Chapter 4

Exploring the subjective dimensions of older adults’ use of neighbourhood space through walking interviews

Abstract. For older people living in densely populated urban neighbourhoods, walking is an important mode of everyday mobility. Besides being a way to get around, the act of walking is considered to be a place making practice. As such, older adults’ walking practices are informed by how they experience neighbourhood space. The objective of this paper is to unravel the experiences that unfold for older adults while walking, and to distinguish how these experiences relate to older adults’ use of their neighbourhood. The results of this research are based on twelve walking interviews with older adults in two urban neighbourhoods in the Northern Netherlands. The walking interviews proved to be particularly suitable for eliciting the embodied and emplaced character of place experiences. Our findings reveal that place making occurs through routes which are informative of older adults’ various engagements with place, including feeling different, the need for sociability and reliving memorable past feelings. We conclude by discussing the broader implications of this study for age-friendly neighbourhoods.

Key words: placemaking, embodiment, walking interviews, older adults, age-friendly neighbourhoods

10 This chapter is reprinted from: Lager, D., Van Hoven, B., Huigen, P.P.P., Exploring the subjective dimensions of older adults’ use of neighbourhood space through walking interviews, and is under revision at an international peer-reviewed journal.
Chapter 4

4.1 Introduction

With a growing population of older people ageing in place (i.e. ageing in one’s own home and neighbourhood) it is important to understand how they experience and make use of neighbourhood space. Neighbourhood space is an important resource for older adults’ health and wellbeing, as a decreasing action radius may heighten the value of the neighbourhood for daily living and social interaction (Day, 2008). For older people living in densely populated urban neighbourhoods, walking is an important mode of everyday mobility (see Banister and Bowling, 2004; Fobker and Grotz, 2006). As well as being a way to get around, walking is a means through which meanings about the places of one’s everyday life are (re)produced (Lorimer, 2011; Pink, 2007; Waitt et al., 2009). Duff pointed out the significance of walking to our sense of place: “To walk is to be affected by place and to simultaneously contribute to the ongoing co-constitution of self and place” (Duff, 2010, p. 887, original emphasis). In this way, walking can be considered a place making practice (Lee and Ingold, 2006) and can evoke feelings about a particular place, such as feelings of social inclusion and exclusion, place attachments and a sense of belonging (Duff, 2010; Wunderlich, 2008). In this paper, we examine how older adults experience neighbourhood space through walking and how this influences the ways in which they make use of the neighbourhood.

Knowing how older people experience their neighbourhood while walking can contribute to improving the walkability of urban neighbourhoods. Walkability refers to the quality of pedestrian space, which traditionally has taken a transportation efficiency perspective, using measures such as speed of pedestrian flow (Hutabarat Lo, 2009). Although walkability researchers and planners have recognised the physiological needs of the older body in traversing space, highlighting the importance of resting places and clear signage (e.g. Phillips et al., 2013; Van Cauwenberg et al., 2014), “the importance of place meanings and attachments for older people’s use of space” (Hockey et al., 2013, p. 539) have found little resonance in walkability research and decision-making with regard to planning (Andrews et al., 2012; Hockey et al., 2013). Andrews et al. (2012) proposed the use of qualitative methods to gain insight into the “complex embodied movements and the experiences of people” (p. 1929) which shape why and where they walk. In our research, we chose to conduct walking interviews, as this method allows the researcher to observe the relationship between experiences and the use of neighbourhood space.

A small but growing body of literature highlights the value of mobile methods, such as walking interviews, to gain insight into the spatiality of place experiences (e.g. Bergeron et al., 2014; Duff, 2010; Holton and Riley, 2014; Jones and Evans, 2012). Walking interviews have become a popular method for exploring the meaning of health
in place (e.g. Carpiano, 2009; Sunderland et al., 2012) and in understanding senses of place, especially of youth (e.g. Cele, 2006; Duff, 2010; Trell and Van Hoven, 2010). Walking makes the geographical context of experiences more explicit (Anderson, 2004) and can reveal the role of bodily abilities in the use of a place (e.g. Matthews et al., 2003). The growing popularity of walking interviews is related to the attention on the embodied and emplaced nature of human experience in the social sciences (Ricketts Hein et al., 2008). These notions address the idea that experiences cannot be understood separately from the specific place and time in which they come into being (Elwood and Martin, 2000), and the body’s sensorial and affective engagement with its environment (Spinney, 2014; Van Hoven, 2011).

