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Disengagement as Withdrawal From Public Space: Rethinking the Relation Between Place Attachment, Place Appropriation, and Identity-Building Among Older Adults

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Empirical research indicates that engagement with public space decreases with age. Why do some older adults withdraw from the public, and which role does the (urban) environment play in spatial (dis-)engagement? Environmental gerontology's model of person–environment (PE) fit suggests an interrelation between agency and belonging and their causal effects on identity and wellbeing in later life. However, there is little research on how these dimensions are actually related. This study sets out to investigate this relationship and how PE can be better adapted for deprived neighborhoods.

Research Design and Methods: The study follows a qualitative case studies approach, focusing on a deprived neighborhood in Vienna, Austria. Nonparticipant observations were conducted at this site and complemented by 13 episodic interviews with older residents.

Results: The results challenge PE's model of interrelation between agency and belonging and their causal effects on identity, wellbeing, and autonomy in later life. Spatial agency in the deprived neighborhood was intense but so was spatial alienation and distancing oneself from one's neighborhood. Drawing on notions of territorial stigma, this might be a coping strategy to prevent one's self-identity from being "stained". Which strategy is being adopted by whom depends on the position and the trajectory in social and physical space.

Discussion and Implications: PE can be complemented with intersubjective measures of environmental conditions (e.g., stigma) and spatial engagement. Gerontology should proceed to consider not only the poor, disadvantaged, disengaged elderly, but also the rebellious, resisting, provocative new generation of older adults.

Keywords: Environment, Poverty, Qualitative analysis: Case study, Sociology of aging/social gerontology, Urban

Research indicates that older adults, on the whole, prefer to "age in place" (Greenfield, 2016), id est (i.e.,) remain living independently in the community, rather than in residential care (Davey, Nana, de Joux, & Arcus, 2004). However, even those aging in place seem to withdraw from their environments. Empirical research indicates that time spent in public space decreases with age (Wahl, Mollenkopf, & Oswald, 1999; Ziegler, 2010). But why do some older

adults withdraw from public space and which role does the (urban) environment play in spatial (dis-)engagement?

In the first part of the article, this question is approached by critically reviewing existing theoretical frameworks of environmental gerontology, focusing on the person–environment (PE) fit, as well as research on sociospatial inequalities from gerontology and urban sociology. In the second part, the suitability of PE fit for deprived neighborhoods is

examined with a case study on a disadvantaged residential area in Vienna, Austria. The third part proposes the person–environment–engagement model (PEEM) as a further developed version of PE fit. Complemented with intersubjective measures of environmental conditions and observable environmental engagement, this model is better able to analyze the production and reproduction of sociospatial inequalities in today's cities.

Environmental Gerontology and the Relationship Between Agency and Belonging

Environmental gerontology addresses the relationship between age and the environmental context that a person ages in (cf. Kahana, 1982; Lawton & Nahemow, 1973). One of the most influential recent models is the person–environment (PE) fit developed by Wahl and Oswald (2010). PE describes the relationship between place belonging on the one hand and spatial agency, on the other hand, with identity, autonomy, and wellbeing as outcomes of each (Figure 1). By framing aging as an environmental process in the sense that it is shaped by the mutual interaction between a person or group and its environment(s), they emphasize the role of the physical environment, acknowledging the entanglement of physical, social, organizational, and cultural aspects of environments. The decrease of agency is mediated through the decline or maintenance of individual competence and autonomy on the one hand and the societal opportunity structure on the other. Both sociophysical belonging and sociophysical agency, in turn, affect the quality of later life. From a life-course perspective, belonging and agency diverge across the life course, with the feeling of belonging increasing but sociophysical agency declining (Wahl, 2015).

In contrast to early environmental gerontologists, PE emphasizes the significance of subjectivity and personal meaning of an environment for a person (or group) and the role of personal agency to intervene and act on one's environments. On the one hand, PE responds with this to the criticism against the Lawton's and Nahemow's (1973) environmental docility hypothesis, which framed older adults more as "victims" of their environments, and "empowers" them by emphasizing their agency; on the other hand, it reacts to the postpositivist critique of most environmental

gerontologist models of being overly functional and lacking relativism by giving the individual, subjective feeling of attachment equal importance. PE's novelty in comparison to other models is thus its consideration of both objective conditions and environmental needs (Oswald, Hieber, Wahl & Mollenkopf, 2005).

