



Photovoicing the neighbourhood: Understanding the situated meaning of intangible places for ageing-in-place

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ABSTRACT

Ageing-in-place is considered important for the health of older adults. In this paper, inspired by a constructivist approach to ageing-in-place, we unravel professionals' and older adults' constructions of ageing-in-place. Their perspectives are studied in relation to a policy that aims to develop so-called 'lifecycle-robust neighbourhoods' in the southern part of the Netherlands. We conducted a photovoice study in which 18 older adults (70–85 years) living independently and 14 professionals (social workers, housing consultants, neighbourhood managers and community workers) were asked to photograph and discuss the places they consider important for ageing-in-place. Based on a theoretically informed analysis of the data, we found that professionals primarily consider objective characteristics of neighbourhoods such as access to amenities, mobility and meeting places as important enablers for older adults to remain living independently. Analysis of older adults' photographs and stories show that they associate ageing-in-place with specific lived experiences and attachments to specific, intangible and memory-laden public places. We conclude that exploring these experiences helps to increase current knowledge about place attachment in old age.

1. Introduction

Place is considered increasingly important in ageing policies of Western welfare states. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2015) advises governments to encourage the development of age-friendly places, described as places that facilitate a healthy lifestyle, social participation and security. According to the WHO, providing age-friendly places will help people to age actively and thereby enhance their quality of life. Governments choose these approaches to confront the challenges of rapidly ageing societies and increasing healthcare expenditures (Menec et al., 2015). By increasing opportunities to remain living independently for longer, governments aim for people to remain healthier for longer. Although ageing-in-place is presented as a solution for governmental challenges, a great variety of studies on this topic over the past decades has demonstrated the complexities of the ageing-in-place processes (Andrews et al., 2007; Wiles et al., 2012). We studied the meanings of ageing-in-place in the development of so-called 'lifecycle-robust' neighbourhoods. These were introduced in a Dutch policy initiative, as a response to demographic trends and rising

costs of healthcare. Although the term 'lifecycle-robust' appears to be synonymous with the notion of 'age-friendly', and the current stress is on enabling ageing-in-place, the idea of lifecycle-robust neighbourhoods is that they enable people of all ages – from cradle to grave – to live there.

Studying the meaning of ageing-in-place, Wiles et al. (2012) demonstrate how ageing-in-place ideals as articulated in policy papers differ from those expressed by older adults. They argue that the phrase 'ageing-in-place' is not as fixed or transparent as assumed in policies. Most older people were not familiar with the term and some even had negative associations, like "*being trapped*" in a place without the ability to move' (p. 360). Buffel et al. (2013) and van Hees et al. (2017) observed similar differences between policies and everyday practices. According to these authors, older adults' experiences of place were not heard by policymakers, and those living independently experienced difficulties in explaining why places matter to them. Buffel et al. (2014) concluded that older adults often abstain from participatory approaches concerning housing issues, neighbourhood design and planning, because they feel their voice is being neglected on these topics.

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Kenkmann et al. (2017) compared perspectives of older adults and care professionals in care homes and found that professionals construct these homes primarily as workplaces, while the older adults who live there construct them as their homes. In addition, older adults expressed feeling more at home when they have greater autonomy and choice in how to use space, while professionals believed that elements such as order and cleanliness would contribute to a 'homely' environment. In studies exploring meanings of ageing-in-place among policymakers, professionals and older adults, very different perspectives and experiences come to the foreground.

Many studies on ageing-in-place already emphasise the importance of older adults' voices and discuss specific meanings given by them to places relating to place attachment versus barriers created by places (e.g. Kohon and Carder, 2014; Novek and Menec, 2014). Elements of ageing-in-place that are generally considered important are mobility, social relations, and the environment as enablers of mobility and social relations (e.g. the importance of benches on which to rest and as enablers of social interactions) (Gardner, 2011; Menec et al., 2011; Ottoni et al., 2016; Vogelsang, 2016). We want to advance the investigation of ageing-in-place by not only focusing on which constraints and regulators older adults recognise in their environment, but by also exploring how their constructions of ageing-in-place connect or interact with those of local professionals (social workers, housing consultants, neighbourhood managers and community workers) who translate ageing-in-place policies into daily practices. We therefore chose photovoice as an alternative method, to explore untold stories about place and to obtain insights into the experiences of older adults. Photovoice provided us with an opportunity to explore how older adults and professionals both construct ageing-in-place. It helped unravel lived *experiences* and stories that, according to Coleman and Kearns (2015), remain untold when relying only on interviews, because: '... "ageing-in-place" is not only a demographic or political issue but also an emotional and lived *experience* that inherently involves the broader place of residence'. In interviews, people expressed difficulties in elaborating why and how places matter to them. Photovoice provides participants with an opportunity to show instead of tell.

