Reconceptualising the person–environment relationship

Introduction

This chapter examines how the findings gained from researching 'place and ageing' in deprived neighbourhoods build on and progress our knowledge in the field of environmental gerontology. This chapter brings together and summarises the findings from 26 interviews in Manchester and 26 interviews in Vancouver – as expressed through eight case studies, 44 short biographies (Appendices A and B) and three participants' photographs and descriptive text. It proposes a reconceptualisation of factors important in the person–environment relationship; such as the consideration of temporal dimensions (for example, past, present and future) and intervening variables (for example, such as religion and spirituality, and lifecourse). The chapter also explores issues around comparative research, factors associated with 'place and ageing', outcome variables (for example, quality of life and identity), and methodological and analytical aspects of the research. The final section summarises the study's contribution to the advancement of knowledge on place and ageing.

Cross-national research – empirical findings

The strength and uniqueness of this study is, in part, based on the comparative analysis of older people living in deprived urban neighbourhoods in England and Canada. Although there has been a growth in comparative research in recent years, as illustrated and discussed in Chapter One, there remains a paucity of comparative research within the environmental gerontology literature. Added to this, there is a lack of research within England and Canada investigating concepts of place and ageing, particularly in deprived urban neighbourhoods. Therefore, this research is in the unique position of being able to add to scientific knowledge not only in general, but also cross-nationally and within each country.

Findings from 26 interviews in Manchester and 26 in Vancouver were compared cross-nationally in relation to three factors. These were:

- environmental categories – comfort, management and distress;
- factors underlying place and ageing;
- the relationship between place and ageing and well-being.

Analysis of the interviews across these three factors reveals significant similarity of findings within and across countries. Findings revealed similar factors underlying older people's experience of place and ageing, and in the relationship between place and ageing and reports of well-being (that is, quality of life and identity). Each of these factors will be discussed later.

Although findings with respect to the cross-national comparisons were similar, there were differences with respect to neighbourhoods. As previously highlighted, the DES differed from the other neighbourhoods on a number of sociodemographic characteristics; namely, the area had a greater proportion of men, individuals who were single and had never married, people with multiple health problems and people reporting neither good nor poor quality of life. In addition to these differences, the interview data collected with residents in the DES also reflected a differing discourse on neighbourhood. Interviewees tended to use more negative or emotive words to describe their area. 'Skid row' was used frequently to refer to or describe the area; this was used by participants in both the DES and Grandview-Woodland. Other descriptive words related to the resident population of the area, such as drug addicts, sex trade workers and mental health patients. One participant even referred to the DES as resembling a concentration camp (see Ms Laing in Chapter Five) and another as "worse than the London slums" (see Mr O'Farrell in Appendix B). In addition, almost all interviewees mentioned having to be careful about the friends they made in the area and there were frequent references to 'trust' related to people living in the area. Expression of self-identity as 'unlike' the area or residents in the area was particularly evident in interviews conducted in the DES. The need to be identified outside of the immediate context or 'out of place' was evident in a number of residents living there. This was illustrated in the case study of Mr Matthews, but was evident in a number of other interviews conducted in the DES (see Appendix B – Keppol Polanski, Robert O'Farrell, Azimoon Rahaman and Mabel Smith).

It should be clarified that these neighbourhood differences did not change the main findings associated with place and ageing. Rather, they facilitated examination of a more extreme level of urban 'deprivation'. These differences, it is argued, might make the experience of place and ageing comparatively more challenging than in other neighbourhoods. This supports some neighbourhood effects research, in that there exists a greater or lesser degree of deprivation, which might be more intensively experienced in some areas compared with others (see Krause, 1996; Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001; Buck, 2001). Despite these areas sharing similar characteristics, this research highlights the heterogeneity among these types of areas and the need to consider this in analysing findings.

Environmental experience

According to La Gory et al (1985) 'older persons sharing the same neighbourhood do not necessarily occupy the same environmental worlds' (p 405). This study supports this. Research findings revealed a diversity in the experience of place

and ageing for older people in these neighbourhoods. In particular, this supports other literature findings on the individualisation of the environment (Gubrium, 1973; Lawton and Nahemow, 1973; Rowles, 1978; Kahana, 1982; Golant, 1984; Peace et al, 2003). Although recognising the diversity in experience, both literature (for example, Rowles, 1978) and the current research have found support for common themes in people's experiences of place. In this research, three common environmental themes emerged from the data. This was found across all five neighbourhoods in England and Canada; these were environmental comfort, environmental management and environmental distress.

These categories were found to apply across nations and neighbourhoods. In addition, proportionally similar numbers of participants were found in each category and in each nation. Just over one in three of those interviewed were found to be in a state of 'comfort' with respect to their neighbourhood. This was illustrated with the case studies of Mary Perkins (Manchester) and Jennifer MacDougall (Vancouver). They perceived their area as having low environmental demand or risk and they had sufficient personal resources (for example, social support, financial security) to enable a sense of environmental ease within their daily life. Within this group, the environment appeared not to present barriers or restrict the negotiation of their daily life. There was also a strong sense of place attachment to the immediate neighbourhood and there was no desire to move. Ratings of quality of life were typically good or very good. Place and ageing in this situation was supported by the environmental and/or personal situation of the older person.

