Dwelling in Old Age:
Urban Life and Subjectivities of Ageing-in-Place

D I S S E R T A T I O N

Cotutelle de thèse

zur Erlangung der akademischen Grade
Doktorin der Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften (Dr.rer.soc.oec.)
doctor philosophiae (Dr.phil.)

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eingereicht an der

Fakultät für Architektur und Raumplanung, Technischen Universität Wien
Fakultät für Sozial- und Verhaltenswissenschaften, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

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Wien, 25. Juni 2025

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Kurzzusammenfassung

„Ageing-in-Place“, als politische Strategie, strebt an, städtische Umgebungen so zu gestalten, dass es älteren Menschen ermöglicht wird, in ihrem vertrauten Wohnumfeld zu bleiben und einen Umzug in institutionelle Einrichtungen zu vermeiden. Sie reagiert damit auf zwei zentrale demographische Entwicklungen: gesellschaftliche Alterung und Urbanisierung. Entsprechende Maßnahmen sind eingebettet in breitere Bemühungen zur Schaffung alternsgerechter Städte und Kommunen und spiegeln gesellschaftliche Ideale eines „guten Alterns“ wider. Diese Dissertation setzt hier an und fragt, wie urbane Räume alltägliche Erfahrungen des Alterns prägen und vermitteln. Sie ist im disziplinenübergreifenden Feld der raumbezogenen Alternsforschung verortet, das sich mit dem Zusammenwirken von Altern und Raum befasst.

Die Arbeit leistet einen theoretischen Beitrag, indem sie ein praxistheoretisches Verständnis von „doing age“ mit einem relationalen Raumverständnis verknüpft – ein Zugang, der das Soziale und das Materielle als ko-konstitutiv und in einem ständigen Prozess des Werdens begreift.

Die Stärke dieser Forschung liegt in ihrer empirisch fundierten Theoriebildung, indem sie einer Grounded-Theory-Methodologie folgt. Die Ergebnisse basieren auf einer qualitativen Interviewstudie in Kombination mit ethnographischer Forschung in Wien – einer Stadt, die alternsgerechte Strategien aktiv in ihre Stadtentwicklung integriert. Einbezogen wurden Personen im Ruhestand zwischen 63 und 92 Jahren, die „zuhause altern“. Es handelt sich um ein heterogenes Sample hinsichtlich sozio-struktureller Merkmale, sozialer Integration, Wohnbiographien und -orte, alltäglicher Aktivitäten und gesundheitlicher Verfasstheit. Ergänzt wurden die Daten durch Expert:inneninterviews sowie eine Analyse einschlägiger Policy-Programme und stadtentwicklungspolitischer Strategien.

Im Zentrum steht die Frage, wie sich alltägliche Erfahrungen des Älterwerdens räumlich manifestieren und wie Altern durch Raum ko-produziert wird. Dabei leistet die Studie eine zweifache Verdichtung: Erstens bündelt sie vielfältige Einsichten in Wohnpraktiken im späteren Leben zu einer Theorie der konstitutiven Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Altern und Raum, indem sie die multiplen relationalen Dynamiken des Alterns und die Zeitlichkeiten des Raums in den Vordergrund stellt. Zweitens hinterfragt sie kritisch das

Konzept des Ageing-in-Place als hegemoniales Leitbild innerhalb alternsgerechter Stadtentwicklung und bietet Impulse für alternative Ansätze.

Die Forschungsarbeit stellt die dominante Annahme einer zunehmenden Ortsverbundenheit (place attachment) im Alter infrage, indem sie Spannungen zwischen biografisch verankerten Erinnerungen und soziomateriellen Transformationen aufzeigt. Sie plädiert für eine systematische Verknüpfung einer Lebensverlaufsperspektive mit einer Generationendimension. Diese Relevanz wird besonders deutlich, wenn urbane Transformation im Kontext sozio-struktureller Veränderungen und fortwährender Urbanisierung betrachtet wird. Aus dieser Perspektive erleben ältere Menschen eine Form der „doppelten Missachtung“: Ihre altersspezifischen Bedürfnisse werden ignoriert und gleichzeitig ihre generationenbezogenen Werte und Vorstellungen aus dominanten urbanen Erzählungen ausgeblendet.

Alltägliche Erfahrungen des Alterns sind geprägt durch vielfältige Formen des „verräumlichten Othering“: sowohl durch die Schaffung altersspezifischer Infrastrukturen, die durch die Verkörperung chrono-normativer Ordnungen segregierend wirken können, als auch durch Erfahrungen von Fremdzuschreibungen in vermeintlich „alterslosen“ Räumen des täglichen Lebens, in denen ältere Menschen als „fehl am Platz“ oder „anders“ markiert werden. Diese Befunde knüpfen an soziologische Arbeiten an, die zeigen, dass das mittlere Erwachsenenalter als soziale Norm konstruiert wird und das höhere Alter als „das Andere“ herausstellt.

Gleichzeitig zeigt die Arbeit, dass ältere Menschen handlungsmächtig sind und auf urbane Transformationsprozesse oft widerständig und ambivalent reagieren. Die Einbeziehung von Theorien zu Subjektivierungsweisen in das Feld der Stadtforschung trägt zu einem differenzierteren Verständnis bei, wie ältere Menschen als Subjekte des urbanen Wandels aktiv und widersprüchlich auf strukturelle Veränderungen und Planungsmaßnahmen reagieren. Damit bietet die Dissertation einen präziseren Blick darauf, wie und ob die viel zitierten prägenden Kräfte von Urbanisierung und gesellschaftlicher Alterung in Bezug zueinander und im Kontext städtischer Alltagswelten älterer Menschen adressiert werden.

Abstract

Ageing-in-place, as a policy goal, promotes urban environments that enable older people to remain in their familiar homes, avoiding relocating into institutional care facilities. The strategy addresses two central demographic trends: population ageing and urbanisation. Corresponding measures are embedded in broader efforts to create age-friendly cities and communities and reflect societal ideals of "ageing well". The thesis takes this point of departure to ask how urban spaces shape and mediate everyday experiences of ageing. It is situated within the cross-disciplinary field of space-related ageing research, which examines the interplay between ageing and space.

The thesis offers a theoretical contribution by linking a practice-theoretical understanding of "doing age" with a relational conception of space – an approach that understands the social and the material as co-constitutive and as constantly in the process of becoming.

The work's strength lies in its empirically grounded theorisation by following a grounded theory methodology. The findings are based on a qualitative interview study combined with ethnographic research conducted in Vienna – a city that actively integrates age-friendly strategies into its urban development agenda. The study involved retired adults aged 63 to 92 who are "ageing in place", representing a heterogeneous sample with respect to socio-structural characteristics, social integration, housing biographies, place of residence, everyday activities and health conditions. The dataset was further complemented by expert interviews and an analysis of policy programmes and urban development strategies.

At its core, the research explores how everyday experiences of ageing manifest spatially and how ageing is co-produced through space. It makes a twofold synthesis: First, it distils a variety of insights into dwelling practices in later life into a theory of the constitutive interrelations between ageing and space, foregrounding the multiple relational dynamics of ageing and the temporalities of space. Second, it critically interrogates the concept of ageing-in-place as a hegemonic ideal within age-friendly urban development and proposes impulses for alternative approaches.

The research challenges the dominant assumption of a growing place attachment in older age by highlighting tensions between biographically anchored memories and socio-material transformations. It advocates for a systematic linkage of a lifecourse perspective with a generational lens – an approach whose relevance becomes particularly clear when

urban transformation is considered in the context of wider structural changes and ongoing urbanisation. From this point of view, older people experience a form of "dual neglect": their age-specific needs are overlooked, and their generation-related values and perceptions are excluded from dominant urban narratives.

Everyday experiences of ageing are shaped by various forms of "spatialised othering": both through the construction of old age-specific infrastructures that, by embodying chrono-normative orders, can have segregating effects, and through experiences of external attributions in seemingly "age-less" everyday spaces, where older people are marked as "out of place" or "different". These findings build on sociological work illustrating how midlife functions as a societal norm, rendering later life as "the other".

At the same time, the study demonstrates that older people exercise agency and respond to urban transformation processes in often resistant and ambivalent ways. The integration of subjectivation theories into urban studies scholarship contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how older people, as subjects of urban change, actively and contradictorily engage with structural shifts and planning interventions. In doing so, the thesis offers a differentiated perspective on how and to what extent the oft-cited intersecting forces of urbanisation and population ageing are addressed in relation to one another and within the urban everyday lives of older people.

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Acknowledgments

A doctoral project is a long and winding journey, filled with both challenges and moments of joy. Reaching the point where I can write these final lines of my book fills me with deep gratitude. I dedicate them to all the people who accompanied me along the way – whether throughout the entire process or during single sections.

I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to submit my research as a *Cotutelle de thèse* at two universities and across disciplinary boundaries. This framework not only reflected but also strengthened the cross-disciplinary nature of my work. I am especially thankful to my two supervisors, Sabine Knierbein and Silke van Dyk, whose guidance and critical insights were invaluable throughout the project.

My sincere thanks also go to my colleagues and fellow PhD researchers at both institutions. I benefited immensely from the stimulating discussions and support in the regular colloquia led by Silke van Dyk and Stefanie Graefe at the University of Jena, and in the PhD seminars offered by Sabine Knierbein at TU Wien. A very special thank-you goes to my dear friend, former colleague and PhD companion, Tihomir Viderman, for walking this path so closely with me – for both the emotional support and the incredibly thoughtful, inspiring contributions. I am also deeply grateful to Olivia Kafka for her invaluable help with documenting during the go-along interviews – an undertaking that would not have been possible alone. My thanks also go to my students at TU Wien, whose engagement in a seminar meaningfully contributed to this research. And to all other colleagues whose insights and reflections enriched my thinking – thank you.

I am also grateful to other research groups and institutions that supported me along the way. My sincere thanks go to Rob Shields for welcoming me as a guest researcher in the Space and Culture research group at the University of Alberta, and to Linda Peake and her colleagues at the City Institute at York University for their generous hospitality and intellectual inspiration. I also gratefully acknowledge the DAAD for funding my research stay in Jena, TU Wien for financially supporting a shorter stay, and the Faculty of Architecture and Planning at TU Wien for covering additional research expenses.

To my friends and loved ones – thank you for staying close throughout this long path. I would like to especially acknowledge two who have been with me from the very beginning and have shared many of the highs and lows along the way: Laura and Fabio, thank you. I am also deeply grateful to my parents, who have always supported me unconditionally and provided both shelter and nourishment during the intense final phase of writing. And I would like to express my genuine thanks to my partner, Mo, whose unwavering belief in me, support and love carried me through the most difficult times.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to the people who participated in my research. They placed their trust in me and generously shared insights – some of them deeply personal – into their everyday lives and experiences of growing older in Vienna. This work would not have been possible without their openness and willingness to engage.

1. Introduction

Demographic change and urbanisation are two fundamental developments shaping contemporary everyday life. Cities are changing with unrelenting momentum – new infrastructure rises, migration patterns reshape communities, neighbourhoods densify and urban fabrics shift, driven by increasing digitalisation and the push for ecological transformation. Within these dynamic urban landscapes, older adults strive to *age in place*, rooting themselves in homes and communities that hold their histories and identities. Yet, as cities transform, how do older people maintain their sense of belonging in environments that often prioritise the new over the familiar? Moreover, what does this mean in light of understanding ageing not as a fixed stage marked by a certain number of years, but as a lifelong process that all humans experience, yet only become labelled 'old' or 'aged' at a certain point in their lives?

The perception and experience of ageing are deeply shaped by an individual's biographical lifecourse and intersect with structural categories and identity positions such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. For an older woman with chronic health restrictions, a history of precarious labour and residence in a small social housing dwelling, ageing is likely experienced through the lens of cumulative disadvantage. Her biography as a Turkish guest worker, shaped by economic insecurity, physically demanding work and limited access to resources, may exacerbate health difficulties and restrict her social and physical mobility. Her gender may compound these issues, with lower lifetime earnings and caregiving roles often leading to greater financial insecurity in later years. Her everyday experiences – navigating healthcare systems, managing financial constraints and coping with social isolation in a confined living space – shape a perception of ageing as a struggle against systemic barriers and bodily limitations, culminating in mobility restrictions and physical withdrawal into the domestic space. In contrast, a well-off woman living in a spacious inner-city apartment with a second countryside residence likely experiences ageing with greater agency and comfort. Her lifecourse, characterised by a continuous housing biography rooted in her neighbourhood, stable family structure with her husband's steady employment, wealth accumulation and access to quality healthcare, affords her opportunities for leisure, social engagement and physical well-being. Her gender still influences her experience in terms of societal expectations around appearance and caregiving responsibilities, but her resources mitigate these pressures. Socio-economic privilege cushions the challenges of ageing,

allowing her to maintain a self-determined lifestyle. Despite increasing difficulties with walking, she is still able to pursue her passion for travelling. Hence, ageing for her may be perceived more as a phase of continued autonomy and fulfilment rather than spatial limitations and social isolation.

Both women are part of my interview sample, representing two highly contrasting cases of ageing in Vienna, illuminating the diversity of everyday experiences in later life. Ageing unfolds as a dynamic, non-linear process, shaped by biographical trajectories and structural factors that accumulate and intersect over time. Past experiences continue to influence the present, creating a path where 'becoming old' is less about reaching a chronological age and more about the cumulative weight of the lifecourse. Furthermore, ageing is embedded in evolving societal images and norms of what is 'the appropriate way' of growing older. The days of portraying older people knitting or playing cards in retirement homes or senior clubs are over, transcending to today's ideals of active 'silver agers' walking with Nordic sticks in parks or gardening in urban plots with neighbours across generations. Growing older is thus considered relational and contingent; it is a process that unfolds through experiences of different facets of change – as living within a transforming bodily, social and personal world (Baars, 2009, p. 90).

What, then, does this mean for a study on dwelling in old age? How can we theorise the intricate relationship between the multifaceted process of ageing and the changing spaces older adults inhabit?

In the interviews conducted with older people, the intersection and reciprocal amplification of diverse temporalities of space and ageing are, for example, reflected in persistent narrations about the evolving community of neighbours within their residential building. These narratives are frequently nourished by nostalgic recollections of a tightly knit community and vibrant interactions with neighbours from earlier times. Experienced changes are juxtaposed against memories of 'how things used to be', unfolding across multiple levels: the 'dying away' of acquaintances, adapted forms of social relationships due to increasing physical mobility limitations, the absence of casual encounters with neighbours in the staircase as retirement fundamentally alters daily routines, or the emergence of new, often alienating forms of coexistence tied to generational shifts. The experienced loss of neighbourly community among residents in housing buildings can also be linked to architectural changes: The implementation of elevators, the elimination

of toilets in the staircase or the introduction of water connections and washing machines in private apartments reduce communal spaces for spontaneous encounters. For many older residents in Vienna, these changes profoundly reshape the sense of neighbourly community as they age, spanning personal, social and societal dimensions across multiple spaces. This book explores the interplay of ageing-related changes and their spatial dimensions, investigating how urban environments shape the experiences, practices and self-conceptions of older people. Hence, it examines the spatial and spatialised modes of subjectivation of ageing. Specifically, it focuses on the dwelling experiences of older adults 'ageing in place' in Vienna, seeking to address the question: *What role do urban spaces play and what effects do they have on the constitution of ageing subjects?*

The previously introduced gaze on a residential building's staircase illustrates the point of departure of the study: Anchored in the mundane rhythms and ordinary encounters of urban life, it draws on the tradition of critical urban studies to take everyday spaces of urban experience as an analytical ground for social analysis, illuminating how micro, meso and macro dimensions converge in the lived experience of city dwelling (Lefebvre, 2014; for further development and actualisation, see e.g., Goonewardena, 2011; Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom, & Schmid, 2008; Knierbein, 2020). In this sense, the research starts from the groundedness of older people's lived experiences and introduces *dwelling* as a lens for empirically researching their spatialised everyday life. Exploring dwelling practices and experiences of older adults illuminates the spatial subjectivation of ageing, because, as I will elaborate, the dimension of dwelling allows for examining individual accounts alongside broader social structures, values and norms that shape ageing experiences.

Urban studies scholarship frames cities as pivotal arenas where macrosocial trends, such as demographic change and urbanisation, converge with unmatched intensity (Sassen, 2000, p. 144). The city is considered a distinctive spatial phenomenon – a vibrant web of relations and interactions, embodying 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005), where diversity is lived and negotiated through 'rubbing along' (Watson, 2006). Although urbanisation processes are not reducible to the city (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015, p. 20), the city's dense relational networks and diverse interactions make it an ideal site for studying contemporary urban transformations that intersect with ageing populations. Thus, I consider it an apt context for exploring how older adults age in place amidst

evolving urban environments shaped by infrastructural changes, shifting lifestyles and new forms of governance.

Yet, the field of space-related ageing research has not fully embraced this urban focus, leaving significant gaps in understanding how older adults age in place within transforming cities (for a similar argument, see Lewis, Yarker, Hammond, Kavanagh, & Phillipson, 2022). This study aims to contribute to filling this gap by investigating the constitutive role of urban space in shaping ageing identities. In doing so, it responds to Phillipson's (2004, p. 969) call to prioritise urban issues in gerontology, advocating for a renewed focus on the urban in ageing and space research.

Planning and urban development increasingly focus on the needs of older people, aiming to support the possibility of staying put. Gerontological research highlights the socio-material environment's role in 'ageing well', prompting policymakers and planners to develop 'age-friendly' cities and communities. These efforts focus on providing suitable housing, social infrastructure and barrier-free public spaces to enable older people to remain in their homes and communities as long as possible – following the idea of 'ageing-in-place'. Initiatives include adapting homes with barrier-free sanitary facilities or 'smart home' technologies, alongside structural and social provisions on the neighbourhood-level and wider scales. Such urban development agendas, frequently intertwined with fostering 'caring communities' and 'healthy neighbourhoods', aim to prevent relocation to institutional care settings.