Despite both dimensions—agency and belonging—being equally important in PE, most research in environmental gerontology focuses either on one or on the other. One of the earlier exceptions is Havighurst (1976), who framed the establishment of a satisfactory physical living arrangement as one of six central developmental tasks in late maturity, considering both the coping strategies and subjective valuation of the result. Adding the dimension of time, Rowles and Watkins (2003) conceptualize a life course model of environmental experience. In their experiential phenomenological research, they analyze the dynamic nature and the development of the person–environment relationship across the life course and how the development of this relationship entails the formation of new competencies. One of the core competencies for building relationships with places is the ability to "make places" that evolves and changes across the life span (Rowles & Watkins, 2003). Whereas Rowles and Watkins see a positive assessment of one's living environment as an outcome of successful place-making practices, Golant (2015) frames appraisal processes as influencing factors for coping strategies in his model of residential normalcy. Assimilative cognitive coping, as mentally and emotionally adjusting to places, can thus not be separated from assimilative action coping, as physically and activity-oriented adjust to places. However, how the relationship between agency and belonging indeed works to affect wellbeing and identity-building in later life, yet tends to be overlooked.

Agency and Belonging in Deprived Neighborhoods

Both spatial agency and place attachment entail questions about social inequalities and social exclusion (Craig, 2004). Accordingly, withdrawal from public space can be assumed to affect different groups of older adults to a different extent. Social inequalities are particularly being spatialized in present-day cities (Savage, Warde, & Ward, 2003). Disadvantaged populations tend to live in disadvantaged areas, leading to sociospatial segregation, replacement, and even expulsions (Sassen, 2014). Sociospatial segregation defines all the processes that eventually lead to internally homogenous spaces, which can be based on different social criteria such as socioeconomic status or ethnicity (Löw, Steets, & Soetzer, 2007).

Some environmental gerontologists have, hence, turned to the question of neighborhood exclusion as one dimension of social exclusion in older age (for a scoping review on this topic, see Walsh, Scharf, & Keating, 2016). Ethnographic and qualitative studies in particular have

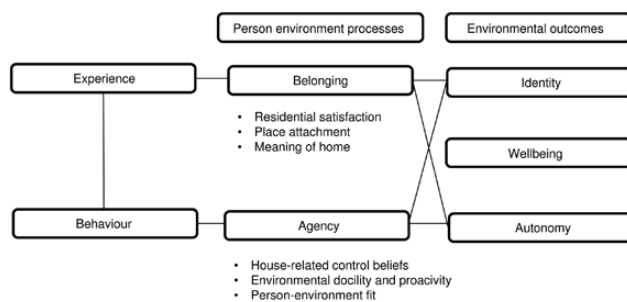


Figure 1. Person–environment fit. Own representation. Source: Wahl & Oswald, 2010.

adopted a neighborhood approach based upon understanding of social inequalities, thus choosing case sites based on their level of deprivation (e.g., Day, 2010; Buffel, Phillipson, & Scharf, 2012). Such studies may either follow the Anglo-Saxon tradition with a focus on structural exclusion mechanisms (e.g., real estate prices in gentrification processes) or the French tradition, focusing instead on sociocultural exclusion processes.

Whereas the former addresses explicit forms of material deprivation or even displacement, the latter refers to subtler ways of sociospatial suppression with symbolic means, as Werthman and Piliavin (1967) describe in their “ecological contamination hypothesis.” It implies that the “stigma” as sociocultural “image” of a neighborhood can stain individual identities. Residents are identified with their area by themselves and others, resulting in “postcode anxiety.” Similarly, Wacquant, Slater, and Pereira (2014) elaborate on an analytic framework termed “territorial stigmatization” that combines Goffman’s (1986) concept of “spoiled identity” with Bourdieu’s theory of “symbolic power,” constituting “advanced marginality” in the dualizing metropolis. The territorial stigmatization framework aims to describe how “spatial taint” affects its residents and how they cope with it. What is particularly interesting in Wacquant’s account is, however, that he tries to link stigma not only with segregation but also with the coping mechanisms of those living in the segregated areas, working out differentiating social and symbolic strategies used by the residents of disparaged neighborhoods. He differentiates between strategies that submit to and reproduce, or rebel against spatial stigma (Table 1). Which strategy is being adopted by whom depends on the position and the trajectory in social and physical space, therefore varying with characteristics such as class, age, housing tenure, and ethnicity (Wacquant et al., 2014).