Close to half of the research participants were found to be trying actively to manage their neighbourhood. This was illustrated in the case studies of Muriel Allen (Manchester), Helen Fox (Manchester), Berry Matthews (Vancouver) and Howard Adams Goodleaf (Vancouver). These participants perceived their neighbourhood as having a number of risks that presented challenges to their personal competence. Older people in this category were acutely aware of the presses in their environment, but managed to remain engaged within the neighbourhood. Issues of emotive attachment to place were evident. However, this was not necessarily located within their immediate neighbourhood. For those whose emotive connection was located in another neighbourhood, there was, not surprisingly, a desire to move, usually back to the neighbourhood they were attached to. However, for those attached to their immediate neighbourhood, there was a desire to age in place. In general, quality of life ratings appeared divided – those who wished to stay in place reported a good quality of life and those attached elsewhere reported neither a good nor a poor quality of life.

Environmental management supports the notion, originally neglected by prominent theorists such as Lawton and Nahemow (1973), that people are active agents of their environment, that despite strong environmental challenges people find the personal resources to negotiate daily life and maintain well-being. The idea of environmental proactivity, later developed by Lawton (1990), relates to this idea. This also provides support for the resilience literature related to older

people (Hardy, 2004), and might also contribute to successful ageing and ageing-well literature (Baltes and Baltes, 1990; Johnson, 1995).

Almost one in five of older research participants were found to be in a state of 'distress' with respect to their neighbourhood. This was evident in the case studies of Harold Waters (Manchester) and Elizabeth Laing (Vancouver). Mr Waters appeared acutely affected by environmental presses and although Ms Laing had relocated to another neighbourhood, the DES, her previous neighbourhood, continued to present a source of distress. In this environmental distress category, significant challenges and disruptions to place and ageing were evident. Environmental presses presented the individuals with significant demands and risks for managing daily life. Personal resources, in general, were unable to cope and maladaptive behaviour and psychological distress were present. There was no evidence of current place attachment, but in some cases there was evidence of disruptions to place attachment, and there was a strong desire to relocate; however, people lacked resources and options to do so. For those who were once attached to their neighbourhood, but at present experienced disruptions to place attachment, psychological distress appeared to be more acute compared to those who had never been attached to place. This supported Lambek and Antze's (1996, p xvi) claim that memories can undermine identity 'by glimpses of a past that no longer seems to be ours'. In addition to identity, failed or disrupted attachments threaten well-being (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Rowles and Ravdal, 2002). This was evident in the poor to very poor quality of life reported by people in this group, and connected to this was their discourse on self-worth and well-being, as illustrated by Mr Waters, who felt that "nobody cares about you now".

The environmental distress category largely supports Lawton's (1980, 1982) environmental docility hypothesis. In numerous cases, environmental press overwhelmed personal competences and led to negative affect and maladaptive behaviour, for example Mr Walters stated that he was "not really interested in living. If I die, I die". However, there were a few cases that challenged the direction of this relationship. In particular, having low competences and high presses did not necessarily negatively impact on ratings of quality of life. This was supported in the case of Roberta Peterson and Millicent Taylor (see Appendix B) where religion appeared to be a protective factor against poor quality of life. This highlights the need to respect the complexity of the person–environment relationship.

The environmental categories (comfort, management and distress) found within this research have support within the literature (Lawton and Nahemow, 1973; Kahana, 1982; Lawton et al, 1982; Brown, 1995). Lawton's competence-press has been recognised as influencing – after an inductive analysis of transcripts – the discourse and basic theoretical framework around docility and proactivity used within this research. However, this is as far as the similarity extends. These categories are unique in that they are generated from qualitative data and evolved from the discourse of older people's narratives about place and ageing. These environmental categories also respect and accept the complexity of the person–environment relationship, such as the acknowledgement of life history

and religion/spirituality – for an example, see the case study of Howard Adams Goodleaf in Chapter Five. This is difficult to find within many of the current conceptual models and frameworks in the environmental science literature. In particular, a critique of Lawton's and others' approach to the study of older people's environmental experience relates to the imposing of quantitative measures in the construction of these frameworks (for example, the Ecological Model of Ageing). This approach prevents the expression of other factors that might be significant in the understanding of the older person and their environment. In addition, although Lawton and others have praised the competence-press model for supporting a combination of person–environment scenarios, the relationship is unidirectional. For example, strong press and low competence equates to negative affect and maladaptive behaviour. This research challenges this straightforward relationship. There is evidence within this research to suggest that this is not necessarily the scenario; spirituality/religion and/or life history might intervene as possible protective factor(s) against negative affect (for example, see Roberta Peterson and Millicent Taylor, Appendix B). In addition, as was illustrated in the case study of Mr Waters (see Chapter Five), environmental proactivity can operate within a situation of environmental distress. These 'complexities' are accounted for in the development and design of Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Person–environment relationships
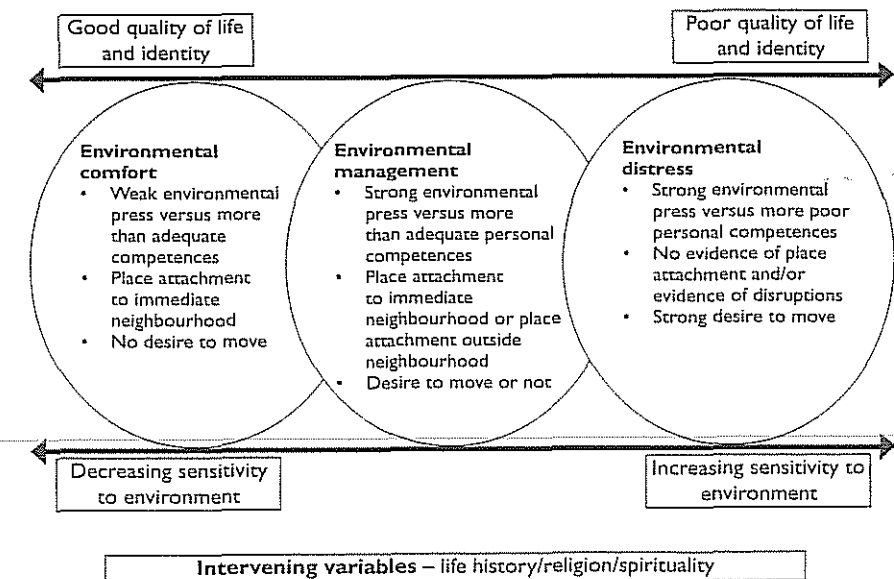
The reliance on conceptual models such as the competence-press and its approach to data generation might in part be a major factor in criticism about the 'languishing state' and 'lack of innovativeness' associated with environmental ageing research. In addition, despite significant achievements of research in this area, Parmelee and Lawton (1990) and Wahl and Weisman (2003) both recognise that there 'remains no cure or remedy'. This research, in part, addresses solutions and presents new ideas to move the study of environmental gerontology forward.