The study is situated in Vienna, Austria's capital city, with more than two million inhabitants and widely recognised as one of the most liveable cities worldwide. Consistently crowned by several quality of life rankings, Vienna is praised for its affordable and ecologically sustainable housing policies, its commitment to equitable urban planning through robust regulation and social mixing strategies (Mocca, Friesenecker, & Kazepov, 2020), and its alignment with global age-friendly city initiatives (WHO, 2007, 2018). Since 2023, Vienna has been a formal member of the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities (WHO, n.d.-a); however, the city had demonstrated a strong commitment to age-friendly urban development already prior to its official inclusion. A wide range of municipal initiatives and funding schemes focused on age activation and health promotion, innovative housing projects for older adults and intergenerational living, as well as a strong emphasis on

promoting staying put and home-based care, make Vienna an ideal site for this research project. Vienna occupies a unique and dominant position within Austria. It is both a federal province (*Bundesland*) and a municipality (*Gemeinde*) with "a relatively high degree of autonomy and resources" (Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021, p. 11). Furthermore, with a population far larger than any other city in the country and undergoing continuous demographic expansion, it functions as the central hub of economic activity, political administration and international engagement. Therefore, beyond pragmatic research considerations, Vienna was selected as the study site because it exemplifies how demographic ageing intersects with urban development and processes of urbanisation, while showing a strong commitment to adapting urban environments to meet the needs of an ageing population. It serves as a particularly illustrative context in which to explore the inherent tensions and opportunities of these processes, and thus the relationship between urban space and the subjectivities of ageing.

Located in Vienna's empirical context, the research combines a qualitative interview study with mobile ethnography to capture the nuanced interplay of individuals' ageing experiences and transforming urban environments. The fieldwork involved interviews with adults living in Vienna who are in their post-employment phase and are 'ageing in place'. The respondents were selected in order to obtain variation in terms of age (spanning both the 'third' and the 'fourth age'), gender, socio-economic status, migration experiences, housing biographies, social integration and use of formal care services. The relations between ageing and space are primarily articulated through participants' interpretations and everyday practices. Accordingly, I approach *space through the ageing subject*, drawing on an understanding of the city as "a set of particular places that are lived-in, experienced, and charged with meaning by their inhabitants" (Friedmann, 1999, p. 7).

Following a grounded theory methodology (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1965), the study seeks to develop a theory of dwelling in old age rooted in empirical insights, making a *dual synthesis*: First, it advances the theorisation of age–space relationships by foregrounding the multifaceted relational dynamics of ageing and the temporalities of space, and, second, it critically interrogates 'ageing-in-place' as a hegemonic ideal within age-friendly city frameworks. The strength of this research lies in its systematic integration of different disciplinary perspectives within the field of ageing and space – a field that often remains

fragmented in its theoretical approaches, despite growing inter- and transdisciplinary efforts.

Scholarship widely acknowledges the constitutive interrelation between ageing and space, emphasising the fluid, relational nature of spaces and the socially produced character of age. While there is widespread consensus in spatial thinking around considering space as relational, moving away from a concept of space as absolute and fixed, research at the intersection of ageing and space falls short in incorporating relational theories of space into their *empirical* analysis (for a similar argument, see Andrews, 2024; Skinner, Cloutier, & Andrews, 2015). Studies often treat space as a fixed parameter and, furthermore, lack engagement with a relational understanding of age, failing to fully do justice to how old age is co-produced through the socio-material environment. In this sense, I identify a significant gap in space-related ageing research in methodologically and empirically integrating a relational understanding of space and social gerontology's extensive theorisations of ageing as relational and embodied experience.

Hence, as I will elaborate, one of the central claims of this research is that by consistently theorising the relationship between ageing and space through a mutual temporality, we can gain new insights into experiences of dwelling in old age within the context of urban change. This approach highlights how individual life histories and memories of the past are mediated through space, and how perceptions of current urban transformations are deeply connected to individual lifecourses. It builds on established research in space-related gerontology, which shows how personal biographies become embedded in and expressed through places – leading to the widely recognised assumption of growing place attachment in later life. However, this study underscores the need to focus more closely on discrepancies between the mnemonic dimensions of space and the realities of present-day conditions. These tensions give rise to what I refer to as the 'dark side of place attachment'. The empirical findings reveal that a strong sense of spatial belonging, often accompanied by nostalgic sentiments for 'how it used to be', can lead to feelings of disidentification and alienation. In turn, this may result in a heightened sense of disruption and unease in one's dwelling environment, challenging the widespread endorsement of ageing-in-place strategies, which position the accustomed home as the ideal site for growing older.

To better understand these disruptions, I will further argue for the systematic integration of the dimension of generation – a perspective that has so far been largely overlooked in space-related gerontological research. Linking a lifecourse perspective on old age with the lens of generation becomes particularly apparent when we understand urban changes in terms of wider structural changes and as processes of urbanisation. Including this analytical layer makes it possible to uncover how older individuals are subject to a dual form of neglect: on the one hand, through ageist experiences, disregarding their *age-specific* needs and on the other, through the exclusion of the *generation-specific* values and imaginaries related to urban life. I consider this approach essential in order to productively bring urbanisation and population ageing into dialogue.

Accordingly, I will demonstrate that although the needs and aspirations of older people are increasingly being incorporated into urban development processes, cities continue to be planned around the lifestyles, needs and preferences of middle-aged individuals. This aligns with findings from sociological ageing research, which highlight how older people are marked as 'other' through the dominant norm of middle adulthood, positioning later stages of life as a deviation from this norm. By analysing the everyday experiences of older people, it will be shown how processes of othering become spatially effective. These processes manifest in both 'positively' and 'negatively' perceived representations of ageing – not only in institutionalised settings explicitly associated with old age, such as pensioners' clubs, but also in seemingly 'age-less' everyday spaces.

The findings also reveal that older adults themselves engage in discriminatory and exclusionary spatial practices. This dual role – as both marginalised and marginalising – complicates the dominant narrative in space-related ageing research, which often portrays older people solely as disadvantaged. Accordingly, this research adopts an intersectional perspective on ageing. Old age is not treated as a one-dimensional category of difference, but as one that intersects with gender, ethnicity, educational background, social class and more – shaping distinct modes of spatial belonging in later life in Vienna.

The book is structured as follows:

- The present **Chapter 1** *Introduction* sets out the book's objective to explore experiences of ageing-in-place in Vienna and illustrates the overall trajectory of the study.

- **Chapter 2** *Ageing and Space: A Cross-Disciplinary Field* situates the study within existing research. It begins by outlining sociological foundations of ageing (2.1), then turns to environmental and geographical gerontology as key subfields concerned with ageing and space (2.2), reviews pivotal empirical findings (2.3), and concludes with an examination of theoretical perspectives on the ageing–space relationship (2.4). This final section identifies critical gaps that underpin the research.

- **Chapter 3** *A Theoretical Attempt for Understanding the Relationship between Ageing and Space* builds on section 2.4 by developing a theoretical framework for analysing ageing–space relationships. It proposes integrating relational theories of space with practice-theoretical approaches to ageing (3.1), leading to a theorisation of dwelling (3.2), where space production and subject formation are understood as mutually constitutive. Dwelling is framed as a central dimension for empirically investigating the spatialised everyday lives of older adults, thus bridging the theoretical and methodological dimensions of the study.

- **Chapter 4** *Methodology, Research Perspectives and Design* introduces spaces of everyday life as a methodological lens for exploring spatial subjectivation processes in old age (4.1). It then details the data collection and analysis process (4.2). Drawing on grounded theory, the study inductively constructs a theory of dwelling in old age, rooted in empirical fieldwork conducted in Vienna. The chapter ends with a reflection on limitations and potential biases (4.3).

- **Chapter 5** *Mapping the Data: A Systematic Introduction to the Interviewees* presents the empirical corpus. It systematically describes the cases along developed categories, linking biographical accounts to contextual information about Vienna's urban setting.

- **Chapter 6** *Spatialities of Ageing: Dwelling Experiences in Old Age* elucidates the findings of the research, forming the cornerstone of the study and the first part of its dual synthesis. It is structured into three sections, which reflect the grounded theory-derived categories: *Embodied Spatialities of Old Age* (6.1), *Spatialised Othering* (6.2) and *Biographical Internalisation of Space* (6.3).

- **Chapter 7** *Ageing-in-Place Revisited: Resumé and Outlook* distils the findings into a reformulated concept of ageing-in-place, forming the second part of the

study's dual synthesis. It represents a summative exploration and proposes directions for future research avenues.

- **Chapter 8** *Concluding Remarks* offers final reflections, summarising the core findings and reconnecting with the questions raised in this introduction.

The book adheres to a conventional structure of academic research: As outlined above, it begins with a review of the state of knowledge, followed by an exploration of the theoretical foundations that underpin the study, delves into the methodology and research design, presents the empirical data, engages in a discussion of the findings, and culminates with concluding remarks. However, readers may notice that the narrative does not always follow this linear progression strictly. As such, I occasionally draw connections to the empirical cases already within the theoretical expositions. This approach is methodologically justified: The research is informed by a grounded theory methodology, meaning that the theoretical framework was not deductively applied, but rather developed iteratively through interaction with the empirical data. Additionally, integrating theoretical insights and empirical observations in this way allows for a more dynamic and coherent reading experience, ensuring that theoretical discussions remain firmly grounded in the realities of the field.

2. Ageing and Space: A Cross-Disciplinary Field

Although we all continuously age, it is only at a certain point in people's lives that they are labelled as 'old(er)' or 'aged' (Baars, 2009, p. 87). In a way, this labelling makes them a different group that is distinct from the norm of a seemingly age-less adulthood; and this matters spatially: "old age is peripheralized […] into discrete locations" (Laws, 1997, p. 91, cited in Mowl, Pain, & Talbot, 2000, p. 189). Taking a closer look at the point in lives at which people are categorised as old reveals that it is not just or simply the result of attaining a higher chronological age. Rather, "this sudden cultural relocation", as Baars (2009, p. 87) frames it, associated with old age is based on a conglomerate of different qualitative aspects: Old age is not only a biological status, process or an individual-psychological challenge, but it is also socially constructed and shaped by legal regulations, cultural images, norms and perceptions.

Gerontology as a multidisciplinary research field deals with the study of biological, psychological, social, cultural and historical aspects of age and ageing (Baltes & Baltes, 1994, p. 8) and approaches ageing from different conceptual angles: as a bodily state, an individual-psychological process, a social and cultural construction (Hülsen-Esch, Seidler, & Tagsold, 2013, p. 18). Two subfields are substantially concerned with the relationships between ageing and space: Anchored in psychology, 'environmental gerontology' and anchored in geography, 'geographical gerontology'[1] deal with how older people experience, frequent and negotiate the material and social world. Both academic traditions have their own developments and, thus, also respective disciplinary perspectives. Simply speaking, their differences are characterised by their distinct starting points: Environmental gerontology starts from "an interest in subjects' processes of knowing and navigating environments and how they might be accounted for (e.g., the occurrence and consequences of spatial cognition in older lives)"; geographical gerontology departs from "an interest in human and material expressions in the world (i.e., the what, where, and when of older lives)" (Andrews, 2024, p. 15). Both disciplinary fields certainly intersect in their concerns and understandings as human perception and the material world are inherently interconnected (Andrews, 2024, p. 15). Accordingly, we can find abundant crossovers between these two disciplinary backgrounds and,

[1] The umbrella term 'geographies of ageing' as introduced by Skinner et al. (2015), refers to a broader, more pluralistic set of geographical inquiries into the spatial aspects of ageing.

additionally, a wealth of research on ageing and space spanning a variety of other academic disciplines and fields of knowledge.

In particular more recent approaches are characterised to a much greater extent by cross-disciplinarity (see Skinner et al., 2015, p. 779), whereby tendencies to shift and dissolve disciplinary boundaries can be classified as part of a general academic trend. The interest in the meaning and relevance of spaces and places for ageing beyond the disciplinary traditions of environmental gerontology and geographical gerontology can be considered as part of what has been coined as 'spatial turn' undergoing in social sciences (see e.g., Warf & Arias, 2008), followed by 'relational' and 'material turns.'[2] Accordingly, also within sociological research on ageing, we can notice a growing interest in how older people are 'emplaced', with a focus on 'embodied' experiences of ageing, (relational) practices and entangled materialities (see e.g., Freutel-Funke & Müller, 2022; Katz, 2018c; Nägler & Wanka, 2022). Again, while there might be differences in definitions, terms and theoretical underpinnings, a key common endeavour of these more recent approaches is a critique of dualistic conceptualisations of human–space relationships, with a plea for their constitutive interrelations. Hence, relational approaches to ageing and space consist precisely of criticising the binary between the human and the environment and, as such, contribute to rendering obsolete the aforementioned starting points of either human perception or the material world.

The field of ageing and space, as the object of research in this work, is, therefore, characterised by its cross-disciplinarity. It spans various disciplines and scientific paradigms. This chapter offers an overview of the state of research. Aligned with my research interests, it sketches out the main features and foci of existing work, highlighting the gaps this study addresses. By delineating its boundaries with other research, I also aim to show the limits of my endeavour while clearly outlining its scope. The chapter examines both the empirical research landscape and the theoretical discussions in the field. This dual structure of presenting empirical findings on the one hand and reviewing existing theoretical approaches on the other results from my research endeavour, which is based on a grounded theory methodology. Hence, it reflects the study's aim to contribute to the field through both new empirical insights and theoretical development.

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[2] For a critical reflection on different 'turns' in the social sciences and humanities, see Bachmann-Medick (2016).

The chapter is structured into four parts:

- The *first part* introduces key accounts from social gerontology and social theorisations of ageing. I approach old age first and foremost as a *lived experience*; an experience that is not simply a biological fact but also socially and culturally produced. This subchapter aims to provide an overview of key insights on which this work is based.
- The *second part* is dedicated to the field of space-related ageing research and gives a brief outline of the development of the above-mentioned sub-disciplines, which have been fundamental to the field from its beginnings. It traces contributions from environmental psychology and human geography, which have progressively merged into more transdisciplinary approaches, extending into various disciplinary knowledge fields and traditions. I situate my work within a cross-disciplinary tradition and believe it is essential to honour this approach by engaging with and integrating diverse disciplinary perspectives. While my discussion must remain rudimentary – given that I cannot fully encompass the breadth of these research fields within this chapter's scope – this engagement is crucial.
- Based on sketching out these conceptual debates and theoretical developments, the *third part* is dedicated to the current state of empirical knowledge and outlines the central research topics and relevant findings.
- The *fourth part* presents a discussion of theoretical approaches that focus on the interplay between ageing and space. In doing so, I try to point out where I see gaps and from where my research sets out. In this vein, particularly this fourth part can be read as grounding work for the subsequent chapter – the theoretical framings underpinning this research (see *Chapter 3*).

2.1. Approaching Old Age from Social Theory: Accounts from Sociological Gerontology

Ageing is conceptualised as characterised by a complex double character of a lifelong *process* (in the sense of becoming old) and a current *state* (in the sense of being old) (van Dyk, 2015a, p. 6). This means that, on the one hand, age is a structural category that serves

as a marker of difference. On the other hand, it is its underlying processual nature that emphasises that we are all constantly ageing: We are ageing in relation to our own lifecourse as well as in relation to others – our social surroundings, the socio-political and cultural contexts.

As a social category of difference, age shapes people's positions in society, their lifestyles, attitudes and ambitions. This also includes the recognition that there is great diversity in experiences of ageing and identifications with becoming and being 'old'. The category of age as an individual experience depends largely on its interplay with other social categories and identity positions. Hence, from an intersectional perspective, what the category of age specifically means for an individual can only be understood in relation to other differences: Gender, sex, socio-economic background, marital status, ability, migration biographies or ethnicity, for example, play a fundamental role for social relations and subject formations (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). Such a perspective emphasises that older people are a highly heterogeneous 'group', characterised by more than their chronological age. Accordingly, the category of age is always interrelated with one's socio-cultural positions and (material) resources. Furthermore, age is not a given, quasi-natural social fact but is constantly produced through social relations. In this vein, "it is not just about our own subjective experience of our ageing selves, but also [about] the experience of perceiving others around us" (Riach, 2022, p. 107). Hence, ageing is notably shaped by external attribution and forms of 'othering' (see e.g., van Dyk, 2016).

From a sociological perspective, the focus is on the social and cultural production of old age. While this underscores the significance of societal images of ageing, cultural norms and legal regulations shaping what it means to grow older, it does not imply that the individually lived and bodily felt experiences of ageing are disregarded; rather ageing means "living in a changing bodily–social–personal world" (Baars, 2009, p. 90). In attempting to overcome society–individual and structure–agency dualisms (see Schäfer, 2016, p. 11; Völker, 2018, p. 3), a practice-theoretical approach to theorising age has been introduced in recent years through the idea of 'doing age' (see e.g., Gallistl, 2020; Schroeter, 2012; Stauber, Walther, & Settersten Jr, 2022).[3] 'Doing' is understood not simply as an individual action but as an interactive and collective practice that involves

[3] This is based on the concepts of 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and 'doing difference' (West & Fenstermaker, 1995a, 1995b) (for discussion, see Walther, Stauber, & Settersten Jr, 2022, p. 7).

individuals who are collectively present, and extends to institutional and discursive phenomena that influence these practices as they are enacted in particular social situations (Walther et al., 2022, p. 7; Schroeter, 2012). 'Doing age' as a research perspective is therefore not limited to the microanalysis of ageing but enables an understanding of ageing in which subjective experiences and structural processes intertwine.

It is the ageing body, in particular, that is of central interest in researching the interweaving of individual experiences and discursive frameworks of ageing. Important work has been done to show how ageing is not merely a biological determinant but is also socially and culturally produced. Thus, the focus here lies on how the ageing body is constituted through discourses (see Featherstone & Wernick, 2005 [1995]; Tulle, 2003; Twigg, 2004), in contrast to approaching the ageing body from a biomedical perspective.[4] Yet, as Twigg (2004, p. 70) points out, "at the same time we need to recognize how these discourses are formed and take shape in a dialectal relationship with real bodies that experience real pain, sickness, and death – as well as other more enjoyable sensations." In this vein, considering ageing as an *embodied* experience precisely emphasises both: It challenges, on the one hand (Cartesian) mind–body dualism that sees the body as a passive, objective biological entity that is subordinated to the mind and, on the other hand, seeks to move away from perceiving the body as object that is solely constituted through discourse. Instead, the body "is considered as an active 'lived' site through which we both experience everyday life and is the way we come to know ourselves and the world" (Riach, 2022, p. 108).