Pereira and Queirós (2014) found that residents of a public housing estate in Porto, Portugal, reacted to the stigma of their living environment by restricting their public relationships and limiting outdoor activities to subsistence activities, calling this strategy “subsistence sociability” and “focused avoidance.” Thus, territorial stigmatization should not be seen as a condition but rather a form of “action through collective representation fastened on place” (Wacquant et al., 2014: 1278), thereby advancing

empirical understanding of its role in producing urban inequality and marginality.

To summarize, most current environmental gerontology and urban sociology assumes a positive relationship between place attachment and place appropriation (independent of the underlying causality). They would assume that high engagement with public space correlates to a strong sense of belonging to the residential environment. The higher both of these are, the greater the sense of autonomy and wellbeing, as well as the more positive the late-life identity. This article investigates how these two dimensions are related in sociospatially deprived neighborhoods.

Design and Methods

Research Questions and Methods

The study is concerned with the question of why some older adults engage with and some withdraw from public space, assuming that place attachment and spatial agency are critical in facilitating spatial disengagement. More specifically, two questions are being addressed:

1. How are place attachment and spatial agency mutually related among older residents living in deprived neighborhoods?
2. How do place attachment and spatial agency influence late-life identities in deprived neighborhoods?

Referring to the conceptual and empirical literature, different hypotheses can be followed to answer these questions. First, all three characteristics—attachment, agency, and identities—could be assumed to be positively related. Hence, a person that feels very much “at home” in their neighborhood and appropriates it extensively would also be more likely to maintain a positive self-identity as an older person. Second, spatial agency is arguably outweighed by place attachment in later life. Hence, a person that feels “at home” in their neighborhood would be more likely to maintain a positive identity despite withdrawing from their neighborhood. Third, older adults are less likely to feel attached to deprived neighborhoods, resulting in “stained identities” in later life and spatial disengagement.

To approach these questions, a qualitative case-study approach was chosen. Qualitative methods are better suited to grasp complex processes, such as the evolving relationship between place attachment and spatial agency, and to investigate hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups, like those living in deprived residential areas. Distinctive features of case studies are that the cases have (in this case: spatial) boundaries and a holistic approach is taken to provide an in-depth picture of the cases (Creswell, 1998).

Within the selected cases, Methods of nonparticipation observation to analyze spatial agency and place appropriation were triangulated with results of episodic interviews that give room to elaborations on feelings of belonging to one’s neighborhood and how they changed. Observations,

Table 1. Coping Strategies With Territorial Stigma

Submission	Recalcitrance to resistance
1—Dissimulation	6—Studied indifference
2—Mutual distancing and elaboration of microdifferences	7—Defence of neighborhood (individual or collective)
3—Lateral denigration	8—Stigma inversion (hyperbolic claiming)
4—Retreat into the private sphere	
5—Exit	

Source: Wacquant et al., 2014.

whether participant or nonparticipant, are particularly suited for practice-based approaches, because social practices are always sited and thus public social phenomena (Schmidt & Volbers, 2011).

Episodic interviews (Flick, 2014) combine narrative passages (e.g., about daily routine) with discursive elements of meaning, symbols, and imaginaries. Anything mentioned in the narrative passages can be made the subject of in-depth inquiries of sense-making. Consequently, everyday spatial practices—like going for a walk, shopping, or meeting friends—can be taken as an entry point for a narration on practices while concurrently leading to the meanings and imaginaries attached to these practices. Interviews were partly conducted with frequent visitors of the observation sites, and partly with “newcomers.” Interviews were completely transcribed and analyzed in a two-stage process, first using thematic coding (Flick, 2014) and then selecting interview passages to analyze with objective hermeneutics (Reichert, 2004).

Sampling Process and Sample Description

Sampling was conducted on two levels: First, two case sites in Vienna were selected for case studies and second, individuals for episodic interviews were sampled at these case sites following a theory-led sampling process.

Case sites were to be contrasting in regards to sociospatial deprivation—namely privilege—with sampling criteria comprising social structure (mean and median income, education, unemployment rate), historic development of the social structure (“blue collar districts”), population density, percentage of older people, age-dependency ratio, building density, percentage of green spaces and the ratio of built to free spaces, and “district image.” As this article focuses on deprived neighborhoods, only results based upon data from the deprived case site are used.