Factors in place and ageing

This part of the discussion of findings centres around exploring the factors important in place and ageing. Specifically, why do some older people wish to remain in place, in spite of strong environmental presses, and what are the factors behind others' desire to leave their place despite the generally conceived notion within the literature that ageing in place is optimal?

The interviews and photographs revealed a number of factors important in place and ageing. Across the two nations and five neighbourhoods, participants revealed a similar discourse in their underlying accounts of place and ageing. These findings parallel and support those found by Rowles and others, but also go beyond this by suggesting the inclusion of other factors that might be relevant to the study of older people living in neighbourhoods characterised by multiple risks. These are:

- physical attachment and area knowledge;
- social attachment;
- historical attachment;
- religiosity and spirituality;
- the life history;
- public spaces.

Physical attachment and area knowledge

Physical attachment was found to be an important factor in place and ageing for older people in all five neighbourhoods, regardless of the national context. Within the literature, physical attachment is one of the key reasons given in defence of ageing in place. This research supports the idea that people develop 'intimate knowledge' of their physical environment that helps them to manage daily life despite declines in health. The research findings not only support physical attachment based on barriers imposed by declines in functional health (for example, Helen Fox, Jennifer MacDougall), but also barriers imposed by environmental presses and psychological concerns based on these presses. These are discussed in detail later.

According to Rowles (1983a, 1983b), the ability to develop intimate familiarity with an environment is important in place attachment. Physical connection

presented in this research supports and is similar to Rowles' (1980, 1983a, 1990) concept of physical insideness and Lawton's (1985) 'state of residential knowing'. According to Rowles, attachment to place might, in part, be physical because of a propensity, through years of residence or adaptation, to form physical attachments. Similarly, 'Intimate knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of one's dwelling ... enhance the unit's livability' (Lawton, 1985, p 508). A significant focus and conclusion of Rowles and Lawton's research was that this physical knowledge masked declines in functional health status. Intimate knowledge or physical insideness has been found to hide declines in functional health, enabling older people to maximise their independence. Certainly, this can be argued to be evident in a number of the interviews and case studies in this research; most specifically, Mrs Jennifer MacDougall (Vancouver) and Mrs Helen Fox (Manchester). Years of residence in their neighbourhood and continuous performance of physical tasks is argued to have enabled a higher level of functional performance despite significant physical challenges. Both women were able to maintain presence within their environment or restructure it in a way that retains an acceptable level of environmental independence. For Mrs MacDougall (aged 90), the intimate knowledge she had developed of her neighbourhood enabled her to maintain a busy five-day-a-week schedule and to maintain a level of environmental comfort, despite health problems. Her interview provided particularly rich data on her physical as well as social relationship with her neighbourhood. For Mrs Fox, the restructuring of her living space to the ground floor of her house allowed her to remain active socially and physically in place despite significant mobility problems (that is, being wheelchair-bound).

Place attachment might also be an important factor in successful adaptation to spatial restriction. Having a 'history' in the development of physical knowledge might lead to intensification of emotive feelings about place. As suggested by Rowles (1978, p 202), 'constriction in the realm of action accompanied by expansion of geographical fantasy' might precipitate 'selective intensification' of feelings about place. This can be argued in relation to the case of Mrs MacDougall and Mrs Fox. Mrs Fox's physical health challenges appeared to have reinforced her need to age in place. Place attachment in this situation appeared a consequence of a strong need to be seen as independent and have a sense of continuity of a past 'busy' self, key to this remaining engaged physically and socially with the community. The recognised value of geographical fantasy and reminiscence was evident in Mrs MacDougall's case study. In her short story *A walk down memory lane* she presents a vivid illustration of past neighbourhood memories and recognised the value of memories to help her in the future, stating "good memories, in one's later life, are better than money in the bank.... And maybe, I will have some warm memories of this day years from now when I might be feeling a little bit lonely".