In this respect, it is particularly the overlapping of discursive ideas and lived experiences that make the body, its appearance and (in)abilities a central marker of old age. Therefore, the body serves as a key reference point for 'othering', i.e. the perception of older people as different from the norm of the middle-aged body: "Like women, ethnic and sexual minorities, older people are embodied or defined by physical characteristics" (Mowl et al., 2000, p. 189, ref. to Featherstone & Wernick, 2005/1995). Accordingly, "bodily

[4] Biomedical approaches focus on understanding and intervening in the biological processes to ageing. Critics, including scholars like Estes and Binney (1989) or Powell (2006) argue that the dominance of biomedical approaches to ageing, exemplified by anti-ageing interventions and regenerative medicine, reinforce problematic discourses of ageing as a pathological problem characterised by decline, dependency and deterioration. This 'medicalisation' of ageing frames ageing predominantly as a disease and overshadows that it is also a social and cultural phenomenon – e.g., it ignores how life expectancy and access to anti-ageing technologies are shaped by social inequalities.

characteristics are especially important in the definition of people as ‘old’ by others” (Mowl et al., 2000, p. 90).

The relevance of age as a category in everyday experiences is highly dependent on the specific socio-spatial context. In some contexts, age may not immediately surface as a structuring factor. Yet in others, it becomes a powerful marker – shaping patterns of inclusion and exclusion, informing spatial identification and influencing one’s sense of belonging (see Gabauer, Knierbein, & Lindinger, 2025). Age, in this view, is not a fixed or isolated attribute but gains meaning only in relational terms – emerging through comparison and contrast with other age groups within a given space. In essence, one is not simply ‘old’; one becomes ‘old’ in relation to others. Hence, age is not a nominal category but rather ordinal: “There are no old ones or young ones, just relatively old people and relatively young people” (Saake, 2002, p. 283, translation A.G.). In addition, the perception of age is strongly linked to one’s own lifecourse, i.e. in relation to individually experienced changes, which in turn are often triggered by specific socio-spatial settings.

Crucial in this respect is that the category of age serves as a marker of difference in a binary system: It “is defined in relation to young and thus essentially by what it lacks” (Cristofovici, 1999, p. 269). It is important to note that ‘young’ does not refer to children or adolescents. This group is equally primarily framed as a deviation – as a not-yet-achieved status of the ‘fully developed’ individual (Freutel-Funke & Wanka, 2025a, pp. 380–381). The norm is the seemingly age-less middle adulthood and old age differs from it in that it is a deviation from the ‘normal’ life stage due to its lack. This binarity between young and old is therefore deeply embedded in a hierarchy and, crucially, fails to recognise the double sense of relationality of ageing – as introduced at the beginning of this chapter section with reference to van Dyk (2015a). In this sense, it ignores the relation to others (other age groups, peers, etc.) through which one’s ageing is produced. It further misses the relationality to one’s own lifecourse, i.e. ageing as “a process of difference from oneself” (Gullette, 2004, p. 111, cited in van Dyk, 2015b, p. 230).

In this context, DeFalco (2010, p. 5) refers to ageing as “a process of alienation producing a doubling of self.” This means that the appearance of the body, hence the perceived changes of its shape, the skin or hair do not necessarily correspond with the conceiving of the ‘self’. Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) have developed the idea of ‘the mask of

ageing' meaning that "the outer body is seen as misrepresenting and imprisoning the inner self" (Featherstone, 2005 [1995], p. 231). Thus, ageing is often described as a disconnect between the perception of one's own body, one's chronological and one's felt age. The body is constructed as something separate from the self: Age-related changes of the body are experienced as something external, detached from one's self and which might not even be bodily experienced or felt but rather 'only seen' hence 'just noticed' (Marina Neumann, 08PI, Pos. 535-561).[5]

Therefore, understanding old age as distinctly different from young age, firstly, promotes the normalisation of youthfulness and the idealisation of youth-oriented lifestyles. With this, the status of ageing is associated with deviating from the norm in general and deviating 'from one's own normal life', as one of my respondents framed her fear of growing old (Dagmar Stetter, 01PI, Pos. 1124-1125). The deviation from one's own 'normal life' particularly also appears in narratives of ageing as something that is associated with the future. Being old as 'abnormal status' and therefore as deviation from an ideal state of human life is often thought of as something that is going to happen, but not yet (Birgit Weiss, 02PI, Pos. 566-568; see also Barron, 2021b, p. 671). Secondly, it encourages the creation of a homogeneous group of older people based on specific determinants. In this vein, it fosters an idea of age as a static and closed entity, which does not take into account the processual characteristics of ageing as 'living in time' (Baars, 2009).

The understanding of ageing as a process implies the focus on the dimension of change and, with this, time and temporality, which is captured by the idea of the lifecourse or, more recently, through the concept of age transitions (see e.g., Stauber et al., 2022; also: Gabauer, Knierbein, & Lindinger, 2025). A lifecourse perspective equally sheds light on the individual biography as well as "how lives unfold collectively […] and how individual and collective lives shape and, in turn, are shaped by wider historical, structural, spatial and geo-political processes" (Neale, 2015, p. 26). Lifecourses, hence, are "both uniquely

[5] I reference interviews from the sample of older individuals by using anonymised names. The interviews were conducted in German, which means quotes from interviewees are translated into English with close attention to original wording while preserving the natural flow of spoken language. In case the reader is interested in more contextualising information of the respondents, a comprehensive overview of all participants can be found in the *Appendix* (see *Figure 16*) and a systematic introduction of the interview material is provided in *Chapter 5*. Expert interviews, if consent has been given, are not anonymised. They are cited in footnotes, with details of the interviewee's role and function provided in the *Appendix*.

individual and collectively sustained according to the cultural priorities of historical societies" (Katz, 2003, p. 256). In this understanding, the lifecourse represents "a dynamic shaping and pleating" (Katz, 2003, p. 256) or "foldings" (Katz, 2003, p. 256)[6] and "the encountered discourses, ideas, technologies, landscapes, the lives of other people, etcetera are folded and refolded into a person's embodied subjectivity" (Schwanen, Hardill, & Lucas, 2012, p. 1294). Accordingly, focusing on old age as situated and contextualised within the course of life reflects macro socio-historical processes and also acknowledges that "the cumulative influence of earlier life patterns on later life chances and experiences can be more fully investigated and understood" (Neale, 2015, p. 26).

In this vein, contrary to what the term 'lifecourse' might suggest, the course of life does not represent a linear trajectory or pathway. Ageing as 'living in time' is therefore neither universal nor linear or continuous and does not unfold predominantly in chronological order (Baars, 2009; Neale, 2015; Schwanen et al., 2012, p. 1294). Rather, it is about understanding lifecourses as a more complex interweaving of different qualities of change – gradual transitions as well as more critical phases, uncertain developments and provisional conditions. Yet this does not mean that lifecourses are not strongly embedded in chronological age markers and cultural norms. People's biographies are fundamentally structured along the so-called 'institutionalised lifecourse' (Kohli, 1985) with its distinct life stages and respective chrono-norms. Accordingly, (state) authorities govern temporalities over education, work life and retirement time. Concepts like 'age-groups', 'age grading' or 'age norms' are expressions of such powerful forms of time organisation and serve as crucial instruments to regulate entitlements and transitions (Baars, 2009; see also Gabauer, 2022).

2.2. Foundations in Gerontological Research on Ageing and Space

A study interested in the relationship between old age and space cannot refuse to mention landmark works from environmental gerontology, starting to emerge during the 1960s and focusing on the relationship between changing personal conditions in later life and the environment. A large body of explorations of the *Person–Environment* (P-E)

[6] By thinking about the lifecourse in terms of 'folds', Katz (2003) refers to Deleuze (1988, 1993).

relationship that can be broadly defined as representing an 'ecological approach' (for early work, see e.g., Lawton & Nahemow, 1973; Lawton & Simon, 1968), studies individuals' changes and their maintenance of independence, especially by retaining a certain degree of competence and control over one's environment. The interaction between the ageing person and the environment is understood as "a transaction between an aging individual and his or her environment over time, with the physical location of the person being the only constant" (Lawton, 1990, p. 288). Broadly speaking, an ecological theory of ageing "explains that the ability to complete a task is a result of congruence between what the environment demands (environmental press) and the capabilities of the person (competence)" (Buffel, Verté, et al., 2012, p. 14, with ref. to Lawton & Nahemow, 1973). Old age is, therefore, predominantly approached from the perspective of functionality. Functional age emphasises changing bodily (physical and mental) conditions and abilities, with the result that older people are increasingly challenged by their environment. A key assumption in this context is that the impact of environmental factors on well-being increases as older people's abilities decline (Kolland, Rohner, Hopf, & Gallistl, 2022, p. 15, ref. to P. M. Lawton, & Simon, 1968).

Since its beginning, the field of environmental gerontology has considerably grown – theoretically and empirically. Substantial developments have led to models which aim to take into consideration wider contexts and their dynamic interrelationships for ageing, such as socioeconomic, social, physical, care/service and technological domains (Wahl & Gerstorf, 2018, 2020). The Person–Environment interaction thus is understood as a complex interplay of emotional-subjective ('belonging') and practical action-oriented ('agency') dimensions (Wahl & Lang, 2006). This has been leading to more comprehensive and integrative frameworks of Person–Environment exchange in later life, such as the work by Chaudhury and Oswald (2019). They argue that "P-E interaction processes of agency and belonging are manifested in quite diverse dimensions of everyday life […] [and] expected to infuse developmental outcomes such as well-being, autonomy, and identity" (Oswald, Wahl, Wanka, & Chaudhury, 2024, p. 47, ref. to Chaudhury & Oswald, 2019).

Contemporary scholarship in environmental gerontology is therefore equally concerned with the individual experiencing both 'intrinsic changes' and 'extrinsic changes' and thus with an "increasing emphasis on understanding the environment not merely as a passive backdrop" (Rhodus & Rowles, 2023, p. 4, ref. to Chaudhury & Oswald, 2019; Golant,

2020; Wahl et al., 2012; see also Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, p. 92, ref. to Lawton, 1990). Nevertheless, attempts to provide such integrative models, encompassing diverse 'factors' or 'domains' for understanding how older people experience and respond to changes, consider age–space relationships merely from a behavioralistic perspective. Environmental gerontology has been criticised for its lack of theoretical considerations, hence being "overly empirical" (Cutchin, 2005, p. 125) and employing mainly quantitative methodologies (Stones & Gullifer, 2016, p. 455) as well as that it "tends to follow a positivistic understanding of space as either a barrier or a compensation for age-related changes in spatial competencies" (Depner, Endter, & Wanka, 2023, p. 7). Chaudhury and Oswald (2019, p. 8), for instance, also acknowledge that their model might not "dissolve the ostensive dualism of person and place for better understanding the aging experience beyond a mere rational-choice perspective." They concede, on an empirical level, a need for more micro-sociological perspectives on the everyday lives of older people and on a conceptual level, a widening of scope, such as drawing more attention to theoretical work coming from critical gerontology and practice-theoretical perspectives on ageing.

A prominent figure advocating for a more experienced-based, qualitative approach to studying ageing is Rowles. As early as the 1980s, he critiqued an "epistemological deficiency" in the "burgeoning field of research into aging-environment relationships" (Rowles, 1980, p. 154), arguing for the need for phenomenologically based research to develop "sophisticated understanding of the aging person's changing relationship with environment" (Rowles, 1980, p. 155). Rowles is considered one of the pioneering contributors from human geography to the study of ageing (Skinner et al., 2015, ref. to Rowles, 1978).

Geographical gerontology is, broadly speaking, "interested in the spatial and environmental contexts of ageing" (Wiles, 2005, p. 100). Scholars explore how space and place are connected to the experiences and needs of older individuals, and aim to understand how ageing shapes particular places and spaces, as well as how specific contexts or places impact issues concerning ageing and older persons (Wiles, 2005, p. 100). Rowles' (1980, p. 158, original emphasis) landmark work on the meaning of place in old age develops the idea of 'being in place' "encompass[ing] several levels of involvement in both a *contemporary* and a *historical* place." Physical, social and autobiographical 'insideness' result from the long duration of living in the same place:

"Place becomes a landscape of memories, providing a sense of identity" (Rowles, 1983b, p. 114).

Critics argue that focusing mainly, or even exclusively, on past memories in the context of place attachment in later life "reinforces an idea that older people are primarily past-oriented, and have no meaningful future" (Lovatt, 2018, p. 375). Hence, such a perspective fails to consider possible futures for place-making, which is why Cutchin (2001, p. 35, original emphasis) has argued for extending Rowles' approach "to include the sense of *what person and place can become* in the face of current affairs and problems". Employing a Deweyan pragmatist perspective, Cutchin's (2001, 2003, 2013) work offers theoretical and empirical explorations to rethink place attachment as 'place integration'. His approach can be seen not only as a response to phenomenological accounts, such as developed by Rowles, but as well as to ecological thinking, such as put forward by Lawton. By de-emphasising behavioralistic views of 'environmental press' and 'adaptation' and instead seeing the person–place relationship as "ever emerging" beyond a subject–object dualism, his endeavours "sets out to explain older people's process of reconstructing their relationship with place in the face of problematic forms of instability and change" (Walsh, 2024, p. 69, ref. to Cutchin, 2001, 2003).

In more recent years, a new strand developed within human geography, subsumed under the umbrella of 'more-than-representational-theories' or 'non-representational-theory' (sometimes also referred to in plural 'theories').[7] This body of scholarly work is "based on the observation that most qualitative human geography throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, regardless of how critical or reflexive it might have been, fell under a social constructivist 'representational' paradigm that involves theoretically-driven interpretative searches for meaning and significance" (Skinner et al., 2015, p. 788). Hence, more-than-representational-theories approach "emerged out of a frustration with the tendency of social constructivist approaches" (Barron, 2021b, p. 666) and rather highlights "the many unspoken and too often unacknowledged performances and practices involved in the reproduction of space, place, and social life" (Skinner et al., 2015, p. 788, ref. to Cadman, 2009; Lorimer, 2005, 2008). From such a perspective, the category of old "becomes something which is performed, resisted and embodied at different moments" (Barron, 2021b, p. 666). For most proponents, this should not mean that representations do not

[7] For discussion about terminologies, see Barron (2021a, 2021b); Schurr and Strüver (2016).

matter – which is what the 'more-than' should imply. They rather criticise a form of 'overextension' "of representational analysis of representations" (Barron, 2021b, p. 666). Accordingly, Barron (2021b, p. 666) argues that a 'more-than-representational-theories' approach invites us to shed light "on how representations of older age are ever evolving, both affecting and affected by other processes and practices."

Barron (2021b, p. 671, original emphasis) advocates for understanding old age as "not a fixed category to which people do or do not belong" but rather as "something which gathers, emerges and disperses as it is mediated through particular contexts: it *takes place*." This view resonates quite well – at least at first sight – with another more recent body of literature subsumed under the umbrella of 'material gerontology'. It is indeed surprising that these two theoretical strands seem to exist rather in parallel than in reference to each other.[8] Material gerontology developed out of a critique towards the mainstream gerontological field concerned with the relationship between ageing people and their socio-material environments, which adopts a merely positivistic understanding of space (Depner et al., 2023, p. 7). As a theoretical approach inspired by (feminist) new materialisms, it perceives ageing as "co-constituted in a nexus of discursive-material practices" (Depner et al., 2023, p. 7). This means ageing "emerges as a phenomenon through the entanglement of diverse materialities, practices, discourses, and subjectivities" (Depner et al., 2023, p. 7). Focus lies on the interplay of human and nonhuman actors, seeing ageing as an 'assemblage of materialities' – from (human) bodies, things, technologies, architectures, spaces and their relations (see Depner et al., 2023; Höppner & Urban, 2018; Wanka & Gallistl, 2018; for an overview, see also Oswald et al., 2024, p. 49). Materialities are considered 'active agents' in the production of age (Höppner, 2022).[9]

This brief overview of the development of different approaches within the scholarship on ageing and space is undoubtedly selective. Nevertheless, it should have provided an

[8] Exceptions are recent published special issues: edited by Gallistl, Hahmann, Höppner, and Wanka (2024); and Wanka and Oswald (2020). Nevertheless, cross-references appear primarily within the respective issue itself rather than in the individual articles.

[9] It is important to note that scholarship subsumed under the term 'material gerontology' do not represent a unified theoretical body and materiality and subjectivity are conceptualised sometimes quite differently. In my remarks, however, I refer to key works that explicitly draw on 'new materialism' theories, such as Barad's (2003, 2007) agential realism, Haraway's (1987) posthumanism, or Braidotti's (2006) process ontological thinking (see Depner et al., 2023, p. 7).

impression of the conceptual landscape and, not least, engaged readers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. In *Chapter 2.4*, I will delve deeper into the debates concerning the theorisation of ageing–space relationships, particularly focusing on recent works that seek to transcend the dualism between people, on the one hand, and places, on the other.

2.3. Key Insights from Empirical Research

From this short outline of the development of more general accounts within the research field of ageing and space, in the following, I present key propositions and findings of recent studies that deal with issues of older people and their relationship to their dwelling environment. These insights can be grouped into four central themes, on the basis of which the following pages are structured: *First*, in older age, people show a higher place attachment; *second*, their mobility radius decreases and the significance of their immediate environments grows; *third*, older people are active agers and co-producers of their spaces and places; *fourth*, in what way older people relate to space depends largely on other social factors and, therefore, the intersection with gender, migration and socio-economic status plays an important role.

2.3.1. Growing Place Attachment

A general proposition within research on ageing and space is, as Wiles et al. (2009, p. 665) summarise, "that older people with good place ties are more likely to feel in control, secure, and have a positive sense of self." This facilitates adaptation to the process of ageing with its contingencies and uncertainties and improves well-being (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 665). Related to this is the general assumption that as people age, their attachment to place becomes stronger and the meaning of their immediate living environment increases (Müller, Wanka, & Oswald, 2022, p. 53; Wiles, 2018, p. 34, ref. to Christoforetti, Gennai, & Rodeschini, 2011; Gilleard, Hyde, & Higgs, 2007; Rowles, 2018; Wiles et al., 2009; Wiles et al., 2009, p. 665).

Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992, p. 139) define place attachment as "a set of feelings about a geographical location that emotionally binds a person to that place as a function of its role as a setting for experience." Explorations of whether and what reinforces, supports or hinders spatial belonging and attachment to spaces and places in old age are linked to

the issue of scale and, thus, to the question of which spatial contexts are important or less important for older people. In this regard, emphasis, on the one hand, is put on the intimate sphere of one's household. On the other hand, focus lies on the neighbourhood as the immediate socio-material environment outside one's private home.