Below, we first sketch the theoretical background to this study and explain the constructivist approach used, which frames ageing-in-place as the situated dynamics of place attachment and sense of place. We then describe the methodology used in this ethnographic study and introduce our case, which involves the introduction of lifecycle-robust neighbourhoods, after which we present a visual analysis. Finally, we reflect upon the ways in which older adults and professionals visualise and share their perspectives, and discuss how these relate to prior discussions of place attachment and ageing-in-place.

2. Theorising ageing and place

Ageing-in-place has been thoroughly investigated and discussed within geography, public health and gerontology during the past decades. This notion closely relates to place attachment, which is elaborated below. First, we discuss two major approaches used to explore how older adults relate to place: (a) an empirical-rationalist approach and (b) a social-constructivist approach. Scholars using the first approach often draw on an ecological perspective (Lawton and Nahemow, 1973), focusing on an environment-person fit. They identify characteristics of place that optimise individual functioning. Tangible characteristics, such as proximity and access to amenities, mobility opportunities, security and attachment through personal items are demonstrated as important for ageing-in-place (e.g. Dahlin-Ivanoff et al., 2007; Eriksson and Emmelin, 2013; Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Ogg, 2014; Ottoni et al., 2016; Rowles, 1983, 1993; Peace, Holland and Kellaher, 2011; Plouffe and Kalache, 2010).

However, while 'objective' but static demographic, geographical and historical characteristics provide insight into meanings of place, this

approach does not help to understand what specifically makes place meaningful for people when living there. In our study, inspired by Science and Technology Studies (STS) we draw on the social-constructivist approach that was introduced to understand *how* places become meaningful (Andrews et al., 2013; Gieryn, 2000; Milligan, 1998). This approach considers the meaning of place not as a sum of objective characteristics, but as a dynamic process in which meaning construction is situated and contingent upon historically shaped experiences. Place is not considered to be a static context, but an integral and meaningful part of peoples' social lives that is constructed by past experiences and desired futures (Andrews et al., 2007). STS is a discipline that studies how science, technology and society interact based on the idea that there is no activity that is not technologically mediated (Hackett et al., 2008). Places can be considered as such mediating technologies when they affect society and invoke relations between people using or relating to them. Accessibility, design and the stories people share about a place create meaning. A pub needs visitors, but subsequently visitors interpret the pub based on their experiences and through other users. Via this example, Gieryn (2000) explains how one pub had become a symbol for class distinction as it attracted the 'moneyed'. A constructivist approach to place points to the importance, not of objective characteristics as such, but to how places generate experiences, and how they enable people to connect to other people and thereby to place.

Constructivist studies first nuanced the idea that older adults all have a desire to remain in-place and demonstrated that ageing-in-place is also about agency and choice in how to use place (van Hoven and Douma, 2012). The maintenance of autonomy, independence, identity and feelings of belonging is crucial (Coleman et al., 2016; Heatwole-Shank and Cutchin, 2016; Peace et al., 2011; van Hoven and Douma, 2012). Stones and Gullifer (2016) studied the refusal of very old people to leave their homes. They found that being able to maintain one's home is not only important because the physical setting represents independence, but also because of an attachment to 'things, experiences, memories and expectations embodied therein' (p. 453). Through these experiences people develop collective identities, memories and histories, which create feelings of belonging and place attachment. This adds to Rowles's (1983) argument that place attachment is constructed by how people in everyday life talk about their life experiences in their environment. He argues that environments embody such experiences and can be called 'incident places'. In her study of collective and relational experiences of place, Degnen (2015) explains that by sharing memories and experiences of place the meaning of place continually changes.