This paper aims to explore the subjective dimensions of older adults’ use of neighbourhood space through walking interviews, based on a research project exploring the meanings of neighbourhood space in older adults’ everyday life. The walking interviews were originally used in conjunction with semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of neighbourhood experiences. The walks, in particular, informed our previous work about the impact of neighbourhood transitions on older adults’ sense of belonging (see Lager et al., 2013) and our work about older adults’ social capital in place (see Lager et al., 2015). We first discuss the embodied and emplaced nature of ageing in the neighbourhood, then address how walking interviews contribute to the understanding of place experiences. After this, we introduce the research context and methodology. Our analysis focuses on how walking acts as means of place making for older adults.

4.2 Embodied ageing in place

“embodied ageing and disability are best understood in place, within specific social and physical environments and geographies.” (Wiles and Allen, 2010, p. 230)

Wiles and Allen (2010) argued for theorisations of the relationship between ageing and place which recognise the embodied and emplaced nature of experiences. To highlight these aspects of experience they proposed the term “embodied ageing in place” (Wiles and Allen, 2010, p. 217). Ageing occurs in specific contexts, and for the growing ageing population these contexts will be at the scale of urban neighbourhoods (Wiles and Allen, 2010). However, neighbourhoods are not simply pre-existing geographical units, but are constantly (re)made in everyday practices (Crouch, 2001), such as walking (Lee and Ingold, 2006). Such ‘place making’ practices are embodied and imaginative in nature. This refers to the role of the body and its senses, and one’s remembered prior encounters in space in the (re)constituting of place experiences (e.g. Crouch, 2001; Pink, 2008).
With regard to older adults, the relation between the body and place making can be viewed from different angles (Skinner et al., 2014). From a physiological perspective, the older body can be said to be in a state of ‘decline’, which may imply a renegotiation of the body’s relationship to neighbourhood space (Van Hoven and Douma, 2012). When the built environment does not support the body’s ‘inabilities’, such as mobility impairments and a slower pace of walking, it can become difficult for older people to navigate urban space, which can result in feelings of environmental stress and marginalisation (e.g. Milligan et al., 2005; Van der Meer et al., 2008). From a social and cultural point of view, the older body is said to be inscribed with ageist discourses (e.g. Minichiello et al., 2000). Such discourses may influence older adults’ feelings about ageing and their perception of the accessibility of places (Milligan et al., 2005; Mowl et al., 2000). Minichiello et al. (2000), for instance, found that some of their older participants withdrew from activities, as they felt younger people perceived them as slow.

The body has also been considered in relation to the “expressive and felt engagement” of practices and activities (Skinner et al., 2014, p. 14; Spinney, 2014). In relation to older adults, Rowles and Watkins (2003), argued that in the development of routine practices feelings about a place come into being. They contended that these routines have a physical, a social and an autobiographical component, which all contribute to a sense of ‘insideness’ or familiarity (Rowles and Watkins, 2003; see also Rowles, 1983). For older adults, the physical familiarity with a place (e.g. through knowing the cracks in the sidewalks through the haptic sense) can support the feeling of independence (Wiles et al., 2012). Golant, highlighted how feelings of independence, competence and control can contribute to older adults’ “residential normalcy”, which he conceptualised as “overall favorable or positive emotion-based residential experiences” (2011, p. 193). He furthermore contended that (un)pleasurable feelings, hassle-free/hassled feelings and good and bad memorable past feelings play a role in how older people experience place (Golant, 2011). Regarding the ‘memorable past feelings’, Rowles (1978), provided an interesting example of how these feelings can become embodied in the way older adults traverse and thereby ‘make’ neighbourhood space. The walk that one of his participants, Stan, made was not only shaped by avoiding cracks in the sidewalk, but also by Stan’s nostalgic feelings of the local pubs he used to visit. In this vein, feelings can become “the movement of the body” (Lee and Ingold, 2006, p. 71).