A crucial factor of place attachment is the duration of time people have been living in their homespace. Hence, one key reason often given for the more meaningful relationship that older people have with their home is simply the length of residence: "The greater the time spent in a home, the more time to develop associations between the people who live in the house, the objects within it, and the everyday, domestic practices which are carried out" (Lovatt, 2018, p. 367, ref. to Rowles, 1983; Shenk et al., 2004; Sixsmith, 1990). The significance of the duration of residence, however, not only concerns the domestic place of the home but also the immediate spaces outside the private flat. A longer duration of residence helps to develop relationships in the neighbourhood, strengthen the bonds and, thus, increases social cohesion (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 103, ref. to Nowossadeck & Mahne, 2017, p. 317). In addition, research suggests that having a positive attitude towards the neighbourhood not only improves emotional attachment to it but also well-being in general (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 103; Oswald, Jopp, Rott, & Wahl, 2011, pp. 247–248). Other factors for place attachment are the availability and proximity of services and infrastructural facilities (Kolland et al., 2022, pp. 102, 133, ref. to Smith, 2009, p. 24) which are also central to satisfaction with the neighbourhood (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 103, ref. to Kruse & Wahl, 2010, p. 422; Oswald et al., 2011). Hence, the length of residence may also correspond to a high level of neighbourhood satisfaction.

Space-related research on ageing, thus, emphasises the growing place attachment as people age, linking it to the increase of familiarity with a place (Walsh, 2024, p. 71; Peace, Holland, & Kellaher, 2006). Time, then, is a crucial factor in how and if familiarity is produced, which highlights understanding the process of ageing in relation to the span of the lifecourse: "Key places in one's life serve as cues to identity and reminders of the key features of one's biography" (Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, p. 92, ref. to Rubinstein & Parmalee, 1992). Place attachment, therefore, "refers to a life course phenomenon that can be both in the present and through memory" (Walsh, 2024, p. 72, ref. to Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992). In this context, homespaces are considered "a warehouse of memories" (Stones & Gullifer, 2016, p. 464) and belongings become important mnemonics that can provide continuity (Lovatt, 2018, p. 367). This refers to the homes'

"enhanced meaning as 'bolsters of identity' for older people who become more physically and socially isolated in their homes, as a result of increased frailty or through the deaths of friends and relatives" (Lovatt, 2018, p. 367, ref. to Kearns & Andrews, 2005; Rubinstein, 1987).

Accordingly, attachment to place is considered crucial for understanding how older people respond to age-related changes over their lifecourse. It could explain why the potential loss of one's home due to reduced competencies is often perceived as a threat to self-identity and personal integrity (Oswald et al., 2024, p. 43). The home can represent a source "of strengthening self identity amid the changes of old age" (Mowl et al., 2000, p. 195; ref. to Rubinstein & Parmalee, 1992). Homespaces, therefore, "are conceptualised as providing older people with an important sense of control and continuity at a time when they may be experiencing less control over their lives and environments" (Lovatt, 2018, p. 367, ref. to Paton, 1992; Stones & Gullifer, 2016; Whitmore, 2001). This relates to work conceptualising the home as 'provider' for independence. Research argues in this context that the home serves as a crucial foundation for maintaining autonomy and independence, offering a sense of control over daily activities, personal routines, physical well-being, individuality and social identity (A. Sixsmith, 1986; Stones & Gullifer, 2016, p. 453, ref. to Golant, 1984; Hearle, Prince & Rees, 2005; Kontos, 1998). The need for an independent lifestyle prompts older people to remain in their own homes (Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 302). From this perspective, the home serves as a space of resistance to ageing "in that it is a place in which independence can be maintained in the face of ill health or disability" (Mowl et al., 2000, p. 195).

2.3.2. The Wish to Stay Put

Based on these findings, most studies today assume that the willingness to relocate decreases in old age: Figures from Austria show that older people move less than younger people (Müller et al., 2022, p. 55). Thus, research suggests that as people grow older, the likelihood to relocate decreases significantly, which is mainly due to the increased desire to 'age in place', i.e. to be able to remain in one's own home for as long as possible (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 133). If moves still take place in old age, then they are usually either voluntary and relatively quick after retirement, or they are a result of health-related 'crises' and thus rather involuntary and not self-determined into institutional care (Hasse, 2009, p. 138; Höpflinger, 2006; Kolland et al., 2022, p. 133, ref. to Oswald & Rowles,

2007, p. 127; Müller et al., 2022, p. 53, ref. to Oswald & Rowles, 2006). In this sense, there seems to be a joint tenor in scientific work that older people exhibit an "aversion to the idea of residential care" (Stones & Gullifer, 2016, p. 461), often associating care homes with a loss of autonomy and self-identity.

Related to this is the fact that older people are considered highly satisfied with their dwelling situation. Studies from Austria show that there is a significant correlation between age and satisfaction with the housing situation, i.e. the proportion of people who are satisfied with their residential area increases with age (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 83); and "older Austrians report a high level of satisfaction with their homes" (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 112, ref. to Höpflinger & Van Wezemael, 2014, p. 111, translation A.G.). Importantly, they generally indicate high levels of satisfaction with their housing situation regardless of the actual objective conditions (Iwarsson et al., 2007, p. 79; Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 304). This so-called 'satisfaction paradox of old age' can be explained by adaptation processes in the home or in behaviour, or by resignation (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 112, ref. to Höpflinger, 2009; Motel, Künemund & Bode, 2000). This means that a high level of satisfaction with the home does not necessarily mean that there are no objective shortcomings, but merely that there is no subjective need for action (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 112).

Accordingly, findings show a dual process with opposing dynamics: There is an "increase in emotional attachment to the living environment with a simultaneous decrease in its practical use" (Müller et al., 2022, p. 53, ref. to Wahl & Lang, 2006; Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 305). This applies to the domestic home as well as to the neighbourhood environment: The neighbourhood can be both a source of support and a burden if the social infrastructure changes, especially in the case of experiencing increasing restrictions (Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 305).

While much research into the relationship between older people and their homespace is strongly positively connoted, with ideas of autonomy, sense of self, independence and freedom, there are also some more critical accounts towards the meaning of home in old age. The home can also evoke feelings of loneliness and social isolation, physical burdens, such as maintaining large gardens or stress from conflicts with cohabitants or neighbours (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 665). In this vein, while much scholarship emphasises the importance of the immediate living environment for well-being in later life, some research

challenges the notion of the accustomed home as the ideal place for ageing and care. Scholars point out that ageing-in-place tends to over-romanticise notions of care linked with the private domain. This can potentially lead to a (re)domestication of care services and the re-establishing and perpetuating of gendered and racialised power relations (Milligan, 2009; Schwiter, Strauss, & England, 2018). When the home becomes a place of care work, its character can change; boundaries between public and private space become blurred and shift (see Milligan, 2009; Twigg, 2000; for an overview, see Kauer, Pasch, & Hobbs, 2023, p. 3). Hence, the rationale behind policies supporting ageing-in-place is not only the belief that older people wish to remain in their homes as long as possible and consider it the ideal site of care, but also that ageing-in-place is simply more cost-effective (Milligan, 2009).

2.3.3. Reduced Mobility and Growing Significance of the Immediate Environment

Both domestic homes and neighbourhoods are imbued with personal meaning (Peace, Holland, & Kellaher, 2005), with research often drawing a direct link between the increasing importance of older people's immediate environments and the reduction in their mobility radius. Within geographical research on ageing, there is a tendency to draw a rather linear correlation between growing older and the shrinking of the individual space of movement. Old age is accompanied by a decrease in spatial distances and, thus, a shrinking of geographical worlds. Indicated reasons for such a reduction in the range of activity are not only age-related health restrictions (e.g. in physical mobility) but also critical life events such as widowhood or retirement (Müller et al., 2022, p. 53). This leads to the conclusion that as people age, especially at later stages in life, the distances they travel in their daily activities become significantly shorter (see e.g., Buffel, Verté, et al., 2012, p. 17).

Linked with the dominant narrative of the 'shrinking' of spatial distances as people age is the idea of the growing relevance of the neighbourhood. For example, Gardner (2011, p. 264, ref. to Peace et al. 2005, 2006) states, "neighborhoods are extremely important places of aging where going outside to interact with the material and social neighborhoods is essential to well-being and self-identity among older adults." Hence, neighbourhoods are thought to significantly impact personal health and quality of life, and play a crucial role in shaping social relationships and networks (A. F. Young, Russell, & Powers, 2004; for

discussion, see Wiles et al., 2009). Related to this are studies on the relevance, availability and accessibility of social infrastructure, the inclusivity of the design of urban places or the 'age-friendliness' of the planning of cities in general (see e.g., Buffel & Phillipson, 2023, pp. 95–113; Hauderowicz & Serena, 2020; Liddle, Scharf, Bartlam, Bernard, & Sim, 2014; Phillips, 2018). Though causal relations remain debated, subjective perceptions of a neighbourhood, such as its 'neighbourliness' or amenities, may influence older adults' social participation, health and well-being more than objective quality assessments (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 666, ref. to Bowling & Stafford, 2007; La Gory, Ward, & Sherman, 1985). Another aspect is the increasing time spent at home: Empirical findings show that older people spend a large part of the day in their immediate living area (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 13; Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 301). At the same time, getting older is often associated with an increase in living space compared to other age groups, a phenomenon that has been termed "passive living space expansion" (Krings-Heckemeier & Pfeifer, 1994, p. 143, cited in Kolland et al., 2022, p. 101) and which often goes hand in hand with a reorganisation of the use of the space.

Therefore, many studies suggest that the immediate neighbourhood and the domestic place of the home generally become more important in old age (see Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 301). Nevertheless, important to note, recent research also shows that the social worlds of older people are far more diverse than previously thought (Wiles et al., 2009; Wiles, 2018, p. 34). There is a growing literature that challenges the presumption of spatial permanency, stability and familiarity in old age (Walsh, 2024, p. 72, ref. to Gustafson, 2001; Oswald & Rowles, 2007; Phillips et al., 2012). Research indicates that relocation and moving have become more prevalent in old age (see e.g., Oswald & Rowles, 2007) and many older people are, compared to previous times, way more mobile and reside "in multiple locations" (Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, p. 98). With retirement, people increasingly split their residence between two or more locations (see e.g., Maddox, 2022). Particularly for older people with migration biographies, hence those who grew up in a different region or a country far away, relocation in old age has a different meaning or plays a different role. For example, an empirical study on Turkish labour migrants in Vienna emphasises that the stage of entering retirement "opened up new possibilities, especially for transnational living environments. Retirement was an important time when spouses renegotiated where they wished to live and how they wanted to divide their time between Turkey and Austria" (Palmberger, 2022, p. 103).

In this vein, it can be stated that "the simple dichotomy between aging in place and migration fails to capture the multilocational nature of place attachments and meanings of 'home' among a growing number of seasonally migratory elders" (Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, p. 98). Despite these upheavals, still, empirical findings from Austria correspond with "the general basic tenor of gerontological research: with regard to housing conditions, old age is characterised above all by residential stability" (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 127, translation A.G.).

2.3.4. Older People as Active Agers and Co-Producers of Space

The desire to stay put is, on the one hand, widely supported by empirical research as the preferred living arrangement of older people (as illustrated in the previous sections). On the other hand, ageing-in-place also stands for a policy goal that is related to broader attempts to develop 'age-friendly' environments. In this context, the World Health Organisation's (WHO) *Age-friendly Cities and Communities* program, launched in 2007, has become a central strategy of many cities worldwide (see WHO, 2007). While not the first initiative to connect ageing with environmental perspectives, the WHO program has sparked global discussions on urban policies for ageing (Moulaert & Garon, 2016, p. 1). Linked with age-friendly cities and communities is a specific discourse about 'active' and 'healthy ageing'. The WHO's concept of active ageing, introduced in 2002, guides cities to optimise "opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age" (WHO, 2007, p. 72). In 2015, the WHO shifted to 'healthy ageing', defined "as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age" (WHO, 2015, p. 28).[10] Nevertheless, active ageing is still used and both concepts appear as highly intermingled, emphasising "action across multiple sectors, and enabling older people to remain a resource to their families, communities and economies" (WHO, 2018, p. 3; see also WHO, 2023). Age-friendly environments support healthy and active ageing by fostering "intrinsic capacity" and "functional ability" across the lifecourse (WHO, 2018, p. 1).

Strong emphasis in this context is placed on the spatial scale of the neighbourhood, shaped by older adults' reduced mobility, robust place attachment and desire to stay put.

[10] For an overview of the development of the WHO *Age-friendly Cities* framework, see WHO (n.d.-b).

Neighbourhoods appear as a potential space for ‘age activation’, fostering engagement and social participation among older adults. Active ageing, endorsed, in addition to the WHO, by a broad collation of international organisations such as the OECD, UN and European Commission (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013), has been widely described and critically discussed (see e.g., Biggs & Powell, 2001; Denninger, van Dyk, Lessenich, & Richter, 2014; Katz, 2000; Marhankova, 2011; Powell, 2006). It refers to a new social figure of ageing connotated with activity, healthiness, autonomy and productivity. Active ageing can be considered the ability to be a resource for the paid labour market, for the family and voluntary activities, and to maintain oneself as independently as possible (van Dyk, 2015a, pp. 99–100, ref. to Butler and Gleason 1985, p. 13). This suggests the interpretation that “policy interest has changed from seeing old age as a burden to seeing it as an opportunity to promote productive aging” (Powell, 2006, p. 106), marking a discursive shift in how older people are perceived in society. This shift has fundamentally challenged the previously dominant biomedically based, deficit-oriented perspective of old age by acknowledging older people’s agency (van Dyk, 2015a, p. 107).

Active ageing aligns with a specific form of governing: The “government of old people in the guise of successful ageing” (Tulle-Winton, 1999, p. 283) that takes place under a “managerial gaze” (Powell, 2006, p. 103) and is embedded in the paradigmatic shift from social welfare to the ‘activating welfare state’ (Lessenich, 2008; van Dyk, 2015a, p. 101). Hence, we can identify a close relation to the general trend of incorporating the concept of neighbourhood into community-based policy programmes with the aim of ‘activating’ communities at the local level and engaging them in decision- and place-making processes (Reutlinger, Stiehler, & Lingg, 2015, p. 11). The increasing focus on neighbourhood spaces has been strategically employed by city authorities and policymakers to address various ageing-related issues, including care, health promotion and volunteering. Critics, however, highlight neoliberal tendencies in this approach, arguing that it instrumentalises communities to offset reduced state-provided resources and public services, risking de-professionalisation and over-reliance on voluntary work (see e.g., Cloutier-Fisher & Skinner, 2006; Milligan, 2009; van Dyk & Haubner, 2021). Despite these concerns, neighbourhood initiatives and bottom-up ‘caring cities’ movements also hold emancipatory and progressive potentials for inclusive spaces (see e.g., Fabricius et al., 2025; Laufenberg, 2018).

These ambivalences inscribed in the concept of active ageing play out in a tension field between ‘late freedom’ and ‘social disciplining’ (Schroeter, 2000) – that is, between self-determined ways and normative ideals of ageing. It challenges stereotypes of frailty and deficiency by positioning older adults as active co-producers of their neighbourhood fabric. Yet, it also encourages self-optimising and adherence to ideals of activity and autonomy, reflecting broader societal pressures to remain productive (Powell, 2006, p. 106). Thus, with regard to the research landscape, on the one hand, scholarship can be identified that critically examines political interventions promoting normative ideals of ageing through the concept of the neighbourhood. On the other hand, studies critique the tendencies of underemphasising older adults’ agency, portraying them as passive recipients shaped by neighbourhood characteristics rather than active agents who influence them (see e.g., Buffel, Verté, et al., 2012; Hand, Laliberte Rudman, Huot, Pack, & Gilliland, 2020; Ziegler, 2012). This critique is especially relevant to environmental gerontology approaches that focus on functional age and environment–person dichotomies. Hand et al. (2020, p. 566), for example, advocate to shift perspective from viewing neighbourhoods as static entities that shape older adults to seeing them as dynamic spaces co-produced by older adults and other factors over time. Similarly, Buffel, Verté, et al. (2012, p. 27) argue that ageing and space are mutually constitutive, with older individuals both shaping and being shaped by their surroundings. They propose reorienting urban development to recognise older people as policy co-producers, leveraging their rich local knowledge – for example, “as ‘neighbourhood experts’ for new(er) residents” (Buffel, Verté, et al., 2012, p. 28). This shifts regeneration policies from a deficit model, where older adults are seen as needing care, to one that values their skills and experiences (Buffel, Verté, et al., 2012, p. 28; see also Buffel, Phillipson, & Scharf, 2012, pp. 609–611).

The perspective of older people as active co-producers not only includes the scale of the neighbourhood but also that of the domestic homespace. The possibility of ‘active homemaking’ through, e.g., furnishing, is considered to have a positive impact on living satisfaction (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 14), which also applies in the case of moving into a care institution (Lovatt, 2018).

2.3.5. Intersectionality of Old Age and Diverse Relations to Space

Research interested in understanding individual ageing experiences in and through space seems impossible to disentangle the dimension of age from other intersecting social categories. Indeed, we can find a growing awareness in space-related ageing studies of the necessity of employing an intersectional approach. Scholarships focus on the intersection with gender (e.g., Marhankova, 2014; Mowl et al., 2000) and race (e.g., Henery, 2011), sexual orientation (e.g., Pijpers, 2022), class (e.g., Finlay, Gaugler, & Kane, 2020; Lager, Van Hoven, & Huigen, 2013), migration (e.g., Buffel, 2017; Enßle & Helbrecht, 2021; Palmberger, 2022; Warnes & Williams, 2006), income (e.g., Finlay et al., 2020) or adopt a broader intersectional approach (e.g., Pain, Mowl, & Talbot, 2000). A specific focus within the group of 'the elderly' is also increasingly put on people living with dementia, addressing questions of designing 'dementia-friendly cities' (see e.g., Biglieri, 2022; Mitchell & Burton, 2006).