Social-constructivist studies on meanings of ageing-in-place demonstrate how not only the home, but also places outside the home such as green (and blue) spaces, historical buildings, monuments, and opportunities for social interactions affect place attachment (Coleman and Kearns, 2015; Coleman Kearns and Wiles, 2016; Gardner, 2011; Wiles et al., 2012). Gardner (2011) studied how such public places can create opportunities to connect, to maintain connections and how places subsequently create feelings of belonging and a sense of community. In addition to home (*first places*) and work (*second places*), Gardner recognises the importance of so-called *third places*, which refer to somewhat open, public places (such as pavements, parks and squares) and public buildings (such as grocery stores, libraries, bars, restaurants and churches). These are places that offer opportunities for people to interact in diverse ways. Apparently, the simple everyday interactions invited by public places, such as observing, calling or waving to a neighbour, are of special importance in constructions of place attachment. In addition, Coleman and Kearns (2015) demonstrate how places do not necessarily need to be actively used to be meaningful. In their study of what ageing-in-place means for older adults living on an island, they give an example of an older woman who explains how she gets pleasure, meaning and satisfaction in her daily life from the view from her home. A man living on the same

island has the opposite experience; the island makes him feel as if he is in exile. In literature about safe neighbourhoods, Blokland stressed the importance of public places to stimulate ‘public familiarity’ among ‘familiar strangers’ (Blokland, 2009).

Here, we adopt a constructivist approach. Through photovoice we explore processes of meaning construction with respect to lifecycle-robust neighbourhoods for older adults. We aim to give them a voice in relation to the experiences of professionals who work in these neighbourhoods and aim to enable ageing-in-place. We advance our understanding of ageing-in-place not only by presenting yet untold stories and experiences, but also by exploring how third places relate to meanings of place.

3. Materials and methods

This paper draws on a photovoice study, a method used in the social sciences and based on the idea that photographs add new (visual) information about our society because they induce alternative modes of thought (Pink, 2013). Using visual information to collect information in research, is considered an opportunity to ‘give voice’ to unique perspectives, experiences and meanings (Novek et al., 2012). Photographs (existing photographs, or photographs taken by researchers and/or participants) are considered visualisations of experiences and meanings given to objects (or places) by participants (Catalani and Minkler, 2010; Lockett et al., 2005; Wang and Burris, 1997; Wang and Redwood-Jones, 2001). These are the main data according to which participants can share their stories. Most scholars ask participants to reflect upon the images in interviews (and sometimes in additional dialogue meetings) (Kohon and Carder, 2014; Novek et al., 2012). The advantage of this method is that it allows for collection of data about how people interact with places without interfering in their daily structures and schemes, as participants can collect this material independently at a preferred time (Carpiano, 2009; Cele, 2006). In interviews, people are limited to talking about places, while the use of photographs can help to visualise their ideas (Carpiano, 2009). Photographs provide an opportunity for them to show why places are meaningful, while they also maintain agency over which experiences to share.

For this study we created a design that would not only help to give voice to older adults’ meanings of place, but also enable a dialogue between older adults and local professionals about ageing-in-place. We assumed that residents know how best to improve the quality of life in their neighbourhoods, because they have what is called ‘place-bound, experiential knowledge’ (Henke and Gieryn, 2008; Hergenrath et al., 2009). As the area in which our study was conducted is known for having a less educated population, we also expected that photovoice would improve opportunities for less literate participants to express themselves. By facilitating dialogue meetings and by reporting on their experiences, we created an opportunity for people to share their perspectives. Dialogues induced insight with yet untold, unique meanings.

3.1. Photovoice in Parkstad

This photovoice study was conducted from July 2015 to November 2015 in Parkstad. Parkstad is an area in the southern part of the Netherlands with almost 250,000 inhabitants (in 2012), consisting of eight municipalities ranging from rural communities with less than 8000 inhabitants to urban areas with almost 88,000 inhabitants. The area is known for its relatively abundant greenery (Parkstad means ‘Park City’), its touristic attractiveness, a history of mining (several coal mines were operational in the post-World War II period), and its geographic position on the Dutch–German border. Parkstad is also known for its demographics (it has a rapidly ageing and shrinking population); the prospective impact on health has induced a sense of urgency in policymakers to change former policies. Our study was

conducted in two separate neighbourhoods that were selected because the civil servants and neighbourhood managers employed there were seeking opportunities to increase the neighbourhood’s experienced lifecycle-robustness. The policy in both neighbourhoods emphasises the encouragement of community-sense over changes in physical constructions. Furthermore, both neighbourhoods are situated directly on the Dutch–German border and consist of mainly Dutch residents; about 20 percent of the population are (mostly Western) immigrants. We chose neighbourhoods A and B based on the assumption that experiences would be different in each because A is situated in a (more) urban area, while B spreads into a rural area.