The example of Stan also shows how places are made through the activity of walking. Lee and Ingold (2006) noted that: “the locomotive (or getting around) aspect of walking allows for an understanding of places being created by routes” (p. 68). The ways in which such routes come into being result from an interplay of the subjective dimensions of place and its ‘objective’ characteristics. The spatial structure of a neighbourhood, for instance, plays a role in how people get around and experience place (Sheller
and Urry, 2006). In sparsely populated North American suburbs (with a lack of appropriate public means of transportation), people are highly dependent on cars for transportation, which can be challenging for older adults who have difficulty driving or are unable to drive (Després and Lord, 2005). Not being able to get out of the house by oneself can lead to feelings of loneliness (Després and Lord, 2005). Factors related to urban deprivation, such as crime, may also influence older adults’ feelings about their neighbourhood (e.g. Buffel et al., 2013; Smith, 2009; Ziegler, 2012) and the routes they choose to walk. The above suggests that embodied ageing in place consists of different kinds of ‘embodiments’, and that the older adult is an active agent in ‘making’ place. However, not much is known about how older adults experience and make neighbourhood space through walking. This may be due to the predominance of stationary research methods in the ‘geographies of ageing’ literature (Skinner et al., 2014). Some authors have noted that health and mobility constraints impede older adults from participating in walking interviews (see Carpiano, 2009; Evans and Jones, 2011). Rowles (1978) and Gardner (2011), however, proved that it is feasible to walk with older adults in spite of mobility constraints. However, both authors made use of mixed methods so it is not clear what type of knowledge the walking interviews revealed about older adults’ experiences and use of neighbourhood space. The next section shows how walking interviews contribute to understanding place experiences.

4.3 Understanding place experiences through walking interviews

“being in motion is somehow different to being stationary, both in terms of the kinds of engagement with the world that it prompts, and the kinds of knowledge and identities that it therefore engenders.” (Ricketts Hein et al., 2008, p. 1268)

The popularity of walking interviews and other mobile methods in geography coincides with non-representational theory’s focus on “analysing the significance of practice and doing” in the constitution of place experiences (Spinney, 2014, p. 2). In 2003, Kusenbach proposed the ‘go-along’ method as a means to gain access to experiences as they unfold in place, combining the methods of sit-down interviews and participant observation. Through participant observation, the researcher is able to study people in their everyday environment (e.g. while walking in the neighbourhood), but these observations do not necessarily reveal people’s experiences and feelings (Kusenbach, 2003). Sit-down interviews allow people to talk about their experiences, feelings and practices (Hitchings, 2012). However, several authors have argued that the narrative character of sit-down interviews can impede the access to the small details of everyday life that play a role in one’s sense of place (e.g. Holton and Riley, 2014; Kusenbach, 2003; Trell and Van Hoven,
Sit-down interviews may disconnect participants from their “routine experiences and practices in “natural” environments” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 462), and this may restrict the knowledge gained on the place of investigation. Evans and Jones (2011), for instance, compared the knowledge obtained through in-depth interviews and walking interviews in a project about sense of place and urban regeneration. They found that the walking interviews revealed more place-specific stories about the neighbourhood than the sedentary interviews, in which the focus was on biographical narratives. Being in the place of investigation can also reveal the role the senses play in one’s experiences (Ricketts Hein et al., 2008). A particular scent may, for instance, trigger a recollection of events and feelings from a certain place and time (Anderson, 2004; Van Hoven, 2011). In addition, being in place with the participant can provide a more embodied understanding of the research topic (Pink, 2007; Riley, 2010). In his research on farm life histories, Riley (2010) gives the example of how one of the participants demonstrated how to turn hay with a fork, something the participant found hard to explain without having the fork at hand. This illustration draws attention to the role of the researcher in the data collection process, who should “take[] practice[s] seriously” in understanding place experiences (Hubbard et al., 2002, p. 161 in discussing Thrift’s notion of the geographer as an ‘observant participant’).

Several authors have contended that through walks traditional power relations of researcher/respondents can be overcome (Anderson, 2004; Carpiano, 2009; Van Hoven and Meijering, 2011), which can result in a more collaborative way of knowledge production (e.g. Anderson, 2004; Pink, 2008). Indeed, walks can allow a more informal and less confrontational way of interaction than sit-down interviews, which make participants feel at ease and make it easier for them to express themselves in everyday talk (Lee and Ingold, 2006). This can facilitate the gathering of knowledge about place experiences, as shown by Rowles, who felt that his participants “were eager to communicate their experiences more directly” (1978, p. 189) than they were in mental mapping exercises and diaries of daily activities. He therefore joined his participants in everyday activities, such as their routine walks around the neighbourhood. In the case of our research, participants were asked to conduct one of their routine walks so as to resemble, as closely as possible, their ‘usual’ experiences and use of their neighbourhood (Evans and Jones, 2011).