In this sense, rather than employing old age as a chronological descriptor, research draws on the socially and economically constructed aspects of old age (Pain et al., 2000, p. 377, ref. to Biggs, 1993; Bytheway, 1995; Featherstone & Wernick, 2005 [1995]). This refers, for example, to the fact that the reduction in mobility radius, as discussed above, and therewith the number of activities outside the domestic place depends not only on the category of age but on a myriad of different factors: The physical condition, income, level of education, availability of a car and individual lifestyle play a fundamental role (Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 305). Housing studies, for example, emphasise the powerful interplay between ageing and socio-economic situation. We know from research that there are significant connections between dwelling conditions in old age and social inequality in early life (for an overview, see Harper & Laws, 1995, p. 204). Poverty in old age is a pressing topic, exacerbated by housing crises in many cities (Kauer et al., 2023, p. 4). Research has shown that existing inequalities intensify with age, yet the category of age remains a marginalised topic within social inequality studies (Enßle & Helbrecht, 2018). Driven by feminist geographers, a particular interest is on the interplay between gender and age, indicating, for instance, that older women are more prone to poverty (Auth & Leitner, 2018; Harper & Laws, 1995). Furthermore, the trend of feminisation of ageing contributes to an increase in female-headed households (Harper & Laws, 1995, pp. 210–211). As a result, older women are more likely to live alone in relatively large housing

units, facing greater risks of isolation and loneliness compared to men (Kolland et al., 2022, pp. 101–102).

In discussions on demographic change and questions around promoting ageing-in-place, it is crucial to recognise that increased life expectancy and the number of 'healthy' and 'active' life years are fundamentally shaped by socio-economic characteristics: Economic status plays a significant role in health outcomes, meaning that "increased life expectancy is subject to class specificity" (van Dyk, 2020, p. 16, translation A.G.; Höpflinger, 2022, p. 38; Kolland et al., 2022, pp. 87–88). This also concerns discourses around developing 'age-friendly' environments and their entanglement with ideals of active and healthy ageing. Scholars argue that the emphasis on active and healthy ageing can undermine the value of or reject certain individual experiences associated with old age, such as illness, disability, frailty or vulnerability (Moulaert & Paris, 2013, p. 120). Certain groups of older people, particularly migrants, refugees and those living in extreme poverty, tend to be still underrepresented in age-friendly initiatives (Buffel et al., 2020; Buffel & Phillipson, 2023, p. 23).

Therefore, despite the strong focus on feelings of belonging towards their homes and neighbourhoods and the general wish to age in place, there is also empirical evidence showing how older people are marginalised. The focus here lies on ageing in socially deprived neighbourhoods, highlighting intersecting disadvantages in later life (Scharf, Phillipson, & Smith, 2005). Finlay et al. (2020, p. 778) argue that older individuals with low income "are especially susceptible to deprived and hazardous spaces given their embodied vulnerabilities and limited resources", demonstrating that place attachment is not inevitably attainable (see also Buffel & Phillipson, 2023, pp. 34–36). A few studies focus on the impact of urban regeneration and gentrification processes on older people (e.g., Buffel & Phillipson, 2019; Lewis, 2016; Lewis & Buffel, 2020). They point, for example, to the relevance of social infrastructure to support ageing-in-place in the context of neighbourhoods undergoing rapid transformation (Lewis et al., 2022). Furthermore, with regard to the German-speaking context, scholars suggest a correlation between 'ageing at home' and socio-economic situation: individuals with higher incomes tend to receive in-home care for longer periods than those from lower-income groups (Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 307). The empirical research landscape, additionally, refers to the effects of heat waves, floods and other climate change-related disasters on older urban

populations. These impacts are felt most keenly by the most vulnerable groups within the older population (for an overview, see Buffel & Phillipson, 2023, pp. 76–91).

2.3.6. Summing Up

Empirical studies on ageing, older people's well-being and relationships to their living environments, particularly emphasise a strong sense of place attachment among older adults (see *Chapter 2.3.1*), with remaining in their homes often associated with feelings of autonomy, self-determination and security (see *Chapter 2.3.2*). Growing place attachment is also linked to a declining willingness to relocate as people age. Studies indicate that older people generally report high levels of satisfaction with their housing situation, regardless of objective constraints (Voges & Zinke, 2010, p. 304). Empirical data illustrate that housing satisfaction increases steadily in old age, while the willingness to relocate declines (for current empirical evidence from Austria, see Kolland et al., 2022). Overall, older people prefer to remain in their accustomed housing situation for as long as possible. Thus, aligning with the policy aim of ageing-in-place, older adults express a strong desire to stay put and age at home in their familiar environments.

Place attachment concerns both the domestic place as well as the immediate living environment outside the household. The neighbourhood is not only highlighted as increasingly relevant for the well-being of older people, shaped by growing place attachment and declining mobility, but is also discussed as a strategic concept aimed at activating older adults (see *Chapter 2.3.3*). This includes promoting health and social integration through voluntary work and highlighting older people as self-determined co-producers of their social spaces (see *Chapter 2.3.4*). In this way, the spatial dimension of the neighbourhood is deeply intertwined with age-specific activation policies. In this sense, the neighbourhood is regarded as important for social integration and as a relevant place for promoting 'active ageing' and building age-friendly cities and communities (see WHO, 2007).

Yet, a small body of research challenges the notion of the home as the ideal place for ageing and care, highlighting the aspect of cost-effectiveness for the prominence of ageing in place in comparison to institutional care (e.g., Milligan, 2009). Furthermore, empirical research on the spatial experiences of older people increasingly advocates for intersectional analysis, pointing to the specific living realities of diverse older

populations, particularly women, migrants, ethnic minorities and those living in poverty (see *Chapter 2.3.5*).

As the preceding illustration should have shown, scholarly interest in ageing and space has spanned decades, encompassing a wide range of topics and foci. My research sets out on these empirical findings while critically interrogating them through this study's empirical work. Central to this endeavour is examining the theoretical foundations for conceptualising the relationship between ageing and space – an undertaking to which the following section of this chapter is devoted.

2.4. Theorisations of Age–Space Relationships: What's Missing?

Most of the current scholarly work strongly emphasises the interrelation between environment/space and ageing. In this vein, we can notice, as Wiles et al. (2009, p. 666) summarise, a "general agreement in the geographical and environmental gerontological literature that there is a strong reciprocal relationship between older people, their social and physical environments, and their health and well-being." However, as they add, we can find "less consensus around how to theorise such relationships" (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 666). My interest lies precisely in this relationship with a particular focus on the ageing individual and the relevance and role of space for processes of subjectivation. Therefore, this research draws on scholarship that emphasises the relationality of both space and age, seeing them as interconnected and, importantly, mutually constitutive. In reviewing relevant literature, I identify crucial shortcomings in the current debates within space-related ageing research. They can be summarised under four points of critique, from which my endeavour sets out. In doing so, I draw upon qualitative empirical studies in ageing research that contribute to theorisations of the relationship between ageing and space. While these studies offer valuable conceptual insights and align with my approach, they also reveal significant gaps that my research aims to address.

Firstly, although relational thinking has become, in the words of Skinner et al. (2015, p. 787), "the new mantra and quality yardstick of progressive human geography", it largely remains at a theoretical level. Despite frequent claims of approaching "ageing as embodied, situated and relational" (Schwanen et al., 2012, p. 1292), there is a notable lack

of empirical research that takes relational space seriously and implements it methodologically.

Secondly, closely linked to the first point, space is predominantly treated as a fixed empirical parameter. Gerontological studies focusing on home environments, housing conditions or frequency of neighbourhood spaces often conceptualise space exclusively as an empirical factor, overlooking its relational dimensions both theoretically and empirically. This leads to a critical gap: The ways in which spatial arrangements fundamentally interfere with the production of old age remain underexplored (on the level of theoretical conceptualisation and empirical investigation). I argue that this contributes to the recurring pitfall of disregarding the mutually constitutive relationship between space and age.

Thirdly, despite frequent calls for inter- and transdisciplinary approaches – and the cross-cutting nature of ageing itself – research remains fragmented along disciplinary lines. While relational and experience-based approaches have been emerging in different fields, also within environmental gerontology (which is still largely quantitative) and outside of space-related gerontology (see *Chapter 2.2*), these strands rarely intersect. For example, the insights from 'material gerontology' are seldom integrated with those from human geography, despite shared epistemological ground. I see this disconnect as a promising entry point for developing a richer theorisation of the age–space relationship. Addressing this fragmentation is not only vital for tackling the lack of relational understanding of space in empirical work, as mentioned earlier, but also for interweaving relational concepts of age with space. This leads me to the last point.

Fourthly, a robust body of theoretical work in social gerontology critically engages with the category of age (see *Chapter 2.1*), yet this is rarely taken up in geographic research on ageing. Neglecting the socially constructed character of age – and thus its relational embeddedness as constitutive – simultaneously limits a full understanding of relational space. A genuinely relational space theory presupposes a relational understanding of age (and vice versa). If, however, age is not theorised further, as is often the case in empirical space-related ageing research, a key dimension of relational space equally remains unexamined and invisible.

In the following, I will carve out the four aspects in more detail:

Relational thinking of space[11] is, indeed, by now "nothing new" (Barron, 2021a, p. 607) and has come to represent a consensus within human geography. It developed in the 1990s as a critique of Euclidean geographies, moving from an understanding of spaces as simply given entities prior to the social, to an open-ended interpretation characterised by interconnectedness and process (Levin-Keitel, Mölders, Othengrafen, & Ibendorf, 2018, pp. 5–6). It follows the "recognition that spaces and places only emerge through their connections with other spaces and places" (Skinner et al., 2015, p. 787) and perceives them as "'bundles of interrelations' highly related to and produced by many other places and entities active at multiple scales" (Andrews, 2024, p. 22). This includes a notion of temporality as they are "always developing and changing over time" (Andrews, 2024, p. 22), hence, continually emerging and 'coming into being' (Massey, 2005). Nevertheless, and here I share Skinner et al.'s (2015, p. 787) critique, considering it still valid that "relational thinking has not been highly visible in geographical research on ageing."[12] Despite the broad scholarly work with indeed empirical and theoretical progress, what still remains are rather limited and static understandings of 'space' and 'place' that underpin research. This means, and what has been critiqued also by other scholars, "in empirical research, the spaces and places studied have not been considered alongside the other spaces and places in the world that help create them" (Andrews, Evans, & Wiles, 2013, p. 1340; see also Andrews, 2024; Barron, 2021a). Furthermore, I should add that the temporality of space, which is immanent to a relational understanding of space – following Massey (2005) as endlessly 'coming into being' – is hardly taken into account (see further *Chapter 3.1*).

My work addresses precisely this critique and aims to contribute to this gap. In order to do this, it is first necessary to identify what feeds this lack of relational space thinking. I argue that the limitation of relational thinking is strongly related to the pitfall of seeing spaces and places solely as empirical factors. I identify a deficiency in the perception of *space as a constitutive element of ageing and in translating this into empirical work*. Nevertheless, there are some valuable exceptions of empirical work that have contributed

[11] I examine relational space in more detail in *Chapter 3.1.*
[12] Around ten years later, Andrews (2024, p. 24) still contends that it is "probably too early to mark the arrival of a 'relational geographical gerontology' that fully adheres to […] theoretical understandings [of relational space]."

to promoting relational thinking. To support my argument, I will examine these contributions, delineating how I build on them and where I diverge from their approaches.

There are indeed a number of empirical studies in geographical research on ageing that move steps towards relational space thinking. By focusing on home as a relational space, Wiles et al. (2009) take the 'interrelatedness of place' seriously (for a similar argument, see Andrews, 2024, p. 24; Andrews et al., 2013, p. 1350; Skinner et al., 2015, pp. 787–788).[13] In their study, they "use the term 'social space' to refer to individuals within webs of relationships and integrated places" (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 666). In this sense, they explore older people's "social relationships, the spaces in which their physical and imaginative activities take place, and the complex emotional and symbolic connections to places and people across time and space" (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 666). Using empirical data from a study conducted in Auckland, the authors advocate for understanding the relationships of older people with their social and physical environment to be 'elastic' and multilayered. They argue against a container space and highlight the relationality of the homeplace by emphasising the interconnection to other spaces and across time. However, in turn, they stay blind to the relational constitution of age and with this, also to the question of how the homeplace *co-produces* age.

They lack a theorisation of the constitution of age in relation to space. In this sense, they consider age a fixed empirical category rather than analysing how old age is spatially co-produced. This applies to most space-related ageing research. Thus, we can predominantly find work employing pre-defined categories of age, such as based on chronological definitions (e.g., 65+), legal frameworks (e.g., retirement) or bodily impairments (e.g., addressed through questions of mobility/immobility), or specific emphasis is put on old age conceptualised one-dimensionally through the (non-)use of specific places, such as

[13] As a further 'signpost' towards thinking space and place relationally, Skinner et al. (2015, p. 788) mention a study by Rosel (2003). She approaches the multi-scalarity of 'ageing in place' by drawing on Rowles (1978) and his "image of concentric circles in which home is at the centre, from which elderly view immediate surroundings via what Rowles calls a surveillance zone, enclosed by a circle representing neighbourhood, and then one for community" (Rosel, 2003, p. 79). She argues that "the image of concentric circles effectively organizes individual geographical experience, where one lives day to day life physically and socially" (Rosel, 2003, p. 79). However, her exploration remains rather descriptive and fixated on the scalar levels of the home, surveillance zone, neighbourhood and community and does not provide insights into the relationality between and among these different scales.

by focusing on moving into assisted living or staying put (for a similar argument, see Harper & Laws, 1995).

By criticising precisely this "fixation with older age as an empirical category", Barron pleas for the employment of 'more-than-representational theories' for "considering how older age *takes place"* (Barron, 2021b, p. 662, original emphasis). She explicitly reviews the category of age and asks for its spatial co-production by arguing that "in the flow of everyday life, representations of older age are recrafted, resisted, performed and embodied as they become folded into lives" (Barron, 2021b, p. 662). In this vein, she understands ageing and old age "less as a stable category, and more as a relational and embodied process" (Barron, 2021b, p. 662), "less as a stable container of meaning, and more as something which emerges and ruptures through the unfolding of events" (Barron, 2021b, p. 663). Despite the promising title of her publication *The Taking Place of Older Age*, the dimension of space appears not to be present – neither as an empirical parameter nor as an analytical category. As a result, her claims for the spatial (co-)production of age remain at a conceptual level, without systematically interpreting her empirics and critically interweaving them with the theoretical discussions provided. In a second paper which is based on seemingly the same empirical data, she attempts to develop new insights into the lifecourse. By drawing on ethnographic work conducted in the UK, she illustrates how more-than-representational theories can contribute to understanding how older people relate to places in their everyday life experiences. She emphasises the processual and "multiple often-overlapping temporalities" (Barron, 2021a, p. 615) of the lifecourse "by foregrounding the temporal folds through which the past and future inhere in the present" (Barron, 2021a, p. 621). Her work is mainly driven by respondents' individual memories and feelings, what places evoke in them and how representations of old age are produced in this context. However, she does not systematically include a theorisation of space or provide an analysis of the spatial contexts in her study, such as how places and environments might have changed over time. As a result, the discursive dimension that could offer a deeper contextualisation of individual experiences is lacking – despite her claim of keeping track of both the representational/discursive as well as the lived dimensions (in the sense of *more*-than-representational theories, as introduced above, see *Chapter 2.2*) (Barron, 2021a, p. 606).

I do not want to open up a more fundamental discussion on the extent to which more-than-representational theories introduce new perspectives on subject formation or whether

they have developed primarily as a means of positioning human geography within the broader academic landscape, in particular in relation to sociology. However, I would like to make a critique that I think is illustrated by Barron's work quite well: I diagnose a strong omission of sociological ageing research in geographical work that attempts to interrogate the very question of the structure–agency dilemma. This is especially true of the work subsumed under more-than-representational theories, which is particularly concerned with this issue. More-than-representational approaches to ageing, as introduced by Barron (2021a, 2021b), often do not take into consideration the vast body of (critical) social gerontology studies theorising the category of age as something relational, embodied and socio-culturally produced. Questioning "how the category of older age is made through representations and how lived experience escapes those relations, whilst also being mediated by them" (Barron, 2021b, p. 661) is – using her own words in respect of relational space (see Barron, 2021a, p. 607) – by now 'nothing new'. Hence, I do want to suggest that a closer examination of theories of subjectivation that take both individual experiences and socio-structural conditions and their mutually formative interplay seriously could be useful, respectively, necessary for these research endeavours. In particular, more recent endeavours subsumed under 'doing age', which have been briefly introduced above (see *Chapter 2.1*), offer fruitful theorisations as well as empirical investigation on modes of subjectivation in old age. I argue that a broad body of literature is simply neglected that would enable a more systematic merging of individual experiences with discourses and societal images of ageing. Disregarding age as a socio-structural category obscures the development of a more overarching socio-spatial analysis, thereby – as Barron's work illustrates – missing the potential to gain insights beyond the particularities of respondents' experiences.

The claim for linking critical social theorisation of ageing with relational space within human geography has been voiced already many years ago by a few feminist geographers (see Harper & Laws, 1995). Within critical geographical gerontology, we can find a small scholarly body that is dedicated "to examine the ways in which age relations are socially constructed, embodied, and mutually constitutive of space" (Pain et al., 2000, p. 377; Laws, 1995). Pain et al. (2000, p. 379) show in their research "that class, ability, and gender fundamentally influence the spatial construction of old age." Furthermore, they demonstrate with regard to leisure spaces "that individuals actively negotiate spatial and social constructions of old age" and explore how negative perceptions of old age are interwoven with other forms of difference (Pain et al., 2000, p. 379). In a similar vein but

with a focus on the home, they compellingly illustrate how the homespace (re)produces old age in a highly gendered manner (Mowl et al., 2000).

I consider these two empirical works (Mowl et al., 2000; Pain et al., 2000) to be very enriching. However, to my knowledge, there has been little progress in this regard since then. One exception is a recently published paper by Enßle-Reinhardt and Helbrecht (2022). Following theorisations of ageing developed in critical social gerontology (drawing on van Dyk, 2014, 2015b), Enßle-Reinhardt and Helbrecht (2022, p. 180) highlight the "constant dual co-construction" of space and ageing by emphasising understanding age as a social category and a process (see also *Chapter 2.1*). Based on empirical research conducted in different spatial settings – recreational places, workplaces and homeplaces – they show how older people recognise and interpret their own ageing through specific places, and how the process of ageing is perceived in relation to both people of other age groups and one's personal lived lifetime. Even though they claim to bring together a relational understanding of age with a relational understanding of space (Enßle-Reinhardt & Helbrecht, 2022, p. 175), they do not do so consistently. For example, they barely address the relationships between places and different levels of scale. This is a key aspect of relational space that remains underexposed (as discussed above, and see Andrews et al., 2013; Skinner et al., 2015), which is reinforced by their rigid separation of the three different spatial focal points (recreational places, workplaces and homeplaces). Furthermore, they fail to recognise the processual character of places and therefore only shed light on the changes of the ageing subject – albeit here in their dual sense of relationality as introduced by van Dyk (2014, 2015b) –, but not on how places might change, for example. In doing so, they only tell half the story of the constitutive power of space for the formation of ageing subjects.[14]

[14] This limitation even more strongly appears in an earlier work in which they consider "space as a prism through which the interplay of inequality and age becomes visible" (Enßle & Helbrecht, 2018, p. 227, translation A.G.). Thus, space here is framed as a methodological instrument rather than an actual and constitutive part of ageing. Provocatively, we could diagnose a missing relational space from geographers who are concerned with relational age theories. This also applies to the much-cited theoretical piece from Hopkins and Pain (2007) in which they provide a conceptual introduction to relational understandings of age, derived mainly from social science, into geographical research on ageing. They – indeed convincingly – argue for 'relational geographies of age' by employing the concepts of intergenerationality, intersectionality and lifecourse, and advocate for implementing them into geographical ageing research. However, I consider their attempt primarily as introducing an 'age relationality' into geography and not in linking this to a 'space relationality' (for a similar critique, see Skinner et al., 2015, p. 787).