We asked 14 professionals and 18 older adults in A and B to photograph a maximum of 25 objects and places which they considered important with regard to ageing-in-place. All professionals worked on a daily basis in these neighbourhoods. Participating professionals informed older adults about the study, and invited them on behalf of the authors to participate. The professionals were instructed to ask people approximately 70 years and over who were living independently. We offered to provide customised solutions for people who were willing to participate, but felt unable to do so independently (owing to mobility limitations, for instance). Although this method of selection has led to purposive sampling, our inclusion coincidentally contained an equal gender mix, with all but one person (63 years) within an age range of 70–85 years. We did not ask participants for specific personal details, but it became clear from their stories that a mix of people had been included, some of whom had lived in the same neighbourhood (or even the same home) for their entire lives, while others returned to their neighbourhood after retirement or because they were looking for more appropriate, age-friendly homes.

Because the policymakers in our case introduced lifecycle-robustness as a mediator of independently ageing-in-place while maintaining a good quality of life, we explained the concept of lifecycle-robust in an instructional meeting for the participants as ‘places to age in a good way’. Participants were asked to keep a logbook in which they answered five questions per photograph: 1. What is displayed in the photograph? 2. When was the photograph taken? 3. Where was the photograph taken? 4. Why do you consider this specific object or place important when you think about ageing in this neighbourhood? 5. What does the object or place you photographed mean for you personally? What does the photograph symbolise for you? All participants signed a consent form, granting permission to use all anonymised photographs taken for this study. After one to two weeks, the photographs and logbooks were collected. We then asked people to choose their three most important photographs that should definitely be used during a subsequent dialogue meeting. Based on which photographs participants prioritised and on recurring themes, we selected 50 (out of 218) photographs in A and 54 (out of 237) in B for the dialogue meetings. Because some older adults worked together, and some only participated in a dialogue meeting, this resulted in 13 photosets made by older adults (six in A and seven in B) and ten by professionals (six in A and four in B). Where necessary, we asked for additional information in a short interview (nine interviews with 11 older participants) when collecting the photographs, or in an e-mail or phone follow-up. Questions for clarification about the photosets of professionals were asked immediately after they were received (during a social neighbourhood meeting in A and via e-mail in B). We wanted to organise the dialogue meetings within two weeks after the photographs were collected, to ensure the stories behind the photographs were still vivid in people’s minds.

In the dialogue meetings participants reflected on the photographs, and shared the underlying stories in small groups of three to five participants (a mix of one or two professionals and three or four older adults). These dialogues were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A researcher guided these dialogues (the first author and four colleagues). Each researcher was instructed beforehand to make sure each group discussed the photographs according to three questions: 1. What do you like about living / working in this neighbourhood and

what makes it age-friendly? 2. What do you like less about this neighbourhood? What makes this place not age-friendly? 3. Make a poster of how you would describe or visualise an ideal neighbourhood where you can 'age-in-place'. Participants were encouraged to use the photographs in their dialogues and to add a description or drawing of the stories they felt were not represented in the photographs. Eventually the groups shared their ideas by giving a short poster presentation.

Data-analysis commenced prior to the dialogue meeting. The trustworthiness of the study was increased by using multiple methods and sources, and by continually refining codes and categories during the process. A preliminary selection of topics was based on the photographs that were given priority by the participants in addition to the places or things that recurred in different photographs of different participants (e.g. nature, formal and informal meeting places, memories). After the dialogue meetings, the topics that were given the most attention during these meetings were discussed with the co-authors until consensus was reached. Corresponding journal entries, interview transcripts and transcripts of the dialogue meetings were examined and re-examined by the first author for these recurring topics. A photo-report including these topics was sent for verification to all participants, to ensure a reliable representation of their perspectives. To obtain a complete picture of the results, they were discussed with the co-authors and via this consensus-building the dependability of the results was increased.

4. Constructions of ageing-in-place

Our findings are presented in this section. Quotes from interviews and dialogue meetings are used to report participants' experiences, as we prioritise their voices and participation in the study. By using their own words, we strive for an honest representation of participants' experiences and perspectives, and consider this an opportunity to give them a broader voice.

4.1. Professionals' constructions of ageing-in-place

'I actually started looking at buildings [...] for instance this [Fig. 1] "care zone" where actually all kinds of housing are available, independent living, assisted living, luxury homes, whatever you want, all care related [...] one care centre facilitates, in my view, an opportunity to remain living [independently] for longer', a housing professional explained during one of the dialogue meetings. How this professional gives meaning to his perspective on place for ageing-in-place exemplifies how many of the participating professionals give meaning to ageing-in-place. Photographs, logbook details and stories demonstrate that the professionals articulate a somewhat objectivist approach to ageing-in-place, mainly focusing on static elements in a neighbourhood which, from their perspective, address the needs of older adults. Most professionals photographed buildings and services



Fig. 1. 'A care zone' photographed by a housing professional.