4.4 Research context and methodology
The research from which this articles draws was conducted in two neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, our research is not comparative in nature and in both neighbourhoods we explored different topics (see Lager et al., 2013; Lager et al., 2015). The neighbour-
hoods – the Oosterpark and Corpus den Hoorn – are located in Groningen, a city in the Northern Netherlands, with 198,395 inhabitants (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2014). Groningen can be considered a typical European city in terms of its high population density (2504 inhabitants per square meter: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2013) and its radio-concentric spatial structure. The Oosterpark and Corpus den Hoorn is home to 11,575 and 4,432 residents respectively (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2013). The Oosterpark, a working-class neighbourhood in the process of urban renewal, is located close to the city centre and dates from the 1930s (see Lager et al., 2013). The neighbourhood contains a variety of indoor meeting places, such as the multi-purpose buildings of the playground associations. Corpus den Hoorn was built between 1956 and 1960 as a self-contained neighbourhood, which is a type of neighbourhood built with a centre around which facilities and amenities are located. Nowadays, Corpus den Hoorn has a variety of shops that cater for the everyday needs of older residents, including a supermarket, a post office, a pharmacy and an optician. The Oosterpark, in contrast, had two supermarkets at the time of the interviews. Because of their compact spatial structure, the Oosterpark and Corpus den Hoorn can both be considered ‘walkable’ for older people. Cycling and walking are common modes of transportation for short distances in the Netherlands, with its relatively flat landscape and high population density. Among the older population (65+), trips made on foot increase while bicycle use decreases as they age (Jorritsma and Olde Kalter, 2008).

A total of twelve walking interviews were conducted in the summer of 2012 and the spring of 2013. The participants were all white and of Dutch origin (see Table 4 for participants’ characteristics). Before the walking interview, participants took part in a semi-structured interview conducted in their own home. The aim of the semi-structured interview was to elicit experiences, feelings and memories of everyday life in their neighbourhood. Following the semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked whether the principal researcher (Debbie Lager) could join them on one of their routine walks in order to obtain a better sense of their everyday life in the neighbourhood. The route, length, time of day and duration of the walk were determined by the participants who were requested to follow their routine walks as much as possible in order to minimise the risk of fatigue or injury. For participants’ safety and health, the walking interviews were only conducted in good weather conditions (i.e. no snow, ice or rain, and neither too cold nor too hot). Walks under less favourable weather conditions could have provided additional knowledge of older adults’ experiences and, in particular, barriers

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11 One of the indicators on the ‘activities of daily living’ scale, which is used by doctors to assess whether people are able to live in their own home and neighbourhood, is that one should be able to walk at least 400 meters (Paterson and Warburton, 2010). The Oosterpark and Corpus den Hoorn both span around 500-600 meters.
However, talking while walking and simultaneously navigating the urban environment can already be a challenge for people with balance disorders and visual or mobility impairments (Phillips et al., 2013), let alone adverse weather conditions.

The participant-led character of the walks led to some insecurity among respondents, who expressed concerns about whether the walk was interesting enough for the researcher and whether they were doing it correctly. In spite of these insecurities, all the respondents seemed to enjoy the walking interview in terms of acquainting the researcher with their neighbourhood and everyday life, which sheds light on the meaning of walking for their sense of place. However, we should note that of those who participated in the semi-structured interviews (30 in total), eighteen did not want to participate in the walking interviews. They indicated that they were not very mobile or fast and that the researcher should find more mobile participants, even though the researcher assured them that she would adjust to their pace of walking. The difference between the 'normal' mobile body of the researcher and the participants' less mobile and frail bodies may have fostered insecurities and led to the decision not to do the walk.

The interviews were audio recorded and the routes were recorded using Google My Tracks, which allowed the researcher to focus on observing the neighbourhood’s so-
4.5 Walking with older adults in their neighbourhood

Before discussing the results, we will provide a brief overview of the participants’ use of their local environment. In both neighbourhoods, most trips the participants undertook were made on foot and the majority walked on a daily basis. Most of these walks were destination-oriented, including trips to local shops, the bus stop and indoor meeting places, rather than walks for the sake of walking. The walking interviews revealed the experiential and felt dimensions of these –at first sight- mundane and functional walks (Lorimer, 2011). The routes the participants chose to walk for the interview offered rich insights in how ‘embodied ageing in place’ may be constituted in neighbourhood space. The remainder of this section is structured by the key themes that emerged from the walking interviews, and all relate to walking as a way of place making. These are: walking as the embodiment of feeling different, walking and making sociable neighbourhood space, and walking as ‘a trip down memory lane’.