Spatial restriction might further feelings of place attachment by acting as a protective factor in the face of negative neighbourhood change. As suggested by La Gory et al (1985), more active lifestyles might be necessary for people

to experience environmental stresses, and therefore possible disruptions to place attachment. Certainly, there is some evidence to suggest that Mrs Fox's neighbourhood has negatively changed, particularly in respect to neighbours and crime. However, as this area is peripheral to the immediate maintenance and management of her daily environment, she appears largely to be unaffected by these negative environmental changes. Rather, the emphasis is on the immediate surroundings for reification of her past self (for example, independent self) and present self (for example, still managing to be independent).

Also important in physical insideness is area knowledge. It is generally recognised in the environmental gerontology literature that area knowledge is advantageous (Rowles, 1978; Lawton, 1985). Knowing whom one can count on and where to satisfy needs has important implications for environmental control and mastery (Francis, 1989; Oswald et al, 2003a). Area knowledge is an important feature in the management of daily life and/or enables at least some level of environmental coping despite significant distress. This appeared particularly relevant to the current study. Findings revealed that physical attachment not only supported increased functional health, but was also important and sensitive in relation to alleviating psychological (for example, fear of crime) and environmental barriers (for example, trouble spots). Physical attachment and intimate area knowledge enables interaction and participation in the neighbourhood that might not be achieved in their absence. Area knowledge in the majority of the interviews, case studies and photographs appeared to be predominantly governed by a need to ease psychological fear, specifically, fear of crime, rather than a feature of functional health decline. This can be illustrated by creating a path or routine that maximises experience of place and minimises psychological distress. The case studies of Mr Waters and Mr Matthews best illustrate this point, in addition to photographs and descriptive text generated by Mr Bennett. Mr Bennett illustrated this when referring to areas that were safe during the day, areas in which people would need to 'proceed with caution', and 'no go areas'. This feature of area knowledge or physical attachment has largely been neglected within the literature, possibly in part because it is a feature associated with older people who live under these particular types of conditions and within these types of neighbourhoods.

Routines might also be evidence of physical attachment. In many of the interviews and case studies in the environmental comfort and management categories, there was evidence of a familiar physical existence of daily life; specifically, the day or week was constructed around a general routine or frequency of certain activities performed at certain times of the day or week, such as walks, housework and social engagements. For example, for Ms Allen this revolved around her twice-daily walks in the parks with her dogs. For Mrs MacDougall, being able to physically manage a complete weekly schedule was important. In the case of Mrs Perkins, this was her almost daily visits to the shops. And for Mrs Fox, routine was located in her ability to manage her immediate environment, such as doing her housework, despite her functional health problems. As suggested by Rubinstein (1986, 1988), the ability to construct a routine based on either a full

day or a week is indicative of how well a person is physically and psychologically coping with their environment. This feature was certainly evident in this research. Older people who had a routine were found to be managing or comfortable within their environment, while those who did not have a routine were found to be in a distressed state. This was particularly evident in the case of Mr Waters.

Social attachment

Social attachment was found to be important in place and ageing in all five neighbourhoods. This supports a significant research literature that links social support and place attachment (Rowles, 1980, 1983a, 1983b; St. John et al, 1986; Francis, 1989; Mesch and Manor, 1998; Fried, 2000; Sugihara and Evans, 2000; Cattell, 2004). Social connection in this research parallels Rowles' (1983a) concept of social insideness. Specifically, people form social affinity with their area through social integration and participation, and thus create emotive attachment to place.

Findings revealed that formation of social connections within the neighbourhood is an important factor in place and ageing. Older people who had social support within their neighbourhood were more likely to be attached, and tended to cite friends as the reason they would not move (for example, see Alfred and Serta Williams in Appendix B). Equally, those who had social connections beyond their immediate neighbourhood frequently expressed a desire to move so that they could be closer to their family/friends (see the case study of Mr Matthews in Chapter Five). Therefore, the social integration of the older person within their neighbourhood is a key feature in place and ageing.

A range of social connections was found across the interviews, case studies and photographs. Some participants expressed a strong sense of informal social ties, which were important in relation to their need to age in place; being close to family and friends was especially significant (see Mrs Perkins). However, for some the development of formal relationships appeared to be just as significant to creating a sense of belonging. Both Ms Allen and Mrs MacDougall valued their many acquaintances. For Ms Allen, the interaction she had with people she met while walking her dogs played a significant role in her day (for example, determining whether she was out for one or two hours) and reinforced her self-identity. This was also found in the photographs and descriptive text provided by Ms Flora Clark, in which the majority of images centred around people she had met that day. This supports the idea that social integration provides a sense of belonging and possibly leads to place attachment and development.

The importance of social connection or belonging as a feature of place and ageing might best be strengthened with a look at failed social connections. Perceived failed social attachments were particularly acute in the case studies of Mr Waters and Mr Matthews. For Mr Waters, the lack of social support within his neighbourhood was inadequate for his level of need. This translated into his feelings of nobody caring and his continuous references to being bored. The inability

to form social attachments in his immediate neighbourhood led Mr Waters to seek some sense of social belongingness elsewhere. This was in part satisfied, if only temporarily, by his regular visits to the pub. Lack of social attachments was also a feature in the case of Mr Matthews. Evidence suggests that Mr Matthews tried to develop some sense of social connection to the neighbourhood (for example, through volunteer work and friendships in his place of residence). However, he found this largely unsuccessful. These failed social attachments can be argued to have had two effects: first, they caused Mr Matthews to seek a sense of belongingness outside his neighbourhood, and, second, they hindered his attachment to place. This supports the idea that failed social integration within the neighbourhood, when it is sought, leads to feelings of rejection and abandonment of place attachment.