Fig. 2. A bus stop photographed by a housing professional.

they considered convenient for older adults, such as bakeries and butchers, grocery stores, bus stops and meeting centres for older adults and age-friendly houses or buildings. In talking about such places (Figs. 1 and 2), professionals explained that they consider good housing facilities with transport, care, welfare, and daily needs services in the environment to be conducive to ageing-in-place. However, they simultaneously worried that these places are no longer sustainable, because, as a neighbourhood manager expressed: *'resources are severely cut, the trick is to maintain these services with constrained budgets. That is why we are trying to think of other possibilities, there is some tension there'*. In other words, to enable ageing-in-place, professionals think age-friendly environments are needed, although there are no means to build them. Therefore, they aim for alternative solutions, for instance by promoting the use of public spaces in apartment buildings as meeting places for older adults.

Professionals find communities and community centres important, as these are considered to increase social cohesion to encourage ageing-in-place. They argued that loneliness is an important issue obstructing ageing-in-place: *'because, in our social work, we see much loneliness. However, we do not see it literally. Because those people are not waiting at their front door, saying: we are lonely. [...] the way you [addressing older people attending the dialogue group] live, should be exemplary for others'*. Some others agreed that increasing the role of the community would be a good strategy to redesign the neighbourhood as lifecycle-robust. They highlighted how they want to create centrally located community places, for instance by (re)making the community centre (Fig. 3) into a formally organised meeting-place run by volunteers. By promoting informal help, professionals also aim to improve older people's coping mechanisms to address problems of loneliness. Another barrier for ageing-in-place that was stressed (in neighbourhood A in particular) was safety. Many places were photo-



Fig. 3. A community centre, photographed by several professionals in neighbourhood A.

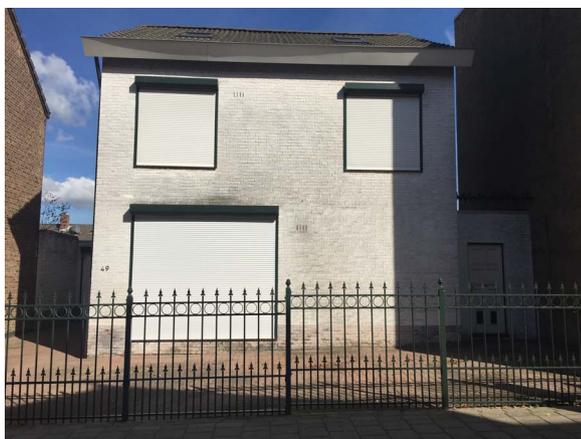


Fig. 4. The assumed residence of a motorcycle club, photographed by civil servants.

graphed to symbolise dangerous situations, neglect or criminal behaviour (e.g. Fig. 4).

Although professionals in both neighbourhoods mainly emphasised the importance of functional characteristics of a neighbourhood that are directly related to health (including social participation), they noticed that there may be other reasons for older adults to become attached to the environment. Some professionals in both places included historical buildings, monuments and parks in their photographs.

4.2. Older adults' constructions of ageing-in-place

Turning to perspectives of older adults demonstrates different ideas of place. The photographs and background stories below illustrate that older adults confirm a need for tangible characteristics in place, but that they give meaning and value to these places differently. When talking about photographs such as Figs. 1 and 2, older adults confirmed that functionality is elementary for ageing-in-place, but they described functionality differently by emphasising how places are functional for them. During the dialogue meetings, it was explained that only a selection of all photographs would be discussed, but that participants could use other photographs that display similar places to those shown in their own photographs (e.g. 'a' bus stop could be represented as 'their' bus stop). However, it became clear that photographs of other participants that seemed similar did not represent similar stories for participants, and that they missed discussing their own specific photograph (or place). Instead of seeing such photographs as symbolic of characteristics that enable or constrain ageing-in-place, older adults talked about *that specific* bus stop they use when they need to go to the hospital, or *that specific* store they use to do their daily groceries. Participants living in more remote areas with fewer services in their immediate environment shared how they were afraid to lose these functional places, while people living in central areas photographed such places as useful places for themselves or their neighbours. At the same time, the people in remote areas were convinced that everyone will eventually find a solution when services disappear. One older man argued: 'If you have no help at home and need a bus [...], people [neighbours] will take care of it. In this place, nobody will die because he has no food. They [neighbours who need help] arrange it in another way, also if they need to get some money [the nearest cash dispenser is located in another village], they arrange something'. However, if you really are in need of care, he thinks that living in remote places might no longer be sufficient, owing to a lack of services: '[...] people should live independently for longer periods of time [...] which would be good, but some support has to be available'.