4.5.1 Walking as the embodiment of feeling different

Being in place with the participants revealed the challenges of negotiating their ‘declining’ body in relation to the built environment. Hugman (1999) argued that the built environment communicates processes of social exclusion, thereby “making a profound statement that people here are different” (p. 198, original emphasis). This difference was felt by the participants while walking through the neighbourhood. For the researcher, adjusting to participants’ pace of walking gave a better insight into how feeling ‘different’ was embodied. This was particularly clear in the walks with two of the oldest participants, Jantje (female, 85) and Hendrika (female, 86), who both used walkers. Their reduced level of energy and sense of balance made the walk a tiring experience for them, which showed in their breathing. Standing in front of the senior apartment block where Hendrika lives, the researcher asked whether she was able to get on the kerb with her walker, as it seemed to cost her some effort. With both indignation and resignation in her voice, Hendrika answered:
"Well it’s okay. You can always walk straight through and cross the road over there [about 5 meters down the road], but they should have made a dropped kerb here. You are not going to walk over there, because you always have to go in the other direction because the shops are there. It’s stupid, they should first consider what kind of people live here and act accordingly."

This quote highlights the place-specific knowledge that walking interviews are able to generate (Evans and Jones, 2011), in this case the particular kerb that Hendrika needed to ‘conquer’. Hendrika’s routine walk to the shopping centre, furthermore, shows how places are made by routes (Lee and Ingold, 2006). From a planner’s perspective the dropped kerb may contribute to the built environment’s age-friendliness. However, when such an element does not fit into older residents’ routes and routines, this age-friendliness may not be felt and experienced.

Feelings of being different for our respondents were also evoked by elements in the built environment that signified how the ‘able-bodied’ seemed to be unaware of older and frail residents’ physical abilities (Matthews et al., 2003). In Corpus den Hoorn, at the initiative of a group of residents, an artwork was installed at one of the fringes of the neighbourhood which is supposed to act as a meeting place for residents as well as a place to enjoy the view over the adjacent canal (see Figure 7). The money for this project was made available by the ‘New Local Agreement’, a collaboration between the municipality and local housing corporations aimed at increasing resident participation and social cohesion in the urban renewal neighbourhoods. With anger and indignation, Petronella (female, 87) pointed at the inaccessibility of the artwork (known by residents as the ‘watchtower’) for older people:

**Petronella:** Look, there is the watchtower. The residents could think of something for the neighbourhood and it’s paid for by the municipality. But look, the path is very steep and you [young people] can walk up there, but you don’t want a watchtower. They made some ridges for going up, but how can you go down again?

**Interviewer:** It seems difficult to me to go up there with a walker.

**Petronella:** It’s completely impossible!

Moved by her indignation and anger Petronella indicated that she did not want to walk to the artwork (being about 50 metres away from us) and we continued with walking and talking about another topic. Petronella’s indignation at the inaccessibility of the artwork for older residents unveils the embodiment and emplacement of feeling excluded, to some extent, from neighbourhood space.
In spite of these negative experiences, the act of walking had positive connotations for the participants. During the walks, they all indicated that walking in old age is necessary in order to keep active and to prevent “becoming as stiff as a door” (Corrie, female, 78). Walkability literature stresses the health benefits of walking for older people (e.g. Wang and Lee, 2010; King et al., 2011) and so walking forms part of active ageing discourses. However, these activity discourses can impede a more nuanced view of bodily mobility in old age. Due to a chronic illness, for example, Antje (female, 68) makes use of a shared cab (a subsidised travel scheme) when she is in too much pain to walk. She expressed uneasiness about her use of the shared cab in terms of how other residents might perceive a discrepancy between her active (walking) and dependent (being driven) behaviour:

“I realise, now that I’m walking here with you [the researcher], that I still feel guilty about using the shared cab. Then I think, there are people who see me here [and disapprove]. But there are also people who say: “she got a good deal, a shared cab is much cheaper than having a car.” I know people in the neighbourhood who think like this. (...) I didn’t get a deal, I had many reservations about applying for [the shared cab scheme].”