‘Doing age’ approaches also offer theoretical explorations of the materiality of ageing. Drawing on practice theory, which considers social practices as inherently bodily and material (Bourdieu, 1987, 2001; Schatzki, 1996; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012), allows for shedding light on the body and ‘non-human’ materialities.[15] In this vein, ‘doing age’ emphasises ageing as *embodied* experience and explores the material aspects of ageing by considering “multiple elements which include bodily and mental activities, artifacts and things, knowledge, attitudes, and emotions” (Wanka & Gallistl, 2018, p. 5). Yet, despite the acknowledgement that practices are bodily (and therefore materially) anchored, work in this field has paid little attention to spaces and places (for a similar argument, see Reckwitz, 2012) – even though within theories of space the body plays a central role in shaping spatial experience.[16] In that practice-theoretical approaches focus on human agency, they might underestimate the materiality of space and its constitutive role in producing old age. Their engagement with the material world takes place primarily from the perspective of the subjects, which might be one reason for the rather little theoretical attention drawn to spaces and spatial arrangements.

The critique against doing age scholarship of remaining ‘too human-centred’ is commonly brought forward by more recent gerontology approaches that employ new materialist perspectives (see Höppner, 2023; Höppner & Urban, 2018). Material gerontological approaches challenge the idea of agency and “call the human-centered understanding of agency into question” (Höppner & Urban, 2018, p. 6). In this regard, scholars of material gerontology criticise practice-theoretical approaches to ageing for their inherent human-centredness. Despite the heterogeneity within material gerontology, they suggest further developments by employing a ‘post-human’ approach inspired by feminist new materialism (Barad, 2003, 2007; Braidotti, 2006; Haraway, 1987) or Latour’s (1999, 2005) actor-network-theory.

Material gerontology follows a relational ‘process ontology’ of becoming, in the sense that all phenomena are continuously ‘in the making’ (Braidotti, 2006; Hoppe, 2017, p.

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[15] Schatzki (1991, p. 651), for example, by claiming that “human agency is inherently spatial”, “gives an early practice-theoretical account of the construction of space through practices” (Moulaert & Wanka, 2019, p. 109). In this sense, “social practices are […] inherently spatial phenomena and […] space is an inherently praxeological matter” (Moulaert & Wanka, 2019, p. 109).

[16] It is through the body that we first and foremost experience and access space (see Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945], later e.g., Low 2003; Madanipour, 2003, pp. 6–38; see also Boettner, 2007).

11). With reference to such a 'new materialist' ontology offered by scholars like Braidotti (2006) and Barad (2003), ageing is considered a "material phenomenon […], in which a variety of human and nonhuman actors are entangled […] [It] is understood […] as an assemblage of materialities: from human bodies, things and technologies to spaces and their relations" (Depner et al., 2023, p. 7, ref. to Wanka & Gallistl, 2018; Höppner & Urban, 2018; Gallistl & Wanka, 2021). Places and people progress, develop and change together in the sense of 'intra-acting' (Barad, 2003) rather than interacting (see also Depner et al., 2023, pp. 7–8). Empirical work in this field and in the context of dwelling in old age is concerned with how understandings of home are constituted through the intertwining of spaces, objects and embodied practices in processual ways.[17] Scholarship focuses, for example, on moving into a retirement home (Lovatt, 2018) or ageing-in-place (Owen & Forward, 2024) or with a specific interest in housing arrangements among couples in later life (Piel & Robra, 2023).

My critique of empirical work in material gerontology is that it falls short of its theoretical ambition to entangle materiality, discourses and practices. Specifically, age as a structural marker of difference and its intersections with class, gender, ethnicity or ability in shaping the socio-material co-production of old age remains underexplored. Although many studies recognise age as intersectional, this insight rarely informs their empirical analysis (see e.g., Martin & Pilcher, 2024). Even when authors acknowledge the limits of sidelining other social positions and structural conditions (e.g., Gallistl & Wanka, 2023, p. 6), neglecting structural inequalities, systemic preconditions, or biographical socialisations still hampers our grasp of subject formation. This connects to another issue from the literature review: a persistent disconnect between theoretical frameworks and empirical findings. Many publications show an imbalance in this regard, raising doubts about whether framing materialities as 'post-human agents' is genuinely useful for understanding the empirical realities of older people or merely represents rather a 'theoretical overload' that offers little empirical insight. If new materialist approaches in gerontology cannot address ageing's structural conditions, they may fall short of offering

[17] Indeed, reviewing the body of scholarly work subsumed under the field of 'material gerontology', reveals quite a theoretical and conceptual heterogeneity. There are significant overlaps with practice-theoretical approaches and attempts to bring these two together (Wanka & Gallistl, 2018) or intersections with relational space thinking, such as in the context of rhythms in everyday life (Martin & Pilcher, 2024) and with more-than-representational approaches, such as regarding architecture invoking atmospheres and affects (Nettleton, Buse, & Martin, 2018).

fresh insights into understanding processes of subject formation and, consequently, the diverse experiences of old age and their relationships to space.

I argue that the claim of "a *posthuman* aging process in which agency is shared between humans and non-humans" (Höppner & Urban, 2018, p. 6, original emphasis) falters on the question of agency. By prioritising non-human agency, they obscure power dynamics and differences within a vague posthuman 'we', transferring agency to abstract forces like matter or life (see Lettow, 2017, p. 111). This sidelines any robust analysis of social relations, practices and the complex dynamics of power, as well as the distinct roles and qualities of 'human', 'nonhuman' and 'posthuman' agents and the historical evolvement of social structures and relations.[18]

Indeed, understanding old age through a material perspective, such as the relationship between an older human and a rollator (which is one of the examples Höppner and Urban (2018) bring forward in their argumentation), is crucial for a relational understanding of age and its spatial embeddedness. The rollator not only serves as a symbol of old age with its ascribed meanings but also "sets the pace" and, therefore, "influences how we as humans walk, […] and how quickly we can maneuver in supermarkets or on sidewalks" (Höppner & Urban, 2018, p. 4). Höppner and Urban (2018, p. 6) see this as an expression of the fact that "the rollator ages the person" (and not the other way round); hence it is the 'what' that ages the 'whom', positioning the rollator as an active agent.

I view the attribution of agency to the rollator, however, more as an oversimplification that sidelines socio-structural and cultural meanings of old age and their influence, for instance, on the societal negotiation with (dis)abilities. To say that the object of the rollator itself actively makes a person old overlooks the role of individual lifecourse trajectories and discursively constructed images of ageing. The rollator is certainly a central identifier of old age. Yet, what is crucial are the *meanings* ascribed to it – meanings that are co-produced through social norms and practices, which in turn also powerfully

[18] Lettow (2017) convincingly criticises Barad's (2003) work for making it impossible to conceptualise "structural differences between human and nonhuman forms of agency, and […] differences or relations of power and domination among humans" (Lettow, 2017, p. 111). In a similar vein, she opposes Bennett (2010) arguing that although she refers to differences in the sense of different humans and different worms have indeed different degrees of power, "she does not conceptualize social relations or structures that have historically developed, and which constitute and regulate forms of practice and action" (Lettow, 2017, p. 111).

shape space and materiality. The use of a rollator has a significant influence on how we (can) navigate, for example. It is thus clearly linked to individual experiences of ageing, which materialise in whether we can continue shopping in a particular supermarket. Yet, grocery store design reflects norms of an 'ideal person', inscribed in the width of the aisles or height of the shelves. To conclude that it is the narrow aisles or the ill-fitting rollator that actively produce old age – and to ascribe to them an agency comparable to that of human beings – means ignoring or at least insufficiently addressing the underlying power relations that shape the production of space. Furthermore, such a theoretical perspective makes change impossible, and with this, a critical social theory (see e.g., Bargetz, 2017; Garske, 2014; Lettow, 2017). A conception of agency that assigns autonomy to materiality while leaving its relationship to human action under-theorised, undermines concepts like political responsibility and emancipation (Bargetz, 2017, p. 139).

Certainly, in studies on 'Ambient and Assisted Living (AAL)', work grounded in new materialism provides a promising lens for exploring pressing questions of power in the context of machine learning (see e.g., Wanka & Gallistl, 2018). Yet, when shifting the focus to the broader question of how material arrangements and objects might act as 'active agents' in shaping the experience of old age, critiques of reintroducing environmental determinism become prevalent – particularly when stressing the symmetrical distribution of agency between humans and materialities (see Haumann, 2020). Haumann (2020, p. 55) identifies "a fine line between asserting that organisms, things and matter have a formative impact on social dynamics and relegating responsibility for social phenomena, including inequalities, to these forces." In this vein, the important question is: *Can we grasp materiality as more than an effect but less than a determinant?* (see Otter, 2010, p. 45).

Instead of attributing agency to materials, things and objects, I propose an alternative approach for understanding the constitutive relationships between ageing and space: I argue for combining a practice-theoretical perspective on the ageing subject with a relational theory of space. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on my theoretical framework. A core argument is that such an approach accounts for the dual temporality inherent in the relationship between ageing and space: both the processual nature of ageing as 'living in time' (Baars, 2009) and the dynamic character of space as 'always in becoming' (Massey, 2005). First, however, follows a brief summary of the key arguments on which my further analysis builds.

2.5. Summing Up

The aim of this chapter was to provide an introduction to the cross-disciplinary field concerned with ageing and space. In doing so, it outlined key theoretical foundations and empirical insights that underpin my research, while also pointing out pitfalls in theoretical attempts to examine the relationship between ageing and space. I understand ageing as an embodied process, moving away from biomedical approaches that treat ageing as merely a biological fact, overlooking its social and cultural production. My work is situated within qualitative endeavours that emphasise the co-constitution of ageing and space. However, I identify a key gap in these efforts: the inconsistent linking of a relational understanding of age with a relational understanding of space, which this research aims to address. In the following, I offer a tentative glimpse into some empirical findings to vividly summarise the theoretical arguments made in this chapter.

The significance of objects and spatial arrangements for the constitution of the ageing subject becomes evident in the conducted interviews with older people, highlighting the complex ways ageing is tangled up with the spatialities around them: Experiences of ageing materialise in walking poles or certain items of clothing representing negative markers of old age, in staircases, uneven sidewalks, steep supermarket entrances, the closure of bank branches and the resulting compulsion to use online banking, or in transport planning interventions such as shared pedestrian and cycle paths. These moments, which are often described as restrictive, limiting and discriminatory, are deeply felt *through the body*.

Yet, stopping at this point, by a simplified analysis of the bodily experience of ageing, risks falling into the trap of viewing ageing predominantly through a biomedical lens. Such an exclusive focus on the material-physical dimensions bears the danger of promoting an essentialist, biologically driven understanding of ageing. It ignores its deeper socio-cultural constructions, meaning that it overlooks the rich, complex web of societal images, norms, institutional frameworks or social expectations that shape how old age is (bodily) experienced. If, for instance, urban planning agendas for age-friendly cities focus primarily on adapting the built environment to address the 'problem of ageing', defined mainly in terms of physical impairments, they risk prioritising the needs of an ageing population too narrowly. In such cases, these agendas remain anchored in biomedical models, neglecting the social and cultural dimensions of ageing. Material

gerontology is also exposed to the critique of reviving biomedical models of ageing. The concern that material gerontology might reinvent deterministic perspectives on ageing builds upon critiques of a 'new scientism' or positivism underlying new materialism approaches, in which epistemic authority over the ageing body in gerontology is again assigned to biomedicine (Gallistl et al., 2024, p. 3, ref. to Hoppe & Lemke, 2021; Keller, 2019). What could this mean in the context of urban planning and design?

When walking poles or rollators are perceived as stigmatising markers of ageing, their significance must be contextualised within societal representations of ageing and perceptions of frail or dependent bodies. This requires examining how such representations are embedded in urban planning decisions, or whether they are considered at all. Examples include the design of staircases with or without elevators, the layout of grocery stores, or the increasing digitalisation of public services, which often leads to the closure of physical infrastructure. As my interviews highlight, measures in this regard also extend to shared pedestrian and cyclist paths, which can feel overwhelming and potentially hazardous for older adults.

Material gerontology scholarship inspired by new materialism, drawing on a post-humanist approach, might interpret elements such as shared paths as having agency to 'make people old'. In doing so, these scholars risk reducing ageing to the effects of spatial arrangements on the physically declining body. Such a perspective tends to foreground incapacitation and overlooks the broader socio-material practices and powerful coalitions of agents that shape urban environments – often in line with norms of able-bodied middle adulthood and the lifestyles of 'the young'. In this framing, 'the old' is positioned as a deviation from a presumed lifecourse standard, marked by perceived deficits.

By centring physical experience and attributing symmetrical agency to human bodies, material arrangements, and objects, new materialist approaches often obscure the socio-structural and cultural dimensions of ageing. As shown through the review of empirical studies, this emphasis sidelines the discursive and institutional frameworks through which age is produced and lived. Empirical work within material gerontology frequently lacks a disentangling of materiality, discourse and practice, neglecting robust analyses of social relations, power and historical contingency. These omissions limit analytical depth by overlooking the differentiated roles of 'human', 'non-human', and 'post-human' agents, as well as the historically specific configurations of social structures. If, at the end of the

analysis, it is concluded that age is expressed through physical experience and that spatial arrangements influence the ageing subject by unleashing active agency, then such analyses risk collapsing into a form of environmental determinism.

Instead of drawing on accounts from new materialism, I argued for employing a theory of relational space for approaching the constitutive role of the socio-material environment for ageing. As demonstrated, human geography widely embraces a relational understanding of space, including in studies of ageing and space. However, these efforts often remain confined to theoretical-conceptual discussions. On the level of empirical analysis, there are only a few exceptions in the research field of ageing and space that truly do justice to a relational approach in its entirety. Furthermore, a persistent challenge is the limited empirical exploration of ageing as a relational process. This gap is particularly pronounced in studies informed by more-than-representational theories recently emerging within geographical gerontology, which stem precisely from the critique that many studies are fixated on ageing as an empirically quantifiable category. Yet, they equally fall short of addressing its dynamic relationality – the fluid, relational nature of spaces and the relational character of ageing. In this vein, I noticed significant theoretical shortcomings existing in age–space scholarship, particularly the underutilisation of sociological theories of ageing in geographic research. These theories, however, would be well-suited to examining processes of subjectivation and could enrich understandings of how ageing is co-constituted through spatial relations.

As argued, practice-theoretical approaches to the subject, which have been advanced within the research perspective of ‘doing age’ in sociological gerontology, are highly fruitful. A practice-theoretical approach of ‘doing age’ emphasises the dynamic interplay of social practices, material infrastructures and human agency, offering a more nuanced understanding of how ageing is co-constituted in everyday environments. Ageing is not merely a biological condition or process; it is also socio-culturally produced. At its core, ageing is an *embodied experience*, and practice-theoretical approaches make it possible to analyse the intersections and mutual constitution of socio-cultural constructions, individual bodily conditions and everyday practices.

The mutual constitution of ageing and space is not exhausted in the processual character of ageing – that is, it is not only changes in the individual over time that complicate navigation through urban environments. Equally central is the fact that cities themselves

are changing, as are urban planning and respective space production processes. These changes are embedded in and driven by broader, global urban development paradigms – such as policies promoting cycling infrastructure or digitalisation trends, as reflected in concepts like ‘smart’ or ‘resilient cities’. To understand these urban transformations adequately, a relational understanding of space is necessary – one that conceptualises space as historically contingent, socially produced, always temporary and entangled with other spaces and places.

The relationship between ageing and space is constituted precisely by the mutual interdependence between the ageing (i.e., changing) subject and the changing socio-material fabric. I therefore propose a different approach to understanding this interplay: combining a practice-theoretical perspective on the ageing subject with a relational theory of space. The following chapter will discuss this theoretical endeavour in detail.

3. A Theoretical Attempt for Understanding the Relationship between Ageing and Space

This chapter is dedicated to the theoretical underpinnings of my study. The aim of the following pages is to illustrate and make transparent the overarching theoretical framework that has guided this project from its inception, while being constantly empirically informed throughout the research process. Hence, in line with a grounded theory methodology, which my research follows, the theoretical foundations are not developed in isolation from the empirical investigation but instead are deeply entangled with the empirical engagement in an iterative process.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The *first part* builds on the preceding chapter (*Chapter 2.4*), in which I identified gaps in the theorisation of ageing and space within the current state of research. The objective here is to argue for conceptually linking theorisations of relational space with practice-theoretical approaches to the ageing subject, contributing to the question of how space influences and intersects with (individual) experiences of old age. The *second part* is dedicated to the concept of dwelling, which emerged empirically as a theoretical framework for approaching the interconnectedness of everyday experiences of ageing and space. It, firstly, brings together early work from (geographical and environmental) gerontology with contemporary approaches to the home that employ a practice-theoretical understanding. Subsequently, by linking such a 'doing home' perspective with the idea of dwelling as 'being-in-the-world', it argues for understanding dwelling as a spatial(ised) mode of subjectivation.

3.1. The Ageing Subject in Relation to Space

In attempting to understand ageing as a mutually formative interplay of subjective experiences and socio-structural conditions, I argue for starting theoretically (and methodologically) from the perspective of the ageing subject by following practice-theoretical approaches to subjectivation. Drawing on J. Butler's (1997a, 1997b) theoretical explorations on the subject and its performative constitution, the subject is understood, on the one hand, as discursively constituted. On the other hand, these constitutive structures and norms are neither stable nor fixed but have to be constantly re-

established through social practices (see also Reckwitz, 2002; Reckwitz, 2003; Schäfer, 2016; Villa, 2013).