Besides functional places, older people photographed places that symbolise the value and meaning of their place's appearance for their environment. The photograph in Fig. 5 was taken by a woman to



Fig. 5. A garden as a symbol of taking care of one's own neighbourhood, photographed by an older woman.

demonstrate the beauty of the neighbourhood for herself and her husband, but also to demonstrate how residents care about and take care of their neighbourhood. She explained how they loved their own well-kept garden as well as the garden of their neighbour and that they thought it was important that people take care of their place. A man shared how, for him, the way neighbours take care of their place is meaningful in a similar way, but he feels powerless at not being able to improve how his neighbourhood looks: 'One small example, my wife cleans the pavement every day, she cleans the window frames. However, next to us, young people are living there, it [their pavement] is green as grass, they never do anything about it, maybe once a year'.

Older adults also mentioned the value of access to social activities and participation, either at formal meeting places, or in public places. Living in a more urban environment with access to a variety of facilities and services is appreciated by people living in age-friendly apartment buildings. Some mentioned how they like the specific meeting places for older people inside some apartment buildings (so-called living-room projects), but benches in a park or at a square, within walking distance (i.e. for some, this means within 100 m) also represent opportunities for social participation. An older woman described her own apartment building as a good place to age, stating that it is essential 'that you own a real cosy home [...] where you can live safe and secure'. By safe and secure she meant that the place offers her additional security because neighbours can easily keep a close eye on her while strangers are kept out.

Interestingly, participants not only considered opportunities for social participation as important for themselves, but also mentioned the importance of spaces for younger people. A woman said that she did not like the vandalism in front of her apartment building, but that she thought this was partly due to a lack of meeting places for younger people: 'I think it is sad that these young people are driven away everywhere [...] yes, they create tumult, but that is not what this is about, I think they need to have a place where they can meet'. By driving the younger people away, an older man warns, the neighbourhood will lose diversity and cohesion: 'Our biggest problem is that the school has been closed [...] consequently, these children go to different places, different schools, they are no longer together [...] they make their own friends, sometimes they join the soccer club. [...] a school is very important for a neighbourhood in that sense'.

Although older adults' constructions of meaningful places are mostly related to their individual experiences and personal use, the characteristics they mentioned as elementary for a lifecycle-robust neighbourhood are largely the same: an attractive functional place that offers opportunities for social interaction. Although older adults confirmed the importance professionals ascribed to place in enabling social and physical activities, they also photographed other kinds of places and shared other kinds of stories, such as those about places



Fig. 6. The community cemetery, photographed by an older woman to demonstrate the sense of community in the neighbourhood.

they are attached to for reasons that are less tangible. In both neighbourhoods, participants shared photographs and stories about places they deemed specifically valuable for individual experiences. The photograph of a cemetery (Fig. 6) exemplifies such a story.

A woman photographed this place to illustrate how the community has always accepted foreigners, like her Polish husband who is buried there, and how immigrants and local citizens lived together harmoniously in the past. *'Next to my husband, there lies a Portuguese, and what I wanted to note is that during the war, and in the years after the war, when the Poles came and later those others as well, we have never had the idea he was approached wrongly. And that is what I wanted to prove with that'*. For her the cemetery is not only a place to visit her late husband, but also a place that symbolises a sense of community.

Another example of this is 'hidden' in Fig. 7. An older man said: *'That place [...] a wilderness, [...] that is just filthy to see, but well, probably the municipality does not own the place. However, it could be a bit, that they just use a lawnmower one time, to make it look a bit more attractive. That is what I think, for many older people, that is a thorn in the side. In the past, there used to be a bar with a ballroom, there was a vibrant life, then, well, now they have demolished it [...]'*. There used to be a famous dancing bar where many older adults went when they were younger; this was 'the' place to go and to meet other people. That this location is currently not taken care of is frustrating for some people who are nostalgic about the place. Similar (childhood) memories recurred in many photosets. People feel nostalgic or sad about these places because the original places have vanished or are neglected. When talking about this neglect, participants shared the



Fig. 7. The former location of a dancing bar, photographed by an older woman and an older man in neighbourhood A.



