbourhood (see Oostrik & Swierstra 2006).
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2.7 Conclusions
While ageing in place policies adopt a static notion of place, offering the benefits of familiarity and predictability to those that age in their home and community, we questioned whether the same applied to the everyday lives of older adults living in a neighbourhood undergoing urban renewal. In order to explore this issue we focused on how older adults experience and negotiate neighbourhood transitions in everyday life. Our results show how a sense of belonging is negotiated and practised in everyday places and interactions (Fenster, 2005), providing a sense of continuity in spite of neighbourhood transitions. Thus, older adults contribute to making the neighbourhood a familiar and predictable place. By adopting a relational approach, this paper highlights the “entwined becoming” (Schwanen et al. 2012, p. 1) of the relation between older adults and the neighbourhood. People and place do not develop independently of each other but are co-constituted (Duff, 2010), as Anna’s story of the rescued artworks showed. Furthermore, our results highlight the contingent character of the ways older adults deal with change. In the case of the Oosterpark, a working-class insideness resulted in specific routines and behaviours which were transferred to the present in order to perpetuate the sense of community which the respondents were familiar with.

This study contributes to the understanding of the social and emotional implications of urban renewal for working-class residents. Urban renewal projects, in this case the ‘New Local Agreement’, can provide an opportunity for residents to remain attached to their neighbourhood (Van der Graaf and Duyvendak, 2009). However, this research also indicates how the social mix between middle-class and older working-class residents has not been achieved. Our respondents did not experience the predicted advantages of middle-class settlement in the neighbourhood. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the meaning that place changes entail, attention should not only be paid to how change is perceived but should also be focused on everyday practices. Reijndorp (2007) is in favour of housing corporations taking responsibility for creating familiar neighbourhoods. But if urban renewal strategies are to be sensitive to older adults’ wellbeing, housing corporations should also provide opportunities for older adults to continue their familiar ways of interacting. Furthermore, as older adults often have a rich knowledge of the local neighbourhood, they could safeguard the connection between the past, present and future character of a locality (Wiesel, 2012). In light of the design of ‘age-friendly’ neighbourhoods, older adults’ housing, care and mobility needs should also be addressed in relation to local identities and cultures.

This research has provided a more nuanced understanding of the meaning of ageing in place for older adults. On the one hand, we showed the agency older adults
have in creating and maintaining a neighbourhood environment that confers a sense of belonging. On the other hand, our findings also reveal that experiences of ageing in place have become largely restricted to interactions with other older adults and are confined to places dominated by older adults. These outcomes challenge the notion of community care which underlies ageing in place policies (Milligan, 2009). Although older adults have been identified as important contributors to neighbourhoods through the provision of informal support (see Hardill and Baines 2009), there comes a time when they themselves require care and support. Further research is needed to understand the role that the neighbourhood can play in supporting its older residents (e.g. Jager-Vreugdenhil, 2012). Therefore, perceptions and attitudes of the people who can be part of older adults’ everyday lives, such as neighbours and local service providers, should be identified. This would further contribute to understanding ageing in place as a relational achievement.

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