Historical attachment

The historical attachment of older people to their neighbourhood was found to be an important feature in the development or hindrance of factors associated with place and ageing. This is supported by other research findings (Rowles, 1980, 1983a, 1993; Taylor, 2001). In particular, Rowles' concept of autobiographical insideness supports notions of a historical connection to place. Historical connection in this study relates to how older people's personal history is intertwined and rooted, usually developed through years of residence within the area. This historical connection enables reminiscence and review of the lifecourse, and has been found to be important in psychological well-being (Butler, 1963; Bornat, 1994; Taylor, 2001). Indeed, according to Rowles (1980), this might represent the strongest indication of people's attachment to place.

Within the interviews, case studies and photographs of older people who had remained in place for a significant part of their lives, the presence of historical connection to place was evident. This was particularly salient in the photographs and descriptive text provided by Ms Allen (Manchester) and Mr Bennett (Vancouver), and the case study of Mrs MacDougall (Vancouver). All of these cases present rich descriptive data concerning older people's historical connection with their neighbourhood. Ageing in place has been found to be critical for intensifying place attachment; according to Rowles (1980), autobiographical insideness can rarely be created in a new setting. This was certainly supported by Mrs MacDougall's short story (see Appendix C) in which she stated: "Twice I moved to other areas of Vancouver. I was miserable. I moved back. I came back because a lot of good memories are connected to this area".

Reminiscence or memories associated with historical connection might also undermine place attachment and psychological well-being. This is certainly evident in the case study of Mr Waters. In this situation, reminiscence, unlike what is generally portrayed in the literature, is negatively perceived and life review within the context is undermined. Recollection of the neighbourhood and neighbours of the past appears to continuously produce a sense of loss and

isolation, and serves to create a global feeling that nobody cares. This situation hinders and disrupts place and ageing.

Religiosity and spirituality

Religiosity and spirituality were found within this research to represent important factors in the relationship of the older person to their environment. The findings revealed two underlying factors relevant to the consideration of place and ageing: the idea that life situations are governed by 'God's will', and that individuals might have a more spiritual relationship with place. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

The idea that 'God's will' governs one's life was evident in a number of interviews, particularly among Black Caribbean residents in Moss Side (see Appendix B: Elsie Forester, Marva Collins, Patricia Reilly, Felicity Parker, Millicent Taylor, Sydney Potter and Roberta Peterson). For these older people, God was a significant feature and source of guidance in daily life, with some perhaps perceiving their daily struggles with their neighbourhood as representing a test of their faith. Certainly, this can be argued in the situations of Millicent Taylor and Roberta Peterson, both of whom were found to be in a situation of environmental distress, yet reported a good quality of life. Religion might be a significant intervening or protective factor. This is supported by Krause (1998), who established that the negative effects of living in run-down neighbourhoods were reduced for older people who used religion as a coping strategy. Therefore, religious factors associated with place and ageing need to be considered much more fully within environmental gerontology research, especially where such research encompasses the perceptions of minority ethnic older people.

Another important factor relates to individuals' spiritual relationship with place. Surprisingly, spirituality has received relatively little attention within the relevant literature. This might be attributable to the fact that a large amount of empirical research has been focused on white middle-class America, and has consequently neglected other ethnic or cultural groups' relationship with place. Within this study, the inclusion of a variety of ethnic groups allowed exploration of cross-cultural differences in the experience of place and ageing. This was certainly captured with the interview of Howard Adams Goodleaf, the First Nations man in the DES. His relationship with place was based on a spiritual connection to his ancestors, and the idea that 'place' (that is, land) was sacred and provided the means of subsistence. The inability to establish an equivalent spiritual relationship with place in his current neighbourhood caused significant stress in his daily life, which he described as being a "struggle from the time you get up in the morning". Consideration of older people's spiritual relationship with place can arguably provide a different perspective and understanding of place and ageing factors. Future research might wish to consider taking this feature into consideration.

The life history

The lifecourse or life history was found to influence factors associated with place and ageing in this study. Connected to this is the danger of romanticising place attachment; as suggested by Hummon (1986, 1992) and Western (1993), attachment to place is not a collective phenomenon. In the present study, lack of feelings of place attachment was found among a number of participants in both Manchester and Vancouver neighbourhoods. This lack of attachment, despite research suggesting that failed attachments are detrimental, did not appear to be maladaptive to psychological well-being (for example, identity and quality of life). Lack of place attachment to an area might have been a feature of the lifecourse, length of residence and absence of physical and psychological need. This was particularly evident in the DES, most likely reflecting the lifecourse mobility of many of the participants. Many interviewees had lived very transient lifestyles, moving from one job to another across the country, working away in the logging camps (in the British Columbia interior), and some had even experienced periods of homelessness. Lifecourse factors were evident in the case study of Ms Laing and in a number of other interviews (see Appendix B: Frank Lander, George Knotsberry and John Rankin). Exploring the lifecourse of the individual presents a greater depth of understanding of and insight into individual factors associated with place and ageing.