This quote shows that there are certain norms and expectations of how old age should be performed. In this case, there seems to be a fixed dichotomy of either being active and
healthy or being ill and dependent. Moving between these categories, as Antje does, does not seem to match people’s expectations of how old age should be performed. These norms may to a certain extent become embodied and “incorporated into individuals’ subjectivity” (Holt, 2008, p. 240), thereby evoking feelings of difference during walks in the neighbourhood.

4.5.2 Walking and making sociable neighbourhood space

Lee and Ingold (2006) contended that “[w]alking around is fundamental to the everyday practice of social life” (p. 67). In later life, walking in the neighbourhood may be particularly important in conferring social life as one’s action radius may decrease and health and mobility related issues impede one’s use of other modes of mobility, such as the bicycle and the car. Interestingly, we found that making the neighbourhood a sociable place was much more salient in the walks with the participants in Corpus den Hoorn. The routes they chose to walk were informed by a need for sociability, which became clear in the places they visited during their walk, such as the shops at the square, and in their talk, which focused on the present social fabric of the neighbourhood. After having a chat with passers-by, participants would always proudly emphasise the sociable character of their walks to the researcher:

**Antje**: Hello! I’m doing an interview as an on older person in the neighbourhood and she [the researcher] wants to know where I walk.

**Passer-by**: That’s nice.

**Antje**: He [the passer-by] lived in the same apartment block as I did. She [the researcher] asks me: ‘how do you know this person?’. Well, we were neighbours. He had two dogs, and now one dog. How are you doing? [talking to the passer-by]

**Passer-by**: Good, good. See you, bye!

**Antje**: See [talking to the researcher], that’s how you have a chat. Sometimes I see him here, that’s very nice.

Gardner (2011), noticed a “’spring in [participants’] step’” (p. 266) when they were in pleasurable and sociable places. In a somewhat similar vein, during the walks the researcher noticed how the participants’ pride in their social contacts was embodied by their faces lighting up and the straightening of their back. In the Oosterpark participants were greeting and were greeted by passers-by, but they did not show such noticeable reactions. During the walks in the Oosterpark, participants were focused more on showing the researcher past neighbourhood life (on which we elaborate in the next section).

It may be that the participants in Corpus den Hoorn were more focused on the
neighbourhood’s present social atmosphere as they had had more social contacts and activities outside of the neighbourhood when they were younger, and before the time their mobility started to decrease (Lager et al., 2015). In contrast, for the Oosterpark participants the neighbourhood had been their central setting of experience throughout their life course, even when they had jobs, as most of their social contacts and activities took place within the neighbourhood (Lager et al., 2013). For the participants in Corpus den Hoorn, the neighbourhood as a social space seemed to have gained importance as they got older. Especially the social contacts with shop personnel and familiar others turned out to be highly valued by the participants (see also Gardner, 2011). While queuing at the checkout of the supermarket, the researcher asked Aaltje whether she knew the staff. Aaltje replied:

“I know them ... that’s nice when you get older. When you are young you are busy with your own things, but when you get older it’s nice to just have a chat. I think it has to do with getting older.... My mother always used to say, ‘You can smile and greet people, it doesn’t cost a thing.’ I didn’t greet people then [when I was young], I wasn’t a fool. But now, I even talk to a blade of grass.”

The importance of the local environment for participants’ social contacts in Corpus den Hoorn seemed to translate into place making strategies for seeing and meeting other people on a daily basis. The majority of participants would spread the tasks on their to-do list over the course of the week in order to have a reason to walk to the square where they could enjoy people’s presence and have an occasional chat (see also Lager et al., 2015). Walking with the participants showed the emplacement of sociability in the materiality of the neighbourhood. This is exemplified by Jantje (female, 85), who pointed to a bench close to a supermarket, which represented sociability to her:

“I always go grocery shopping here [supermarket at the square], then I also have a purpose, every day I get some groceries. Then I also meet this woman who is waiting for her taxi and I will sit next to her, which provides us both some companionship [gezelligheid in Dutch].”