Starting from the perspective of the subject allows for placing emphasis on *embodied* experiences of ageing individuals, their everyday practices, social interactions and negotiations with ageing narratives and perceptions (see also *Chapter 2.1*). Furthermore – and this is crucial – starting from the subject and its bodily experiences of ageing also means considering the socio-historical context in which it is embedded. A practice-theoretical approach understands the ageing subject as always mediated by discursive images of old age, societal norms, legal and institutionalised frameworks. Ageing individuals are exposed to norms and expectations, but they also enfold agency by responding to these norms differently and in new ways (Settersten Jr, Stauber, & Walther, 2022, p. 236, ref. to J. Butler, 1997b). Yet, societal images of ageing are deeply inscribed in the subject and are constantly perpetuated through forms of 'self-governing'.[19] Thus, a closer look at individuals' perceptions of old age, their negotiation of and responses to age-related changes, reveals that it is impossible to clearly separate discursive norms and images of (successful) ageing from seemingly individual life choices.

As introduced above (see *Chapter 2.1*), practice-theoretical approaches precisely attempt to overcome such structure–agency and society–individual dualisms (Schäfer, 2016, p. 11; Völker, 2018, p. 3). 'Practices' form the fundamental theoretical category. They refer not only to intentional action but also to unconscious doings, to being embedded in and aligned with the world (Völker, 2018, p. 3). Hence, ages and age relations

> are not simply there; rather, they are produced, made in specific historical, material and socio-cultural spaces and situations. This making, the doing in action, the production of the social, of contexts and relations, is the essential subject of practice theories (Völker, 2018, pp. 1–2, translation A.G.).[20]

The focus, therefore, lies on the processes through which the ageing subject is produced by social practices.

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[19] Influential on questions of (self-)disciplining/'technologies of the self' in the tradition of Foucauldian thinking has been developed within in ageing research prominently by e.g., Katz (1996, 2000), Tulle-Winton (1999), Biggs and Powell (2001); for an overview, see Powell (2006, pp. 93–116).

[20] In her argumentation, Völker (2018) refers to the analysis of gender(s) and gender relations, which can be transferred to the category of age.

Ageing is considered relational and a contingent process; it means "living in a changing bodily–social–personal world" (Baars, 2009, p. 90). This definition, on the one hand, covers the multidimensional nature of ageing, which is also reflected in the various disciplinary perspectives within gerontology. On the other hand, it provides an additional analytical category: It introduces *change* as a constitutive element of the ageing process. Consequently, theorising ageing requires acknowledging its inherent time dimension, underlining that ageing is inherently processual and relational, whereby in a twofold way: Ageing is approached as changing in relation to one's lifecourse as well as in relation to the social contexts people age in (see *Chapter 2.1*). Van Dyk (2020, pp. 165–168; 2015b) finds J. Butler's (1993) theorisation of the subject revealing for analysing the temporality of ageing: Understanding the subject as performatively constituted through constant repetition highlights the temporality inherent in processes of subject formation. While this applies to all identity positions, it is especially pertinent to ageing, which, in the sense of 'living in time' (see Baars, 2009), is immanently temporal.

By recognising the subject's relational embeddedness, the role of space in the constitution of subjects is implicitly acknowledged. However, to fully grasp the reciprocal relationship between ageing and space, I argue that a relational understanding of space is essential. Employing such an approach considers the constitution of ageing as genuinely relational, in that it offers a theoretical exploration of space as equally continuously becoming.[21] Accordingly, the twofold relationality of ageing (in the sense that people age in relation to their biographical trajectory and in relation to their social surroundings) needs to be extended by taking space into account (in the understanding of relational space). This renders the dimension of space key for understanding the character of ageing as being constituted through its relational embeddedness.

This understanding implies that places and spaces are inherent parts of ageing experiences. Whether age matters in everyday experiences depends on the specific *spatial* – that is socio-material – context. In some spaces, age as an identity category and a mode of structuring appears rather insignificant, whereas in other socio-material arrangements, conditions may dominate where age acts as a key marker of exclusion, identification or belonging to a place (see also Gabauer et al., 2025). The relevance of socio-material

[21] For a similar argument developed in a trialogue with two colleagues, see Gabauer et al. (2025).

arrangements for perceptions of ageing is deeply entangled with one's own lifecourse, as ageing occurs in the experience of personal-individual changes that, in turn, can be triggered by specific socio-material settings.

A relational understanding of space means that spaces and places are not simply given entities that are prior to the social but are regarded as social phenomena that emerge in the actions and experiences of agents, i.e. through social practices. In this regard, space is a socio-historical process; it is 'produced' by social relations that it also reproduces, mediates and transforms (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]). Hence, space is continuously created "through the dynamic interconnections between and among places and social relations" (Bondi, 2005, p. 142; Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]). Such a perspective highlights the relevance of the socially and culturally produced dimensions of space and criticises an essentialist understanding of space as merely a physical container that envelops urban life. Rather, a relational approach follows a dialectical understanding of the social and material dimensions of space "as being in a mutually formative relationship, rather than in opposition to each other" (Viderman et al., 2022, p. 10). In this regard, I do not follow a simple social-constructivist approach to space, but rather, when I talk about space, I mean a socio-material understanding of space in which *the social and the material are seen as mediated by each other*.[22]

I particularly draw on Massey (1999, 2005) who conceptualises space (and spatiality)[23] following three principles: Firstly, "space is a product of interrelations" ranging "from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (Massey, 1999, p. 2). Secondly, "space is

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[22] The theoretical proposition of such a dialectical interweaving of the social and the material features of space is shared by most human geographers as well as increasingly by sociologists. However, within empirical studies on ageing and space, we can see that space is still mainly treated as static (see *Chapter 2.4*). Furthermore, the strong interest in space within sociology is still a rather recent phenomenon that has developed with the 'spatial turn' (see Bachmann-Medick, 2016, pp. 211–243). As Schroer (2008, p. 132, translation A.G.) aptly diagnoses, space has long been "taken for granted in sociology to such an extent that a closer examination of it seemed unnecessary." This "lack of thematisation of space" and "spatial blindness" in sociology has to do, among other things, with disciplinary positioning, i.e. the contestation of clear distinctions between sociology and human geography (Schroer, 2008, p. 132, translation A.G.). Disciplinary disputes between (human) geography and sociology in terms of their understandings of space are sometimes carried out very passionately in the German-speaking academic discourse (for examples, see the contributions in the anthology by Döring & Thielmann, 2008, particularly: Günzel, 2008; Hard, 2008; Redepenning, 2008; also: Roskamm, 2012).

[23] Spatiality refers to space and its characteristics, hence, they are used interchangeably (Massey, 1999).

the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity" because if it is considered "the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality" (Massey, 1999, p. 2). Thirdly, space is "always under construction" (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Hence, "precisely *because* space is the product of relation-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices *which have to be carried out*, it is always in a process of becoming; it is always being made. It is never finished; never closed" (Massey, 1999, p. 2, original emphasis). Departing from these propositions, I want to highlight three aspects of the theorisation of relational space that are important to my study: temporality, power and scale.

Massey (2005, p. 59) conceptualises space as "open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming." Such a 'space of becoming' resonates with a practice-theoretical approach to the subject. Just as space, the subject is also understood as contingent. The ageing subject is continuously produced by socio-material relations, while equally recognising its agency to (co-)produce these relations. In this sense, theoretically bringing together a non-essential thinking of the subject and a non-essential thinking of space means, following Natter and Jones III (1997, p. 149, ref. to Lefebvre 1991[1974], original emphasis), "to start with a conception of space that, like the subject, as a *lack* to be filled, contested, and reconfigured through contingent and partially determined social relations, practices, and meanings."

Massey's emphasis on the temporality of spaces and, thus, the rejection of an apparent hierarchical separation of time over space,[24] is particularly crucial with respect to the constitution of the ageing subject. Like subject-constituting structures and norms, spatial structures and arrangements are never stable and closed but can only continue to exist if they are constantly actualised through the practices of the subjects. Reviewing current literature employing a relational space account by highlighting spaces and places as 'open', 'porous', 'unbounded', 'unstable' and 'fluid' sometimes rightly gives the impression that space is somehow 'everything and nothing'. Space can then easily become an empty signifier that is too indeterminate and without analytical clarity. However,

[24] A central concern of Massey (2005) is to expose the dominant separation of time and space, which she understands as deeply embedded in patriarchal and colonial relations. Linked to this is the rediscovery of the body and thus a critique of the hierarchisation of the mind over the body. Massey is not interested in privileging space over time, but in arguing against any form of privilege. For her – and this is what relational thinking is about – space always implies time and vice versa.

considering spaces and places to be ever developing and changing over time, in Massey's understanding, does not suggest losing sight of the specificities of particular spatial structures, of different scales and of the deeply uneven processes of space production that manifest themselves in concrete boundaries, sedimented forms of inclusion and exclusion.

Power is of key interest. Thus, just because emphasising possible change of space through arguing for its openness, does not mean that everybody at any time has the agency and capacity to do so. Hence, I do agree with Schroer's (2008, p. 137) critique of relational space theorisations that tend to ignore that at some point, every production comes to an end, no matter how provisional this space production might be. In this sense, it is indeed important to acknowledge that although spaces are never finished, rigid and unchangeable once and for all, they still cannot be changed at will at any time. If one of my respondents, who is dependent on a walker, cannot leave her apartment on her own because of stairs, then it is clear that she experiences a spatial setting that she has not (co-)created and that she cannot change (easily). This spatiality is socially produced, and its production is infused with power. In this sense, it is not a given fact, but a product of social processes, yet physically sedimented. Spatial arrangements of forms, objects and materials are expressions of cultural values, social structures and political convictions that can yet appear quite static – at least temporally.

In this sense, time and temporalities must also be considered political because they powerfully shape social life:

> Understanding the ordering effects of temporalities requires considering both the power relations that shape the production of temporalities as well as the power effects produced through their ordering at different urban scales and in varying modalities (Besedovsky, Grafe, Hilbrandt, & Langguth, 2019, p. 582).

In this regard, time is a social construction (Besedovsky et al., 2019). This means that understanding time requires considering the context of the social, political, cultural and economic systems that define conceptions of time and imply that societies relate to and are organised along a plurality of temporalities (Besedovsky et al., 2019, ref. to Barak, 2013). Additionally, it means that perceptions of time can be experienced quite differently.

Particularly with regard to attempts to sediment spatial productions through positions of power, it is important to focus on those attempts in which spaces are presented and constructed as fixed, seemingly absolute spaces. This is especially true for the fields of planning and urban development. Here, space is often introduced as a container, though it is necessary to understand this as temporary sedimentation. Hence, I propose to speak of 'bounded' or 'territorial' space and refer to Davoudi, who argues for

> the necessary entanglement of relational and bounded (territorial) space. While the boundedness is temporary, contingent and always becoming, it nevertheless produces powerful spatial imaginaries and shapes the ways in which relations are understood and acted upon (Davoudi, 2018, p. 20; see also Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016, p. 9).

And, finally, what Massey's work emphasises is the interweaving of different scales. She argues that "understanding the world in terms of relationality" implies "a world in which the local and the global really are 'mutually constituted'" (Massey, 2005, p. 184). This, as she adds, "renders untenable these kinds of separation" (Massey, 2005, p. 184). What this means for my endeavour is that 'the everyday' cannot be reduced to a seemingly local place, but that everyday life is always shaped by global spatial relations. Hence, the places people refer to in their everyday routines and experiences are sites where these relational forces come together in a unique, particular way. Thinking of space relationally, it is the sum of these temporary articulations, flows and connections, "and in that sense utterly grounded" and yet "may go round the world" (Massey, 2005, p. 185).

While recognising that a local context cannot be understood without placing it within a complex world, I want nevertheless to emphasise that an empirical analysis must go further than simply acknowledging that everything is somehow connected and that the broader intertwines with the smaller and vice versa. Rather, the aim must be to take a close look at the various, multifaceted and interwoven 'forces' and carefully distil out how they affect, for example, the everyday lives of older people. At the same time, it is important not to overlook where the potential particular lies in the everyday and how this might shift and transform more abstract and apparently 'personally detached' contexts. In this sense, I conclude with a nod to my methodological approach (see *Chapter 4.1*), which is based on approaches anchored in urban studies, arguing precisely that "the point of departure of critical social theory should always be everyday life, the banal, the ordinary" (Schmid, 2011, p. 58; see also e.g., Goonewardena, 2011, p. 98; Knierbein, 2020).

3.2. Dwelling: Towards a Spatiality of Everyday Experiences of Ageing

The dimension of home and dwelling as a theoretical framework for approaching the interconnectedness of everyday experiences of ageing and space emerged empirically. Asking the respondents about their individual housing biographies appeared as a stimulating opening question of the sit-in interviews (see *Chapter 4.2*). It allowed for provoking a variety of insights into people's everyday routines and experiences and encouraged the creation of concrete spatial references. A focus on home also resonates with space-centred research on ageing, with the general proposition that the relevance of the immediate living environment grows in older age (see *Chapter 2.3*). The study of home in many of the research endeavours on ageing and space extends beyond the domestic dwelling and/or interior and considers the wider context in which homes are located. In this vein, the scope of the home equally includes one's own 'four walls' as well as the neighbourhood, district, community or municipality and beyond in which one lives (see e.g., Naumann & Oswald, 2020, p. 373). In this respect, focus lies on how older people inhabit not only the domestic homeplace but also "a neighborhood, third places, urban places, rural places, vacation places, places of action, and places of passivity and reflection" (Cutchin & Rowles, 2024b, p. 4).

Research within the disciplines of environmental and geographical gerontology investigates how older people live in their houses and communities, how they interact with their neighbours in the housing estates and streets, and which social infrastructure they use and need. Scholarly work further asks about how mobile older people are in their neighbourhoods and districts and what places they frequent, use or appropriate. Studies particularly draw attention to aspects of place attachment and how feelings of spatial belonging to someone's home grow or change over the lifecourse. These are all highly important explorations, and the rich body of scholarly work offers insightful contributions to the dwelling practices and housing conditions of older people. However, research in this field tends to approach the home only as an empirical fragment and, despite references to its multi-scalar character, does not exploit its potential in the sense of using the study of home "to understand what it means to live in the city" (Blunt & Dowling, 2022, p. 141).

My research starts from this critique of gerontological enquiries into the home while linking it to critical voices within sociology that diagnose a lack of research and reflection on the concept of home (see e.g., Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020).[25] Following this argument, I advocate that "home is a privileged site for studying processes of place-making, mobility, identity, emotion and belonging, as well as majority–minority relations, at both local and global scales" (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 596). Hence, home "can be ethnographically appreciated as a microcosm of society" (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 598, ref. to Bourdieu, 1979; Carsten & Hugh-Jones, 1995). Home, therefore, is considered a privileged entry point into individual biographies and their spatialisation, and an empirical study interested in dwelling practices of older people can draw conclusions about wider social arrangements, values and patterns of social structure that shape the conditions and experiences of ageing. Therefore, home, or more precisely dwelling, can be exploited to gain insights into older people's spatial modes of subjectivation. In this sense, I approach *dwelling as a dimension for empirically researching the spatialised everyday lives of older people.*

3.2.1. Defining Home: Scope and Scales of Dwelling

Following J. Sixsmith (1986, p. 282), "home is a complex, multivarious phenomenon." It refers to a physical space, a site of self-expression and identification, a place for activity and of social relationships, a status symbol and, above all, an existential need. Home is, as mentioned in the introductory paragraph, multi-scalar, i.e. people dwell in different spatial and scalar dimensions (*see Figure 1*). In this vein and as literature in the field suggests, "most people develop nested feelings of home regarding differently scaled locations, eliciting more or less 'thick' senses of home depending on particular social and temporal circumstances" (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 600). Likewise, Blunt and Dowling (2006, p. 27) argue that "senses of belonging and alienation are constructed across diverse scales ranging from the body and the household to the city, nation and globe."

[25] As early as 1947, Louis Wirth proposed to understand home (or housing, a different term used, but nevertheless with the same motif) as "a social activity", stressing that housing should be analysed "in relation to the community" (Wirth, 1947, p. 137). With his essay *Housing as a Field of Sociological Research*, Wirth (1947) argued almost 80 years ago for its relevance for sociology.

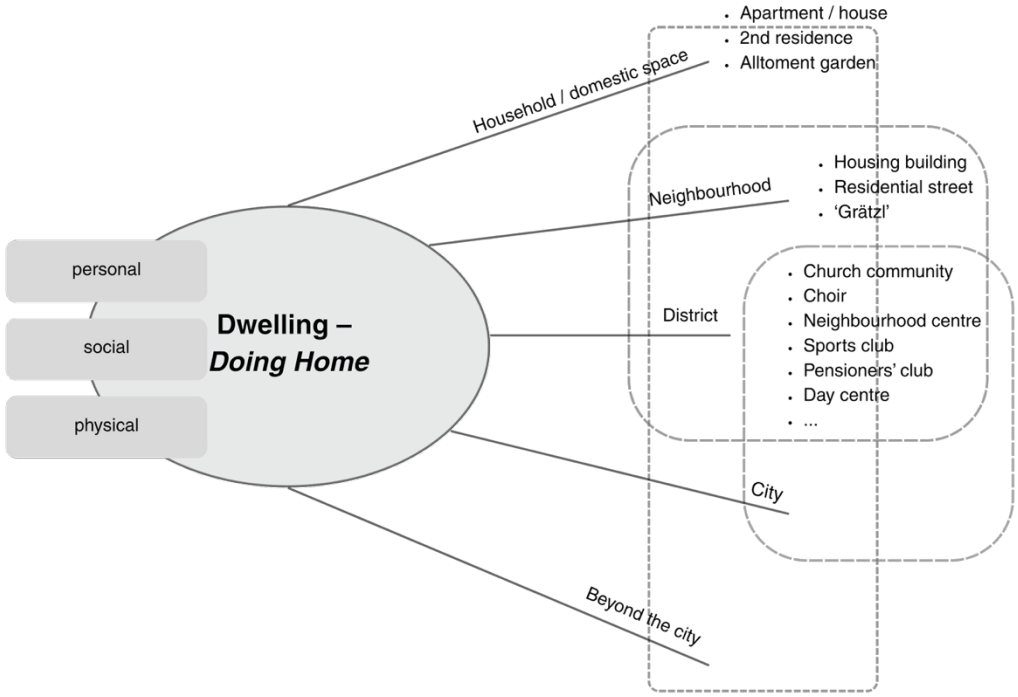

Figure 1: Scope and Scale of Dwelling based on the Study's Empirical Material. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

(J. Sixsmith) has carved out three "distinct modes of experience of home" (J. Sixsmith, 1986, pp. 288–289) which are "the personal aspects of home; the social aspects of home; and the physical aspects of home" (J. Sixsmith, 1986, p. 289). Her early conceptualisation reveals fruitful crossovers to Rowles' idea of 'insideness' (e.g., Rowles, 1980) where he distinguishes between 'autobiographical insideness', 'social insideness' and 'physical insideness'. This three-part classification is useful in order to first break down the complexity of the concept of home for analytical purposes. In a second step, I argue in favour of considering these, then again, as mutually interconnected, which manifests itself in the conceptualisation of home from the perspective of doing.