Public spaces

Public spaces appear to be important in older people's positive experience of place and ageing. Public spaces in this research related primarily to local parks. The importance of parks for psychological well-being was found in the case study of Ms Allen and Mr Matthews. However, they appeared to serve different functions. For Ms Allen, the presence of a park in her neighbourhood appeared to reinforce social and historical connectedness, and hence place attachment to the area. For Mr Matthews, on the other hand, concerns over safety connected to his neighbourhood park precipitated a connection with a park located outside his neighbourhood, providing a means of escape and a strategy for coping with environmental demands. As is highlighted in the literature, public spaces, in particular parks, are an underutilised resource primarily because of fear of personal safety (Mumford and Power, 2003). In research examining the effects of development and regeneration of community parks and gardens by local residents increased rates of civic engagement and attachment were found (Francis, 1989; Armstrong, 2000). Attention of policy makers to the social value of public spaces (for example, parks) in deprived areas might work to increase population well-being and place attachment.

Another consideration in the importance of parks to place and ageing might be connected to spirituality. As in the case study of Mr Goodleaf and his deep connection with the land, parks might provide a way for urban residents to connect with 'mother nature'. There is a lack of research exploring this particular issue. This research suggests that some individuals have a need to connect with nature in order to sustain well-being and place attachment.

Quality of life and identity

It can be argued from the findings of this study that quality of life and identity are, in part, environmentally driven. Across the three environmental categories (comfort, management, distress), quality of life and identity differ according to the categories. Older people within the environmental comfort category were, in general, found to have very good to good quality of life, compared with those within the environmental distress grouping, who, in general, expressed very poor to poor quality of life. Older people in the environmental management category tended to rate quality of life as either good or neither good nor poor. The connection between quality of life and the environment was strongly evident in a number of the case studies, for example Elizabeth Laing, Harold Waters and Robert O'Farrell (see Chapter Five and Appendix B). Ms Laing argued that her quality of life had significantly improved upon relocation from the DES, while Mr Waters suggested that his life was made poor by his environmental conditions, lack of good neighbours, fear of crime and neighbourhood decline. Mr O'Farrell simply felt he could not talk about quality of life while living in the DES. This suggests that, at least for some older people, quality of life is environmentally bound. This supports literature findings suggesting an association between the person–environment relationship and quality of life as an outcome measure (Farquhar, 1995; Raphael et al, 1999; Stevens-Ratchford and Diaz, 2003; Gabriel and Bowling, 2004; Wiggins et al, 2004). Therefore, improvements in quality of life need to be addressed through the tackling of environmental press factors that impinge on well-being. This has implications for policies on regeneration and the renewal of deprived neighbourhoods.

However, solely looking at this relationship in this way ignores the complexity of quality of life (Smith, 2000). Although the findings largely reflect a predictable relationship between place and quality of life, there were some cases in which quality of life was good despite 'distress' and 'neither good nor poor' despite 'comfort'. This possibly suggests one of two things. First, as previously stated, quality of life is complex and individualised. In this context, place might not be a salient feature in quality of life if other factors are currently the focus, such as health, family relationships or finances. Second, spirituality/religion and the lifecourse might work as protective factors against negative environmental factors and hence perceptions of well-being. This is supported by previous research that reported a connection between environmental deterioration and religious coping strategies (Krause, 1998).

Place attachment was found to be significant for quality of life and perceived identity. For Mr Waters, disruptions to place attachment in terms of his inability to reintegrate and form satisfying relationships clearly impacted on his feelings of

self-worth and psychological well-being. This is supported within the literature (Cutchin, 2001; Peace et al, 2003). Harnessing and supporting place attachment in these environments has implications for the quality of life of residents and the community. In general, older people in this study who were attached to their immediate neighbourhood were found to report a better quality of life than those who were not attached (but wished to be) and/or were experiencing disruptions. It also needs to be mentioned that not everyone was found to be attached, and that those who lacked attachment did not necessarily confirm that they had a poor quality of life. A good example here would be the situation of Ms Laing. This raises the issue of romanticising place.

Connected to quality of life is self-worth or identity, which was found to be a factor influenced by place and ageing. Reification of the self within the study's context was viewed as both personally and environmentally bound. The research supports Kaufman (1986) and Brandtstädter and Greve (1994), who argue that the ageing self seeks continuity, and is resilient and resourceful in spite of personal change(s). In addition, the current research suggests possible environmental factors that challenge the self. Achieving positive or negative reification of the self might be dependent on the level of support needed and the ability of the environment to meet this level.

The self is viewed as drawing meaning from the past as a way of recreating the present self (Kaufman, 1986). This is evident in Mrs Fox's case study, where there was evidence of a connection to aspects of her former self and life, for example "I've had a very good life ... I get photographs to show my granddaughter when I was about 18 or 19". The mechanisms highlighted by Rowles (1980, 1983a) that allowed for reinforcing memories of the past were the preservation of artefacts such as pictures, and ongoing participation in a familiar setting. Reminiscence through pictures and videos represented a feature that gave pleasure to her life; sharing pictures of herself when she was a teenager with her granddaughter and looking at family videos enabled reification of the self and preservation of identity as it was in the past, not as it is in the present. The ability to remain or age in place likely enabled preservation of and continuity to her past self and life.