This quote also stresses the importance of local shops as a reason for going out of the home. In a similar vein, Day (2008) found that in a neighbourhood with few local services, the participants would not walk around the neighbourhood much, and indicated that they had no reason to do so. In this light, purposive walking, which Wunderlich (2008, p. 131) describes as being of a “constant rhythmical and rapid pace” and which is focused on arrival at a particular destination, has a different meaning to older people. The partici-
pants’ walking rhythms were characterized by stops to have a short chat with passers-by (i.e. stillness incorporated in movement, see Cresswell, 2011) and there seemed to be no hurry in their pace of walking. When resting places, such as benches, are placed along residents’ routes they can facilitate these social interactions in the neighbourhood, thereby providing older adults’ need “to feel noticed and be visible in the world” (Gardner, 2011, p. 268).

4.5.3 Walking as ‘a trip down memory lane’

The walking interviews also highlighted how the neighbourhood can be a place that is experienced by the participants as “soaked in affective connections” (Jones and Evans, 2012, p. 2315). We specifically encountered this in the Oosterpark where participants planned a walk that took the researcher along places of their past, thereby literally making a trip down memory lane. The experiential dimension of the walks was focused on memorable past feelings of childhood and the Second World War and, most notably, a sense of community that used to be there in the past. It may not be surprising that walking through the neighbourhood evoked such memorable past feelings, as all the participants had lived in the Oosterpark for over 35 years (see Table 4). However, for those participants living in Corpus den Hoorn, walking through the neighbourhood did not evoke any allusions to past neighbourhood life. As we indicated in the previous section, the Oosterpark had been participants’ central setting of experience throughout their life course and this may, in part, explain such reference to past neighbourhood life.

The changes in the social atmosphere that participants experienced in the Oosterpark (Lager et al., 2013), may further explain their trip down memory lane. By means of these walks, they can relive and feel the sense of community that used to be there in the past. Walking in the neighbourhood revealed the spatial character of remembering (Degnen, 2005) the lost sense of community, since all of the memories were prompted by the sight of houses, buildings, parks and streets. Anna (female, 65), when walking past the canal near her home, remarked:

“It was [so] much fun here, everyone knew each other. There were people swimming here in the Van Starkenborgh canal. And people would [bring] a chair [to] the embankment in summer. They would take a thermos with tea and would sit there, and there were youngsters playing soccer.”

Degnen and Rose (2012) argued that memories influence the ways in which people experience the built environment and make meaning of places in the present. This also became clear in the accounts of the participants. Greetje (female, 67), for instance, talked a great deal about the ‘sense of community’ in the street where she used to live and
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how everyone would just enter each other’s houses through the back door instead of ringing the front doorbell. For Greetje, the fences that were put up between the houses some time ago represented the loss of this sense of community (see Figure 8). Seeing the fences during the walk, Greetje made these remarks:

**Greetje**: They [the housing corporation] put fences between the houses everywhere. It probably is necessary but it does not make it very cosy [gezellig]. I don’t like it.

**Interviewer**: Because you can’t go behind all the houses?

**Greetje**: Yes, with my bicycle I could cycle behind all the houses in the street. I don’t know why but it’s cosy. Especially in the summer, you see people then.

Interestingly, the walking interviews revealed that participants’ walking practices were also a means for keeping this sense of community alive. The ‘trip down memory lane’ was not just a single event enacted for the researcher. Moved by feelings of nostalgia, Marinus (male, 71), for instance, would often get together with neighbourhood friends to visit the street where he used to live. In this street, there were riots on New Year’s Eve 1997\(^\text{12}\), and

\(^{12}\) During these riots youths smashed the windows of a local politician’s home, raided two houses and pelted the fire brigade with stones (Zijlstra, 1998).
Marinus would visit the street to remember the good times before the riots. Standing in this particular street, Marinus remarked:

**Marinus:** There was so much going on here in this place ... You ran into each other every day and had a chat. That's the way it was. Later on, it changed. Nothing is left [of that nice atmosphere].

**Interviewer:** So now that all has disappeared, do you still feel at home when you walk here?

**Marinus:** Yes I do, I come here often. With my friends, I have a look here and then you start talking about what happened. And then it all comes back, you know, the good times.

This quote illustrates what Degnen (2005) referred to as the practiced nature of memories, which emerge in conversations and in this case also in visiting the place in question. In contrast to Marinus, Greetje usually avoided the street where she used to live as it was too painful for her to be confronted with the memories of the good contacts she had had with neighbours, something which she did not experience anymore. Although the participants did not make these trips down memory lane on a daily basis, they can be seen as a “conscious writing” (Holton and Riley, 2014, p. 64) and emplacement of themselves in the history of the neighbourhood through which they may be able to negotiate a sense of belonging through neighbourhood change (Lager et al., 2013).