The deprived case site in Vienna’s 5th district, Margareten, is an inner-city area located between the first and the second “belt” road of the city. It is a relatively small and densely populated district, with a high percentage of its limited space dedicated to transportation and buildings instead of green or free spaces. The social structure of its inhabitants can be characterized as younger, more likely to have a migrant background, and to be socioeconomically (income, education, employment) more disadvantaged than Vienna’s average. The developments of the sociospatial conditions that its inhabitants face today are historically grounded. The district is traditionally a worker’s bastion, with heavy industrialization having been enforced, leading to a rapid population growth (doubling of the population) in the midst of the 19th century. The increasing need for accommodation posed major social problems and large public housing initiatives were initiated by the Austrian Social Democratic Party, for which the district has been a stronghold since. To observe how people “do” age in different environments, specific places must be selected within the case site districts,

and those places should be as comparable as possible at the privileged and deprived case sites. Structured inspections in which certain criteria (Criteria comprised the embedding in the city’s infrastructure according to WHO’s age-friendly cities criteria (2007) – like barrier-free walkways, public transport, shopping infrastructure or spaces for social activities – as well as the specific design of the places, both featuring a rondo and benches to sit in circles, which is typical of Vienna’s public space architecture.) were documented and compared offered a way to select those places (Lower Kutschkermarkt in Waehring and Bacherpark in Margareten). The observation place at the deprived case site, Bacherpark, is a small inner-city park located next to an elementary school and within a network of traffic-calmed roads. The place itself features a rondo with benches, two sports cages, a playground, and a dog zone. This rondo became the observation site.

Nonparticipant observations were conducted at both case sites for 8 months between June 2012 and September 2013. Observation cycles were restricted by weather and limited to warmer periods, namely the months of June, July, August, and September 2012 and 2013. Throughout these 8 months, observations were conducted three times per week for 3–4 hr per observation session, alternating weekdays and time periods to include weekends and weekdays as well as morning, noons, afternoons, and evenings. Throughout the observations, observation protocols were written that comprised times and descriptions of activities as well as sketches of the sociospatial arrangement and movements. At the end of each observation day, observers also wrote postobservation memos, containing any other information, thoughts, or feelings they had had.

Theory-led sampling of interview partners took place throughout the observation sessions. Selection was mainly based on age appearance, hence the interviewers judged from the persons’ looks if they seemed old enough to be retired (As the age range described below shows, however, this judgement has not always been quite accurate.). Interviews were partly conducted with frequent visitors that had been observed for a while and partly with persons the interviewers had seen for the first time.

Altogether, 13 useable episodic interviews with adults aged 53–91 years were conducted at both case sites; four at the deprived site and nine at the privileged site. The unequal distribution of interviews at both case site results from difficulties that the interviewers faced at the deprived case site, when trying to conduct interviews (Difficulties ranged from refusal to be interviewed to physical threat, which might be attributable to the case site’s deprivation. For this reason, and as violent or threatening behaviour was particularly targeted at the female interviewer/observer, all interviews were finally conducted by the male interviewers/observers.). Three interview partners from the disadvantaged case site were male, one female, whereas the gender ratio was the other way around in the privileged case area

(two male, seven female). From the four adults from the disadvantaged site, three were in third age (53, 65, and 71 years old), one in fourth age (80 years old). From the nine interview partners from the privileged area, four were in third age (58, 68, 69, and 72 years), and five in fourth age (78, 88, and two times 91 years). Two of the women had been vendors, one had finished an agricultural school, one an electrician, one a stenographer, one head of a bank department, and two had studied journalism (but only one finished, whereas the other one quit and started to work as a stenographer). Of the men, one had been a patent agent, two had been mechanics, one a computer engineer, and one was a one long-distance lorry driver by profession but currently unemployed and not yet retired.

Interviews and observations were conducted by three sociologists (including the author) between the age of 25 and 32 years, of which one was female and two were male. All interviewers were of Austrian origin. Hence, all interviews were conducted in German and interview passages have been translated to English.

Results

Results are structured by addressing the following questions:

1. Who uses the place and how do older adults use it?
2. How do older adults feel about their neighborhood and themselves within it?

Who Uses the Place and How Do Older Adults Use It?

Bacherpark, the small inner-city space in the deprived neighborhood, was used by diverse groups—mothers and children at the playground, teenagers in the sports cages, and middle-aged and older men at the rondo. Judging from the languages they spoke, most visitors appeared to have a migrant background. User density was high and people would sit and move in immediate proximities, not avoiding bodily contact. Most of the older adults observed stayed for at least half an hour, but duration could stretch to several hours. Consequently, many arrived with a backpack or large bags, carrying beer cans, water bottles, cigarettes, newspapers, and other belongings that helped them spend their time. The physique and bodies of the persons who visited the place had quite a presence, and their attire added to the immediacy of this materiality, as older adults dressed to reveal some skin—wearing short trousers, sandals, tank tops, and brightly colored dresses.