However, this research suggests that the ageless self is also strongly environmentally bound and constructed, in that the environment can work to support or threaten achieved continuity to the ageing self. According to Rowles (1978, 1980, 1983), people's identities are *intertwined*, *preserved* and *reinforced* by the place they live. Evidence of this was found in a number of interviews and in the case study analyses. For example, Mrs Fox's ability to retain her independence despite profound functional health challenges was, in part, environmentally determined; consider for a moment what would happen if her immediate environment became too much to manage or she was forced to relocate – this would likely create significant challenges to her 'independent self'. Certainly, a coherent and continuous sense of self would be threatened. This is connected to the work of Peace et al (2003) on place attachment and identity maintenance; their findings revealed that individuals have a comfort level for environmental connectedness,

which enables maintenance of the self and mastery over the environment. This further reinforces the importance of environmental management or ageing in place in the maintenance and preservation of the self within a context of personal and/or environmental change. Similarly, Mrs MacDougall's drive to 'keep going' and retain an active weekly schedule was, in part, supported by her level of achieved environmental comfort. In this case study there was evidence to suggest that a change in environmental support might negatively influence the self.

There is, however, evidence to suggest that rejection of the immediate environment can also enable positive reification of the self. In the case study of Mr Matthews, rejection of the immediate environment (for example, the people and neighbourhood) as unlike or dissimilar to the self, enabled retention of a positive self-image and connection to his previous life – "I grew up with people with money". This was similarly found in Novak and Lerner's (1968) study, in which rejection of the self as unlike others was a protective factor for self-esteem and self-worth.

Although the environment in this situation is considered primarily as a strategy to enhance environmental coping, it should be mentioned that it can also undermine the self. Findings from interviews and case studies on reification of the self in situations of environmental distress and disruptions to place attachment suggest an inability to construct a coherent sense of self. This was evident in the case study of Mr Waters, in which he perceived his environment as unfeeling and uncaring. This appeared to translate into his personal feelings of low self-worth and the idea that no one would care if he died. This supports Golant's (2003, p 642) argument that those older people 'whose self-concepts are strongly rooted or anchored to past experiences and behaviors (the proverbial "living in the past") may experience the most difficulties'.

Summary

Comparative analysis of 26 interviews in Manchester and 26 interviews in Vancouver revealed similarities across the environmental categories of comfort, management and distress, in factors underlying place and ageing, and in the relationship between 'place and ageing' and well-being. Examination of place and ageing within the two countries has come at a time when these and other nations are focused on meeting the needs of an increasingly ageing society and on solving some of the challenges present in urban areas. Certainly, findings from this study provide support for the consideration of a more complex relationship between the older person and their environment. Despite the environmental challenges present in the areas in the study, over one in three older people interviewed was found to be comfortable within their environment, expressing in some cases strong commitment to place. There was also a significant number, almost half, who were found to manage. This illustrates the resilience of older people, and their adaptability to environmental and personal changes. In some cases, despite strong environmental presses, there was a desire to age in place. However, for others this

was not the situation and these individuals might benefit from government policies aimed at tackling some of the underlying factors hindering place and ageing. For example, programmes aimed at increasing community participation such as development of local parks or gardens might aid in place attachment. However, attention also needs to be given to tackling broader issues such as crime.

The research also highlights a significant number of older people who were in distress, and did not feel that ageing in place was optimal. Nine out of the 52 research participants were acutely negatively aware of their environment and expressed a wish to move (or had moved). If this number was found to be proportionally generalisable to neighbourhoods with similar characteristics, this might present a challenge to current ageing in place policies in England and Canada, and other countries. This group might benefit most from policies aimed at tackling factors associated with environmental presses, for example, high crime, poor infrastructure and instability of resident populations. This might in turn influence personal competence, such as health and social support, and hence possibly lead to a greater sense of well-being.

England and Canada share a number of similarities. At a macro level, both countries share a similar type of political and judicial system, their social welfare systems are broadly comparable and the nations are socially and culturally similar. England and Canada also share a number of trends, such as similar population ageing projections and an increase in challenges to urban inner-city neighbourhoods. Therefore, similarities in results between the two countries should not be unexpected; the study also supports research from the US literature. This suggests that such findings might be usefully considered beyond the current study, to other countries sharing similar characteristics (for example, political, economic and social systems).

The study's contribution to knowledge

This section of the chapter highlights the study's contribution to scientific knowledge. In Chapter Two, a number of gaps in knowledge within the current literature on place and ageing were identified. These concerned lack of knowledge relating to contextual limitations (leading to a critique of a lack of innovativeness and stagnation within environmental gerontology) and a neglect of temporal dimensions in the consideration of place and ageing issues.

The first contribution made by this study concerns cross-national research in gerontology. This study was unique in that it sought to gain a cross-national perspective on place and ageing issues in deprived urban settings. The comparative element of this research enabled the expansion of scientific knowledge related to place and ageing issues in general, and, in particular, in deprived inner-city neighbourhoods of England and Canada. This enabled the redressing of Parmelee's (1998, p 179) critique of environmental gerontology, which suggested that findings would benefit from an internationalisation in order to learn how generalisable the results are, such that 'Are we observing culturally universal behaviour patterns

that are intrinsic to spatial behaviour in late life or simply the effects of being old and North American?'.