### 4.6 Conclusions

This paper explored the subjective dimensions of older adults’ use of neighbourhood space by using walking interviews. We adopted the notion of ‘embodied ageing in place’ (Wiles and Allen, 2010) to highlight the interplay of the body, self and place in how older adults experience and make use of their neighbourhood. Some authors have stressed the experiential and felt dimensions of walking practices (Andrews et al., 2012; Hockey et al., 2013); with this paper we have provided empirical evidence of this view. Through walking interviews, we gained insight into the spatiality of older adults’ engagement with neighbourhood space and how walking acts as a way of place making (Lee and Ingold, 2006). We showed that this place making is an embodied and emplaced process, which bears physical, social and autobiographical components (Rowles and Watkins, 2003). The experiential and felt dimensions of place making moved the participants in the routes they chose to walk, their walking rhythms and the ways in which they embodied their feelings. The specific character of place making may be contingent on older adults’ engagement with the neighbourhood over their life course. On the one hand, we showed that for older people who began to spend more time in their neighbourhood when their...
action radius started to decrease, the need for sociability in their local area informed their experiences and use of their neighbourhood. On the other hand, for those who had spent most of their life in the neighbourhood, walking acted as an important way of reliving past neighbourhood life.

Our findings offer some new perspectives for thinking about and designing age-friendly neighbourhoods. The walks highlighted how places are made and experienced through routes (Lee and Ingold, 2006). It is important to identify the routes older residents walk in their neighbourhood in order to improve the walkability of these routes. As we showed, age-friendliness may not be experienced and felt by older people, when age-friendly elements do not adhere to how a neighbourhood is used. Improving the walkability of neighbourhoods involves facilitating older adults’ purposive walking. It is important to note that this includes allowing for a walking rhythm that is characterised by stops for rests and social encounters (see Cresswell, 2011) and sufficient local shops and services, which give older people a purpose to go out of the home and to walk in the neighbourhood. Consideration should also be given to the question of whether there is a need amongst older residents to retain affective connections with past neighbourhood life. Particularly for neighbourhoods undergoing change, retaining elements in the built environment which prompt such affective connections could instil a sense of continuity and belonging in the face of neighbourhood change as well as support the wellbeing of older adults (Jones and Evans, 2012).

The variety of affective engagement with neighbourhood space requires place sensitivity in designing age-friendly neighbourhoods. Walking interviews are a useful tool for obtaining place-specific information on why and where older people walk. Wunderlich (2008) argued that “we need to understand and explore walking as a design method in its own right that can inform the theory and practice of place-design” (p. 138). Adjusting to older adults embodied practices by the means of walking could result in more empathy for this group as well as a better understanding of how the urban environment can be more supportive to their needs (see also Spinney, 2014). Joining residents’ everyday walks in their neighbourhood could also be a way to connect with vulnerable older people, who tend to be excluded from public engagement in planning processes (Hockey et al., 2013). Increasing numbers of older people with dementia are ageing in place and it will be particularly important for this group of people that the neighbourhood environment supports their physical, social and cognitive needs (Skinner et al., 2014).

Not much is yet known about the wellbeing effects of walking and how places may foster or hinder such wellbeing effects (Ettema and Smajic, 2014). With this paper, we revealed that walking in the neighbourhood can evoke a sense of exclusion, memorable past feelings (both nostalgic and painful), and a sense a proudness of one’s social
encounters. These experienced and felt dimensions of neighbourhood space show that walking in later life is not only about active ageing, but is entwined with the “emotional-spatial dynamics and place embedded nature of relationships, identities, and experiences in older age” (Skinner et al., 2014, p. 17). Whether neighbourhoods and communities support positive residential experiences (Golant, 2011) is an issue of social justice and “strongly connected with an understanding of the phenomenon of ageism” (Day, 2010, p. 2671). More research is needed to explore older adults’ experiences of other modes of mobility, how these experiences influence their use of places, and how mobile methods can aid in understanding these processes.

**Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the respondents for sharing with us the routes of their past and present lives in their neighbourhoods. We would also like to thank Koen Salenmink for his feedback in the early stages of this paper. This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Ubbo Emmius Fund.

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