Beyond the general and ever-changing visitors, the place hosted a group of frequent visitors that would spend most of their days at the site, thus shaping and “ruling” it with their presence. They would stay particularly long and often left and returned a several times per day. For example, a group of men would sit, drink and smoke on one of the bench-and-table sets close to the playground; after a while,

two would get up and leave and one would lay down on a bench and sleep. Other men would pass by, wait for him to wake up, and start playing cards together; then the men from earlier would return.

The group consisted of about 10 men and 1 woman from their fifties to their seventies but it also maintained a large social network that stretched beyond the immediate surrounding. The group would enlarge especially over chess games, where up to 20 people gathered around the table, trying to get a view. The one woman that was part of the core group—a studied actress, former alcoholic, and wife to one of the group members—had taken the role of the “chaperone”: she would tell the men not to burp loudly, or to throw their beer cans away (instead of squeezing them between the wooden beams of the table), and would always thank them once they had followed her instructions, which many men—except for her husband—did remorsefully as soon as she complained. She would often sit on a bench a little behind the group, watching them but not taking part in their discussions, because her husband didn’t want her to

[...] Mine [A.N.: husband] is a little more calm when he’s chatting with his friends, well, and I do back away, I know he likes that, when you are not – I just watch them, sometimes he indicates to me – card, payback card out means: [go] down, then I go there [...] and as I said, one goes down again to the supermarket to get a round, and then they drink [...] (female, 71 years)

Like this group, the majority of older visitors lived in the immediate environment, 5–15 min away from the park, and they also gave the short distance as the main reason why they had come to that particular place. Their routines seemed, thus, to be more shaped by possibility than by preference. Despite most of them being either retired or unemployed, as they stated in the interviews, they followed a relatively strict daily routine. The common daily routine would be to get up quite early (around 7 A.M. or earlier), have breakfast, do housework (particularly the women), and then go “out” to the “park.” They would return home for lunch and maybe a nap and return home late at night. The continuous repetition of those daily routines bothered some of my interview partners. One man even said his routine would bother him so much that he’d rather be dead than alive.

And as I told you, have the same routine every day, the same soul-destroying things every day. You turn on the radio, same shit every day [...] television, same shit. What can I do but go somewhere where it’s quiet and nothing more [...] Pointless, if you gave me a 9mm, I would end it. (male, 53 years)

Yet, public space in the deprived neighborhood did offer a range of opportunities for social interaction. Public space, in general, is a space in which social interactions with strangers—whether perceived as “anonymous, superficial and transitory” (Wirth, 1938: 1) or as “res publica”, as the

network of relations between people that are not part of one community (Sennett, 2003)—take place. Hence, older visitors who came there on their own would meet acquaintances passing by, who then stopped and chatted for a while. Often, such chats resulted in the passerby sitting down with the other person, and then spending the afternoon together and communicating vividly. Accordingly, the soundscape at Bacherpark was quite intense: People would talk loudly and even shout across the park to another person, or they made frequent and loud use of their cell phones.

However, the imaginary of public space as a space of encounter was generally declined by the older adults interviewed. Many emphasized that they would prefer not to talk to anyone when they went outside, despite being aware that they did not act accordingly.

No, I don't want that at all [A.N.: to be talked to in public space]—I might even, how shall I say, well I might say, whatever, “Come on, get lost, over there”s a place’ [...] Because there are 100 benches that are free and I could have told you I want to have my quiet, but yes. (male, 53 years)

Beyond social interaction, most time was spent at Bacherpark doing—apparently—“nothing.” At times, older adults would simply sit down somewhere and stare. Goffman (1966) describes this behavior as “situational withdrawal”—a doing that is, he claims, only to a limited extent permitted in public space, as the rules of public space behavior comprise “purposefully going about one’s business” (ibid: 58). While in public space, people must usually demonstrate alertness or use “involvement shields”—like cell phones or newspapers—to legitimately withdraw from this alertness. While social interaction draws upon one aspect of involvement competencies, situational withdrawal draws upon another. Often at Bacherpark, more interactional phases alternated and blended with more withdrawn stages. For example, conversations—often dragging and stiff—between two or more older men would be interrupted by long pauses. In these pauses, they stared around the park and did “nothing” as well. The breaks in conversation were usually filled with smoking and drinking.