The interviews and photographs in the present study revealed a shared experience of place and ageing cross-nationally. Factors found to be important in establishing place and ageing were: physical, social, historical attachment; the lifecourse; religion and spirituality; and public spaces. Some of these findings support previous environmental science research, therefore building on previous knowledge, such as physical attachment and area knowledge, and social and historical attachment. Other findings identified new knowledge that has largely been neglected or ignored: for example, the expansion of knowledge related to religiosity/spirituality and lifecourse, and the importance of public places. The research also found that physical attachment and area knowledge were important in the easing of psychological fear (that is, fear of crime) alongside the more commonly achieved masking of functional health challenges. This finding possibly reflects the type of study locality – deprived urban neighbourhoods.

The second contribution relates to the environmental categories and new conceptual model (Figure 6.1). These categories are unique in that they were generated from qualitative data that allowed the older person's discourse on place and ageing to emerge. A shortfall of current conceptual models on the person–environment relationship is that measures are imposed and narrowly focused, and therefore restricting. A key strength of this conceptual model is that the data inductively evolved. The relationship was found to be complex and not always straightforward. Specifically, high environmental press and low personal competence were not always associated with perceptions of poor quality of life. This raised the need to consider the complexity of the person–environment paradigm and to consider in particular variables such as life history and religion/ spirituality. Taking this approach might aid in the advancement of environmental gerontology beyond its present 'languishing state'.

The conceptual model also recognised the importance of being temporally located in time and place. Although individual cases needed to be fixed in time and place for analysis, Figure 6.1 recognises the fluidity of an individual's relationship with their environment (for example, comfort, management and distress), such that throughout an individual's lifecourse they might move through several environment categories, possibly as circumstances in their life change, for example, health, relocation and/or neighbourhood changes. The findings and model also highlight the need to consider how the past has impacted on the present, and how the past and present might impact on the future. Within this study, consideration of these factors enabled greater understanding of place and ageing factors and the relationship between 'place and ageing' and well-being (that is, quality of life and well-being). These findings illustrated the significance of including temporal factors in the analysis of place and ageing data.

A third contribution relates to methodological limitations within the current research literature. This research aimed to redress the imbalance in research on quantitatively driven conceptual frameworks on environmental ageing (for

example, the Ecological Model of Ageing). Criticisms have predominantly related to a lack of innovativeness in methodological approaches, leading, therefore, to stagnation in scientific knowledge gained in this area. Although there has been a growth in the use of qualitative data to build on the conceptual framework of Lawton (for example, Rowles, 1978, 1983; Peace et al, 2006), few have used qualitative data or a mixed-methods approach to drive forward a better conceptual model or seek new ways of exploring the person–environment relationship.

Within this study, the selection of a mixed qualitative methodological approach enabled the acquisition of data gathering from a number of perspectives, adding increased insight and validation to the findings. This produced rich knowledge on place and ageing, which builds on previous findings and conceptual frameworks, and found previously neglected or new ways of understanding some of the factors associated with place and ageing. The incorporation of participants' photographs and descriptive text provided a useful way of verifying interpretations arising from the face-to-face interviews. This exercise established participant photographs as an innovative way of data gathering and generation. This both enabled the capturing of the neighbourhood from the perspective of the resident and provided a way to engage the older person in the active construction of meaning. The approach was also sensitive to the complexities of the person–environment relationship. This enabled the development of a conceptual figure (see Figure 6.1) that appropriately represents the multidimensional and multi-variable paradigm of the older person and their relationship to their neighbourhood and well-being.

A fourth contribution is related to future research. The study, while addressing a number of current gaps in knowledge, also raised some research questions for consideration in future studies. One such question relates to the study of cross-cultural issues. With an increased trend in globalisation, national differences might become less diverse; the focus then might be one of exploring cultural issues within nations. Investigating the experience and meaning of place across different cultures has the ability to add new insight into a field that has been criticised for its 'lack of innovativeness and stagnation'. Certainly, the importance of cultural and spiritual issues was raised within this research with the analysis of a native North American perspective.

Another interesting research area would be to assess possible age, generational and period effects on place and ageing. This could be achieved in a longitudinal study investigating possible cohort differences across the lifecourse. In addition, people's future relationship with place is likely to change with increased globalisation and information and communication technology. How these changes will impact on the future of ageing and older people's relationship with place might be critical to the sustainability of communities and neighbourhoods – this is discussed in further detail in Chapter Eight.

Consideration of gender effects on the use and attachment to place would also present an interesting research topic. This was not fully explored in the current research but arose in the analysis of the photographs; differences in the use of place were revealed. For example, Mr Bennett was found to capture a wider range

of images and covered a wider geographical distance compared with the more narrow focus of Ms Allen and Mrs Clarke. However, because only three participants were involved in this exercise, no conclusions can be drawn on possible gender differences. Although there is some research to suggest that differences exist (Dines et al, 2007; Holland et al, 2007), this area remains largely unexplored.

Conclusion

This chapter brought together and discussed findings presented in Chapters Four and Five. This revealed findings associated with empirical and methodological contributions to scientific knowledge. Empirical findings revealed cross-national similarities in environmental experience, in factors underlying place and ageing and in the relationship between 'place and ageing' and well-being. The research also supported previous research findings on place and ageing and enabled an expansion of knowledge related to previously neglected factors and new ways of understanding the relationship between the older person and their environment. Methodological contributions revealed the appropriateness of taking a mixed-methods approach and the importance of using multiple forms of data collection. Finally, consideration of temporal factors in data collection and analysis of findings was critical to the development of accurate insight and understanding of individuals' relationship to their environment.