Fig. 8. Impressions of the dialogue meetings.

sentiment that the value of their neighbourhood that they experience is not recognised by others.

According to older people, specific places contain untold (or unheard) memories and stories that professionals and policymakers are not aware of. An example is a large flat that is scheduled for demolition because it no longer fits current housing requirements but that is well known in the neighbourhood for its social cohesion. The flat has become a place that represents an ideal of qualitative ageing, as an older woman explained: *'That has been a big advantage for many people, that flat, if you think of the cohesion there, incredible. All those years [...] that flat, it was marvellous, the things that happened there'*. When talking about these places, older adults emphasised that it might be good to retain the vividness of these places by maintaining these memories, even when reconstructing places.

4.3. Older adults and professionals discussing ageing-in-place

In dialogue meetings (Fig. 8a and b), older people and professionals shared stories about their prioritised photographs, and added stories about other places they deemed important. A particularly important topic in neighbourhood A, but also discussed in neighbourhood B, was safety and how it affects a desire to remain in a place (Fig. 4). During the meetings professionals explained that there were safety issues in the neighbourhoods because their location on the Dutch–German border not only offers opportunities for leisure trips or to buy (cheaper)



Fig. 9. A wooden witch, photographed by two participants, one man and one woman.

products, such as gas, but also for all kinds of criminality. Both residents and professionals mentioned that the neighbourhood attracts drug dealing and robbery. In picturing the criminal behaviour they were facing, older adults attempted to give nuance to its influence on their experience of place. An 85-year-old woman, who shared a story about how she stood up during an attempted robbery at the cemetery, stated: *'They will not chase me away'*. Older adults explained that they attempt to look away and ignore the ugly parts of their neighbourhoods if possible. A woman photographed a building used for drugs across from her place, but when talking about the building and what she did not like about it, she tried to give nuance to her experience by saying that her windows are on the 'good' side of the building (where this building cannot be seen), which enables her to ignore the ugliness.

While professionals mainly emphasised the importance of places to enable physical and social activities for ageing-in-place, older adults shared many stories about other kinds of places.

'That witch' an older woman said when she showed the photograph in Fig. 9, *'has been carved out of one tree, and it is placed at the former location of an open-air theatre ...'* An explanation about the history of the theatre follows, which dates back decades. The wooden witch can be found in a forest that is attached to neighbourhood B. Professionals were surprised that older people consider this and similar places as important for ageing-in-place. When talking about Fig. 10 a neighbourhood manager expressed wonder: *'I think it is remarkable, if we talk about lifecycle-robustness, that you take a photograph of [such a steep path], which you can hardly climb'*, while older adults argued that *'the environment, that is phenomenal'* and appreciated that *'you see everybody there, walking, cycling'*. Talking about their photographs confirmed that people become attached to places through experiences, memories and history. Monuments and monumental buildings or places like the wooden witch were portrayed many times, and participants explained how these places give their neighbourhood its own identity and acknowledge events that happened in the past (e.g. a mining history, World War II).

Despite barriers to ageing-in-place, older participants prefer their current place and even shared photographs of their own homes to



Fig. 10. A photograph of a path in the forest. This specific path was photographed by one woman but the forest was part of four of the seven sets in neighbourhood B.

emphasise its importance. Before the meeting, some older adults thought of it as an opportunity to share their feelings of displeasure with their municipality's policy. During the meeting some topics of concern were shared, including unsafe traffic situations (a dangerous crosswalk), neglected vacant buildings, criminal activities and absence of services (public transport). However, in the main, participants shared how proud they were to be able to live where they live. Professionals, who identified with the municipal policy much more than older adults, shared their surprise about the resilience that was articulated in the experiences of older people, such as the stories about the forest path.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we investigated the meanings of ageing-in-place by exploring professionals' and older adults' experiences of place using a photovoice method. In this section, we discuss our findings and demonstrate the usefulness of photovoice in exploring place experiences as well as the limitations and implications of the study.