To summarize, the spatial agency of older adults at Bacherpark was loud, physical, and colorful; it featured many social encounters and hours-long social interactions that alternated with phases of situational withdrawal, drinking, and smoking. Spatial agency at the deprived neighborhood can, hence, be described as vivid, engaged and pronounced. But does this imply that older adults feel as engaged to their neighborhood as they act?

How Do Older Adults Feel About Their Neighborhood and Themselves Within it?

Despite vivid engagement at the observation site, the older adults interviewed at Bacherpark heavily criticized their neighborhood. Main points for criticism were the other inhabitants and the noise they produced.

Whenever we want to have our peace, around 1 PM, they let the children out into the yard – when the weather is nice, of course – but it’s just that time when you leave your windows open [...] They, they, of course the kids whine [...] we have nothing against that, but I, I don’t like it. (female, 71 years)

The search for silence went as far as when asked about the place they would most enjoy going to, one respondent named a close-by cemetery:

Quiet, that’s what inspires me, just plain quiet. [...] [Author’s Note: At the cemetery] there is the quiet, not like in this park where you cannot even sit down, well I have lived there in the district for years, when you come here, I don’t know the time right now, but everything is crowded. All of this is somehow registered, here are the Polaks [A.N.: swearword for Polish], there are the Yugos [A.N. swear word for people from former Yugoslavia], there they play cards, I don’t want that, I want the quiet, the quiet! (male, 53 years)

Critique of noise and the people who produced it were closely interwoven at the deprived neighborhood. And, in the older adults’ memory, this noise had not always been there; it had evolved with the developments of the past decades. When they themselves had moved to the area some decades ago, everything had been nice and quiet; but after a while, strangers started moving in, and with them came the noise and the deprivation of the area as a whole.

Well, when I came here 22 years ago, the 5th [A.N.: district] was one of the most beautiful districts. [...] Reinprechtsdorfer Street used to be a wonderful shopping street, really great, with splendid shops, stores, prestigious stores, not such a ragtag as it is now. Yes, we had everything. [...] Not something like casinos and kebab and noodles and all that shit there, right, that didn’t exist back then. One-Euro shops and all that junk; a butcher; where there’s now the Admiral [A.N.: casino] there used to be a tableware store and next to it a brick manufacturer, a great butcher, we’ve had five butchers, they all closed down because of that. [...] Today all we have is cement and foreigners there, now in the 5th district. When the first immigrants came to the 10th district, when they went out of place, they came over across the city belt and now it’s over [A.N.: The “belt” is the main thoroughfare in Vienna that divides the outer and inner districts]. It’s only getting worse now. (male, 65 years)

The narratives of the neighborhood’s development were full of bitterness and nostalgia, and people kept repeating: “Those times are over” or “the good times have gone.” In their perception, the newcomers—the immigrants—had changed the sensual and infrastructural landscape of the neighborhood; they had replaced the quiet with noise, the

prestigious stores with junk stores. Even worse, it was perceived that *they* tried to replace the persons themselves: they occupied their places and pushed the “old” residents out.

[...] because at the end, you couldn't have come here anymore and you cannot go to Einsiedlerpark over there either because it belongs to the Turks. You don't belong there anyway. [...] Well, all the Turks that moved here, that would not even have a right to exist here and claim everything and get it. (male, 65 years)

Complaining about the noise and with that, complaining about the people—the neighbors—seemed to be another way of distinction, a communicational performance of alienation, or estrangement from one's own residential environment. Sound became noise in a process of sensorial othering: Languages one could not understand, noises one could not comprehend, people one could not relate to—many residents felt as having become replaced in their own environments (after many of them had been replaced in their workplace as well) and expelled by the new inhabitants. The residential area and its new inhabitants, they felt, disengaged them from much more than they disengaged from it. These conditions turned out to be particularly bothersome for older persons who had been living in their neighborhood area for quite some time, and for those that were socially most deprived.

Curiously, when asked about the changes that affected their neighborhoods, many of the interviewed persons began to talk about the changes they experienced with aging. One commonality was in how they talked about both the change of their neighborhoods and themselves with time: first their association with decline and, second, the degree of self-identification or estrangement they felt in the process. Thus, the way they talked about aging can be framed in reference to PE as belonging (self-identification as an older person) and agency (assessed scope of action and self-efficacy in the aging process).

Among all interview partners at both case sites, three types could be extracted based on criteria regarding whether a person acted to appropriate their neighborhood space (spatial agency), felt attached to their neighborhood (spatial belonging), acted to adapt or resist older age (aging agency) and self-identified as an older person (Table 2).

The three types were unequally distributed across space (environments) and time (age groups) (Distribution is,

however, in no way representative and highly dependent upon the different samples at the two case sites.). The first type, consisting mainly persons over the age of 75 years and living in the privileged area, had experienced decline in physical and mobility competencies, which limited their scope for appropriating the neighborhood space, even though they felt a strong sense of belonging to it. Due to those experienced restrictions, they also strongly self-identified as being old. Action scopes for resisting or adapting to older age were identified to some extent, such as going for daily walks to maintain a certain degree of fitness. Finally, decline was perceived as inevitable.

It's natural that the older person fails once in a while and that he is no longer able to do what he used to take for granted. (female, 91 years)

The second type of interview partners was younger (between 58 and 72 years) and all were female. They only had “second-hand experience” (e.g., from their parents) of health decline in older age. They did not identify at all as being old and took various measures to resist aging (like cognitive training, frequent social interactions, or “dressing younger”).

I mean, you may grow old, but you don't have to grow blowsy and not much to look at, right? (female, 71 years)

They showed the same level of agency in regards to their neighborhoods, which they strongly appropriated and even, at times, took action to change: One woman in the deprived neighborhood, for example, had started a petition as collective action to prevent “her park” from being turned into a parking lot.

The third type consisted of two younger (53 and 65 years) males, both of whose interviews were cited in this article. Both described, among other things, having lost their jobs due to their age, and this experience—being labeled as old by the working world—had made them partly self-identify as old. However, this label clearly did not make them happy, as it decreased their social role from a productive member of society to somebody that was not needed anymore.

I was definitely too old for a new job, from 50 on you can forget about it [...] Well that is even worse. When you go somewhere today, in a company, they don't ask you what you want to earn or your skills, but how old you are. Once you say 50 plus, well then we don't need to talk any further, it's done [...] I learned typesets, in my times this was one of the best-paying jobs that even existed, and now this job doesn't even exist anymore, the computer already killed it, no. Nobody needs a manual type setter anymore today, no.” (male, 65 years)

Despite describing themselves as “old” throughout the interviews, they also did not completely agree with the label they had been assigned. For both men, age was something

Table 2. Agency and Belonging to Space and Age

Type	Type I	Type II	Type III
Spatial agency	–	+	+
Aging agency	+/-	+	–
Spatial belonging	+	+	–
Self-identification as being old	+	–	+/-

Note: Plus (+) refers to a high degree of agency respective belonging, minus (–) to a low degree of agency resp. belonging.

to be resisted but they did not entirely see a scope for action in this resistance. Similarly, they felt their neighborhood was a place to be abandoned but they did not see how they could do it and they saw no action scope to change it.

Discussion

This study posed the question of why some older adults engage with and some withdraw from public space, or more specifically, the public places in their neighborhoods. It addressed two questions:

1. How are place attachment and spatial agency mutually related among older residents of deprived neighborhoods?
2. How do place attachment and spatial agency influence late-life identities in deprived neighborhoods?

The results challenge PE's model of interrelation between agency and belonging as well as their causal effects on identity, wellbeing and autonomy. In this study, agency—as observed place appropriation, and place attachment—as subjective identification with one's neighborhood, did not match. Instead, place appropriation was intense but so was spatial alienation. Hence, the relationship between spatial agency and spatial belonging is not necessarily positive. Whereas existing research does acknowledge gaps between agency and belonging when older adults lose mobility competence and are thus limited in their spatial agency, the opposite condition—vivid spatial engagement within one's neighborhood without subjective place attachment—is mostly neglected.

However, this result is not necessarily a contradiction to PE fit when considering the underlying data sources: In this study, spatial agency was collected through nonparticipant observation, whereas place attachment was collected through episodic interviews. If agency had also been collected through interview data, results would in fact fit the PE model: Male residents of the deprived case sites did not *feel* like they had control over their neighborhood's development, even though they in fact *exercised control* through their spatial practices.

Why is it that people who engage with their residential environments distance themselves from these environments at

the same time? Referring to territorial stigma (Wacquant et al., 2014; Werthman & Piliavin, 1967), such verbal distancing can be a coping strategy to prevent one's self-identity from being "stained" by environmental stigma. Hence, older adults might not identify with their neighborhood to maintain a positive self-image. According to Wacquant et al. (2014), coping strategies of stigmatized areas' residents can either submit to and reproduce, or rebel against spatial stigma. Which strategy is being adopted by whom depends on the position and the trajectory in social and physical space. Hence, I propose to complement PE fit with Wacquant's notion of territorial stigma.