The neighbourhoods that we studied are the homes of the older people who participated. Professionals give meaning to ageing-in-place in these neighbourhoods based on their daily practices and professional experiences. These professional perspectives imply that ageing-in-place is based on tangible characteristics, which resonate with characteristics illuminated in previous studies (e.g. Coleman and Kearns, 2015; Eriksson and Emmelin, 2013; Gardner, 2011; Ottoni et al., 2016; Plouffe and Kalache, 2010), but also with the ideas of policymakers that ageing-in-place can be constructed physically (van Hees et al., 2017). These characteristics include the availability of age-friendly homes, proximity to facilities and services, transport opportunities and spatial opportunities for social participation and feelings of security. There were some differences between professionals' perspectives in both neighbourhoods; professionals in A stressed the lack of safety due to criminality, while in B disappearing services were emphasised. But in general, professionals' perspectives were similar and in line with current policies. However, their ideas about how older adults attach meaning to ageing-in-place differ from those of the older adults themselves.

Older adults consider these characteristics to be important, but when talking about their photographs and the places they think are important, their stories confirm the findings of earlier studies as they demonstrate that the meaningfulness of neighbourhoods is situated and individually defined (Coleman et al., 2016). People feel particularly attached to places that are embedded in history and which give nostalgic feelings – such as a steep forest path – and are not willing to let themselves 'be chased away'. They also explained that the neighbourhood community can compensate for a lack of services and

facilities only to a certain extent. Older adults wanted to pick places that symbolised certain experiences that are difficult to objectify. Hence, their stories demonstrate that not only tangible places, such as the home and Gardner's (2011) third places, are meaningful. Instead, there are also other (sometimes no longer existing) meaningful places in neighbourhoods that cannot be recognised by others because they are intangible. These include places that demonstrate a sense of community that people find unique and want to remember, such as the flat scheduled for demolition or the cemetery with the Polish husband. We call these intangible but meaningful places *fourth* places, as they play an important role for older people in relation to ageing-in-place. The notion of intangible places as fourth places adds value by providing for the addition of new insights to meanings of ageing-in-place. These places share a similarity with Rowles' (1983) 'incident places' as they acquire meaning through experiences, memories and history. Memories are, according to Degnen (2015), continually reconstructed in interactions with other users of these places. While 'incident places' that evoke such sentiments, and 'third places', that enable relationships, are both tangible places, the places we describe here are intangible. They are important, although they do not exist (any more). They embody personal, lived experiences that can only be kept alive via stories. Gardner explained that an informal, natural neighbourhood network is embedded in third places, through which older adults' wellbeing is enhanced. Our study demonstrates how intangible places affect people's relationships and interactions with their neighbourhood in a similar way. It is via the stories about intangible places that older adults connect with and attach to their (previous and current) neighbours and community.

One of the main limitations of this study is its small sample. Our aim was that the activities could take place within a few weeks to enable professionals and older adults to share their stories in a dialogue meeting. However, the purposive sampling employed probably attracted participants who are (more) engaged in their community and committed to ageing-in-place. The selection method for this sampling suggests that older people who are less active or feel socially isolated were probably excluded. Furthermore, although we did not prevent people from sharing stories about their own homes, the emphasis on lifecycle-robust neighbourhoods as a means towards achieving ageing-in-place might have led to the fact that most photographs depicted places in the neighbourhood, not in their homes. Because we prioritised older people's voices, we could not fully explore professionals' stories (i.e. no interviews were conducted). Nevertheless, photovoice gave agency to all participants in the sense that they all could participate in setting the meeting's agenda and a broad diversity of experiences could be shared. It would be interesting to include a larger sample, with a wider variety of inhabitants in future studies to explore whether other layers can be added to meanings of ageing-in-place. The differences in the perspectives of older adults and professionals suggest a need for further exploration of their perspectives and of the relation with other perspectives, such as those of policymakers. Using a similar design could offer more opportunities for a dialogue about the meanings of place in relation to ageing.

Our findings demonstrate the importance older people give to being heard and acknowledged through the places they value as important for ageing-in-place. Asking participants to take photographs gave them an opportunity to think about ageing-in-place in a different way. Their stories about fourth places substantiate the individuality of lived experiences and emphasise a need for a more sensitive and customised approach from policymakers. We agree with Heatwole-Shank and Cutchin (2016) that it is impossible to construct one liveable place for ageing-in-place that suits everyone. However, the difference between the expectations of professionals about places for ageing-in-place and the experiences of older adults necessitates a continuation of dialogue between policy and practice. This study demonstrates both how methodology matters to exploring experience and how it could be of interest to policymakers willing to involve older adults in future

policy developments. By demonstrating how intangible places play an important role for older adults and related ageing-in-place process, this paper emphasises the importance of social-constructivism in studying meanings of ageing-in-place.

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