Consequently, the concepts used in PE fit can be differentiated into two mutually related factors (Figure 2): observable (environmental context, environmental engagement, autonomy) and subjective (belonging, perceived agency, identity, wellbeing).

With the addition of environmental conditions—comprising both the (infra-) structural requirements as well as the symbolic labelling of a neighborhood—and the observable engagement with the residential environment, a model of PE fit could consider social inequalities more comprehensively. Acknowledging Wacquant, territorial stigmatization is not a condition but a form of "action through collective representation fastened on place" (ibid: 1278). Different forms of environmental engagement either reproduce or challenge spatial inequalities that, again, manifest in concrete living conditions of older adults. In this study, older adults used both resistance strategies—like the woman who initiated collective action to retain her park—and reproduction strategies—like the men who denied their neighborhoods in front of us—the cultural capital-rich researchers. These forms of engagement have different effects on identity, wellbeing, and autonomy.

From a sociological perspective, forms of engagement that reproduce social inequalities need particular attention. The study's results point to (new) social inequalities that stretch into older age: There is a group of predominantly male, third-aged men who feel increasingly outpaced by societal developments. Losing their jobs to younger employees and losing their neighborhood to new residents, they felt expelled (cf. Sassen, 2014), not disengaged, from the sociospatial environment they once belonged to. These inequalities have developed with what gerontology refers to as the "rejuvenation"

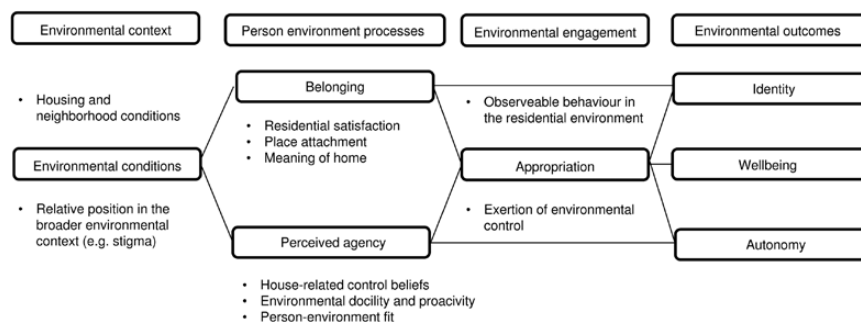


Figure 2. Person-environment-engagement model (PEEM) as further development of PE fit. Own representation.

of older age (Tews, 1993), “mask of aging” (Featherstone, Hepworth, & Turner, 1991), or “structural lag” (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994): Adults are labeled as “old” by society at a much earlier age than when they themselves feel old. The active aging discourse has been welcomingly appropriated by a majority of older adults who share the view that age is something negative that can be resisted, if one just tries hard enough. Those who do not try hard enough get stigmatized; when they then get labeled as old, obviously, they must have done something wrong. This simultaneity of societal demands—being and not being old—opens new pitfalls for socially disadvantaged groups in older age.

Unlike the generations before them, however, those older, expelled adults do not react by withdrawing from public space, but by spatial appropriation and subjective estrangement. This group is not resigning but struggling to protest against their expulsion from the world they once related to: They have raised their voices in political decisions (e.g., the 2016 “Brexit” and U.S. presidential election; cf. Stein, 2016) and are likely to engage in other forms of “deviant behavior.”

This group’s disengagement is more multifaceted than gerontology is generally used to—their deviant kind of doing age is neither purely suppressed nor purely hegemonic—the older men observed in this study were seriously socioeconomically disadvantaged but they were also suppressing others (women, migrants) in their strong manner of place appropriation and setting up in-group boundaries. This group is both invisible and suppressed—in terms of gerontological and political consideration—and simultaneously very visible and oppressing—in their everyday life practices. It is a group that makes it hard to call for more participation in the development of neighborhoods and cities, and at the same time makes it even more necessary to do so. In addressing social inequalities in older age, (critical) gerontology should thus not only consider the poor, disadvantaged, disengaged elderly, but also the rebellious, resisting, provoking new generation of older adults.

The small sample size and the sample composition, however, put limitations to the results. Data of the only woman interviewed at the deprived site (the “chaperone”) gives some clues on how a more gender balanced sample could have given more and different insights, as her pattern of place attachment and place appropriation differed greatly from the men’s. Moreover, despite many (older) migrants living at the deprived case site, migrants have partly been left out of analysis due to language difficulties. Their view, also, could be quite different. Hence, this qualitative, exploratory research generates assumptions that are yet to be tested and developed further.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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