Home has a material dimension (J. Sixsmith, 1986, pp. 292–293). This includes physical objects, the design and features of the architectural space, the location of the residence, the morphology and the existing facilities and amenities. Rowles has described the physical qualities of home with 'physical insideness' which "represents functional existence within the setting manifest in the immediacy of everyday activity – the network of paths traced in the rhythm and routine of utilizing services and making social trips" (Rowles, 1980, p. 158). Home, thus, is produced through the daily routines and practices. Over time, people tend to develop "a more subtle form of physical involvement with the

space", what he refers to as "a physical intimacy, transcending cognition" and that creates "a body awareness of the physical space" (Rowles, 1980, pp. 158–159).[26] Such a 'physical insideness', as Rowles' calls it, refers to the small-scale spatiality of the domestic home and can equally extend to the neighbourhood and other places beyond. This includes, for example, the daily morning routine, which always follows the same order: from running errands at the bakery and picking up the daily newspaper at the tobacconist's to navigating tram times and traffic light changes, all of which shape the precise repetition of the route each day. Additionally, it encompasses the social encounters that take place along these regular paths. Thus, meeting "familiar strangers" (Milgram, 1992 [1977], p. 60, cited in Blokland, Vief, Krüger, & Schultze, 2023, p. 1951) or acquaintances and friends occurs precisely due to these fixed spatial rhythms.[27]

The qualities people link with their homes are obviously related to infrastructural aspects. They range from the availability of public transport, groceries, social and cultural amenities. If the immediate neighbourhood "doesn't offer anything" (Marina Neumann, 08PI, Pos. 109), everyday routes and activities are extended to other neighbourhoods in the city – such as former residential areas: "There where I used to go, where I know the cafes and restaurants or where friends live" (Marina Neumann, 08PI, Pos. 116-117). Dwelling, therefore, not only refers to the immediate small-scale neighbourhood but can also include other levels of scale. This is particularly the case when people have second residences – often in rural areas and abroad – or allotment gardens. This also becomes evident when they spend a lot of time in the homes of family members, such as their children and grandchildren, performing care activities, for example. The idea of dwelling allows for understanding belonging and mobility not necessarily as antithetical but rather

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[26] With this, Rowles (1980, p. 159, see also, Rowles and Ravdal, 2002, p. 85) refers to Seamon's (1980) usage of Merleau-Ponty's (2012 [1945]) 'body subject': "Body-subject is the *inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviors of the person intelligently, and thus function as a special kind of subject which expresses itself in a preconscious way usually described by such words as 'automatic', 'habitual', 'involuntary', and 'mechanical'"* (Seamon, 1980, p. 155, original emphasis).

[27] The qualities of social encounters in spaces of everyday life including those with ('familiar') strangers and their relevance for feelings of belonging have been broadly discussed in other research (see e.g., Blokland, 2003; Kusenbach, 2003a; Lofland, 1998; Valentine, 2008). 'Public familiarity', as Blokland and Nast (2014) define it, refers to the idea of "recognizing and being recognized in local spaces, where one meets some people whom one knows and many whom one does not, but with whom one develops some level of acquaintance, however superficial and fluid" (Blokland & Nast, 2014, p. 1155). Public familiarity can be considered as positively associated with neighbourhood belonging (Blokland, Vief, Krüger, & Schultze, 2023, p. 1956).

emphasises that “contemporary forms of dwelling almost always involve diverse forms of mobility” (Urry, 2000, p. 132; see also Watt & Smets, 2014).

What older people think and feel of as home depends on social relationships. Following Boccagni and Kusenbach (2020, p. 597, ref. to Boccagni, 2017; Smart, 2007), “home has to do with a significant relational engagement, or with people’s need and desire to attach a sense of security, familiarity and control to some portion of their life circumstances.” Rowles (1980) highlights the dimension of ‘social insideness’, which refers to the social integration in a neighbourhood, social contacts and networks, including the awareness and willingness to conform to local norms of appropriate behaviour. The relation between spatial belonging and social norms and ‘appropriate behaviour’ is also of interest in neighbourhood research: “Belonging can then mean an entitlement to define the rules of the game called neighbourhood norms for appropriate behaviour” (Blokland et al., 2023, p. 1953). The idea of social home puts emphasis on these different sets of social relationships and sees home as “a place allowing entertainment and enjoyment of other people’s company such as friends and relatives” (J. Sixsmith, 1986, p. 291), while at the same place contextualising these relationships in cultural ideas and normative images that are embedded in power hierarchies (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, pp. 600–601).

From the perspective of the personal dimension, the home appears as a central emotional reference point, “as an extension of oneself” (J. Sixsmith, 1986, p. 290), “a way of ‘being’ in the world” (J. Sixsmith, 1986, p. 290), “that contribute[s] in some way to the person’s self identity […], where self-expression is possible” (J. Sixsmith, 1986, p. 290). Understanding home “as the embodiment of identity and self-expression […] not only anchors people within a particular locality”, it also manifests itself “as a site of memories and a daily reminder of continuity with past identity and relationships” (Milligan, 2009, p. 69). These deep feelings of personal investment in places over time has been conceptualised by Rowles (1980) under the idea of ‘autobiographical insideness’. ‘Autobiographical insideness’ is “a much deeper level of being inside which moves beyond physical and social dimensions of contemporary affinity” (Rowles, 1980, p. 161) and refers to places that are “laden with personal meaning in relation to a life history” (Rowles, 1980, p. 162).

Home is a place where identity and self-expression are embodied which, however, are again deeply entangled with societal norms and hegemonic ideas: “In fact, when being at

home, people link personal, emotional experiences of familiarity, haven and heaven in particular material environments […] with cultural and socio-structural ideas of what is desirable and appropriate for someone like them" (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 597, ref. to Duyvendak, 2011; Paulsen, 2013). Therefore, home is also place for engagement with our aesthetic preferences (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 12) and "as a means of individual expression, [it offers] opportunities for self-development" (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 13 ref. to Harth & Scheller, 2012, translation A.G.). From this perspective, the home is fundamentally shaped by taste and lifestyle, serving as an expression of social differences, personal convictions and social affiliations (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 13).

3.2.2. Doing Home: Dwelling as Practice of Everyday Life and Subjectivation

Boccagni and Kusenbach (2020, p. 602, original emphasis) argue that "looking at what people actually *do* to make themselves at home, in light of their assets and opportunity structures, is no less important than attending to what they *mean* by home." With this, they put emphasis on the "interdependence […] between people's views and emotions of home (which are, of course, socially constructed) and the social practices through which these become articulated and materialized (what could be referred to as the social production of home)" (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 602). J. Sixsmith (1986, p. 293) has also emphasised in her essay on *The Meaning of Home* that homes are not static, but "have a particular historical and temporal background." With this, she points out that homes are transformed and develop over time "with lived-in everyday experience" (J. Sixsmith, 1986, p. 293). Her work on the phenomenological perspective on the meaning of home resonates with more recent accounts on 'doing home' emphasising the *making* of home and conceptualises "home as an ongoing process" (Dowling & Mee, 2007, p. 161; see also Baxter & Brickell, 2014; Blunt & Dowling, 2022; Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 597). Hence, "home is increasingly understood as a set of practices that make a place *home-like* […] In this perspective, home is viewed as a particular form of doing that is 'performed'" (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 599, original emphasis).

From such a practice-theoretical approach, attention is drawn to how home is 'done' through everyday practices (which equally involves social relationships and materials) rather than perceiving it as a structural given or a state of things (see Baxter & Brickell, 2014, p. 134; Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 597; Lovatt, 2018, p. 368). 'Doing home',

thus, represents a pattern of regular practices including all kinds of materials and objects as well as social relationships, which (re)produce and shape a sense of home-like space. Through the process of doing home, meaning is developed; or in the words of Rowles and Ravdal (2002): It is the transformation of "a simple physical structure, to a place suffused with the warmth of relationships and experience" (Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, p. 87, ref. to Young, 1998). Importantly, this process of imbuing space with meaning is not passive; individuals equally play an active role (Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, p. 87, ref. to Young, 1998). In this sense, focusing on the 'doings' of dwelling also emphasises older people's agency. At first sight, this seems obvious. However, if we look at public discourses and images around dwelling in old age, particularly in the context of increasing care needs and living in institutional housing, it reveals that older people are rarely seen as active producers of their homes.

Approaching home as doing should not imply conceiving it simply as a set of (everyday) actions. Rather, building on J. Sixsmith's (1986) idea of 'personal home' and Rowles' (1980) concept of 'autobiographical insideness', I understand dwelling as a form of spatial(ised) mode of subjectivation. In doing so, I draw on Hasse who sees dwelling as an expression of living one's life in forms of spatialisation (Hasse, 2012, p. 477; Hasse, 2009, p. 39). In this sense, he refers to dwelling as a specific form of existence, inspired by Heidegger's concept of '*Dasein*' (Hasse, 2012, p. 488). *Dasein*, in the understanding of Heidegger, reveals human existence as existence 'in the world' (Hasse, 2012, p. 488; Heidegger, 1993 [1927]). Accordingly, from this perspective, dwelling is understood as a fundamental way of 'being-in-the-world' (see Heidegger, 2000 [1951]) as an existential condition (Heidegger, 1993 [1927], see also Cloke & Jones, 2001, pp. 651–652).

While my work does not seek to address dwelling in the sense of Heideggerian existential ontology, more recent interpretations and applications of Heidegger's ideas have profoundly informed my research. These perspectives encourage us to move beyond seeing home as simply a physical structure or a place of shelter. There is indeed broad consensus among studies that adopt a 'doing' perspective on home, emphasising its dynamic and relational nature rather than equating it solely with housing as shelter. However, when reviewing the broader field of housing studies, a different picture often emerges. Many housing studies focus on aspects such as affordability, accessibility, housing regimes, policies and governance structures, often operating within a rather static conception of home, treating it as a container-like space. Moreover – and this is inspired

by Heideggerian understanding of dwelling as a mode of existence – the aim of this study extends *beyond merely describing the dwelling practices* of older people. It seeks to take this further by examining how the ageing subject is constituted through dwelling.

Therefore, this research follows Hasse (2009, pp. 36–40; 2012, p. 488), who builds on Heidegger's idea, identifying dwelling as a fundamental aspect of being. He approaches dwelling as encompassing a broader sense of 'spatial-bodily being-in-the-world' that is characterised by familiarity and a sense of belonging (Hasse, 2009, p. 33, translation A.G.). When speaking of dwelling and dwelling practices, I mean more than routine tasks in and around the home. Instead, I adopt a perspective that conceptualises dwelling as a form of subjectivation – one that understands the ageing urban dweller as embodied.[28] Employing the term dwelling thus means exploring the individual, social and societal practices of situated and emplaced living, through which space and place acquire meaning. Dwelling, therefore, encompasses varying degrees of intimacy, privacy and publicness, as well as their spatial materialisation across different scales. Dwelling practices are used as a lens through which the embodied experiences of old age are examined. In doing so, I see the potential to draw conclusions and insights into experiences of old age, and to explore the relevance of urban spatiality to shaping those experiences.

3.3. Summing Up

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical endeavour for understanding the constitutive relationship between ageing and space. My approach lies in connecting practice-theoretical approaches to old age with theories of relational space to understand the subjectivation processes of older people in relation to space. It is precisely this conceptual linking that enables us to address the processual character of ageing without losing sight of the spatialities in which it is embedded. Thus, the focus extends beyond the changing

[28] I am aware that these formulations likely do not align with Heideggerian thinking. However, I would like to emphasise once again that this is not my intention. In my understanding of the subject – as outlined in *Chapter 3.1* – I draw on practice-theoretical approaches, primarily inspired by J. Butler. It should also be noted that Hasse (2009, p. 20), in his references to Reckwitz's (2008) understanding of the subject, does not strictly follow Heideggerian ontological phenomenology either (even if he does not explicitly acknowledge this).

individual to include the changing socio-material environments that fundamentally co-produce ageing.

I departed from the understanding of ageing and old age as an *embodied experience that is inherently constituted by change*. People experience ageing through shifts in their lifecourse, such as the transition from work life to retirement, altered physical abilities compared to their youth, or changes in their social surroundings and relationships, such as the loss of their spouse. For example, they encounter forms of othering due to their bodily appearance or become aware of their advanced age through increased mortality within their social circles. Consequently, ageing is not a static attribute but something that is constantly 'done', always in relation to societal images of ageing. These images – ranging from the active retiree to the frail individual in need of care – shape people's understandings and self-perceptions of their own ageing. In their everyday practices, they continuously 'perform' their age, influenced by societal norms, socio-cultural expectations and social interactions. Therefore, drawing on J. Butler's (1997a, 1997b) understanding, the ageing subject is produced through the reiteration of age-related norms and practices, in the sense that older individuals enact, resist and reinvent societal expectations of frailty, productivity or dependency. This perspective highlights how ageing is co-constructed through interactions with material, social and discursive contexts, emphasising the fluid and relational nature of identity formation in later life. In this sense, ageing is constituted through its relational embeddedness, with the process of subject formation being inherently ongoing – never definitively completed, always temporal. Ageing, by its very nature, is a continuous process – in the sense of 'living in time', we all are constantly ageing.

To explore how spatial arrangements shape the constitution of ageing, I argued that a *relational approach to space* is necessary. In doing so, I draw on Massey and her theorisation of space. She emphasises that space is inherently dynamic and relational; it is "a product of interrelations" and therefore characterised by multiplicity, plurality and being "always in a process of becoming" (Massey, 1999, p. 2). This perspective allows us to not only identify certain materialities and objects as central markers of old age – such as poles and rollators, to revisit the examples of my previous exploration (see *Chapter 2.5*) – but also to examine how their ascriptions are related to and situated in the specific local context. This becomes particularly evident in one of my respondents' perspectives on the usage of poles: Poles may carry different connotations in urban areas

compared to rural settings, where they are often associated with sporting activities. That is why she uses them as a walking aid when she is in the countryside to visit her family, but refuses to take them when being around in her Viennese neighbourhood. The significance of poles in relation to age can evolve over time and reshape spaces in new ways, while spatial arrangements co-produce their meanings. Spaces are historically contingent and are produced in and through the dynamic interconnections between and among places and social relations.

A relational understanding of space also highlights that the construction of ageing is not unidirectional – spatial arrangements do not merely act upon older people; rather, older people equally shape and transform spaces through their practices. This dialectical approach to understanding the relationship between ageing and space is key; insights into empirical accounts from my fieldwork can illustrate this: For example, the constitutive interrelation of space and age reveals how notions of 'active ageing' materialise in public spaces. Older adults are confronted with ideals of a sporty and active lifestyle through advertising posters, infrastructural measures such as senior playgrounds, or community sports programs taking place in neighbourhood parks. These spaces (re)produce active ageing, embedding it into the fabric of the environment. At the same time, older adults themselves shape these spaces through their active, sporty use. Places thus become spaces for age enactment – in this case, linked to a positively connoted image of the healthy, productive and sporty ager. Even though these places are not initially associated with specific age groups (such as in contrast to pensioners' clubs or senior housing), they become imbued with age-related attributes. How older people use or reject certain places can also serve as a means of differentiation from others. For example, regularly frequenting a nearby green space for brisk hikes can distinguish an individual from age peers who walk slowly or use walking aids. This illustrates how age and its associated meanings are spatially performed. The co-production of such spaces can be exclusionary and discriminatory, particularly when it enforces dominant uses of specific places. Consequently, the social production of space is deeply intertwined with power – with planning serving as a potent tool that can solidify societal relations.

I have illustrated that, despite efforts to fix spatial productions through positions of power, framing space as a static container, these arrangements remain inherently temporary. In line with Massey's theoretical framework, space is always temporal. Recognising this temporality offers new insights into older people's experiences of space. As such, it

allows us to explore how changes in the neighbourhood fabric shape identification with ageing, often through referring to 'how it used to be'. Central to this is the understanding that neighbourhood transformations – whether through new traffic planning, an influx of new residents, extensive gentrification or densification due to housing construction – are embedded within broader societal developments and urbanisation processes. A relational understanding of space enables this by conceptualising 'the local' and 'the global' as 'mutually constituted' (Massey, 2005, p. 184). Thus, the many individually experienced changes in their neighbourhoods that my interview participants report are shaped by global spatial relations. I will show in the remainder of this book that acknowledging this is essential for understanding what it means to 'age in place'.

Older people's wish to stay put and, relatedly, the significance of the home for ageing well is emphasised by a myriad of scholarly work in the field of space-related gerontology (see *Chapter 2.3*). Home not only refers to the material housing conditions and infrastructural facilities but equally to social relationships, personal meanings and emotions imbued in and connotated with home. In this sense, home is not merely a static shelter but something that is constantly re-produced through practices in interaction with societal norms and hegemonic ideas, making a place 'home-like'. It is precisely these *everyday doings of home* that I consider fundamental for understanding ageing-in-place – scrutinising individual practices as well as wider social arrangements, values and patterns of social structure that shape the conditions and experiences of ageing. In this sense, I see the dimension of home to be a productive lens for research into the spatial subjectivation of old age and ageing.

I draw on the concept of 'dwelling' introduced by Hasse (2009). He theorises dwelling as 'everyday praxis' in which spatial(ised) modes of subjectivation accumulate: In dwelling "one's own life is expressed as spatialisation praxis" (Hasse, 2009, p. 39, translation A.G.), which includes both internal and external references. In this sense, dwelling serves as a dimension for empirically researching the spatialised everyday lives of older people and – importantly – for gaining insights into older people's spatial modes of subjectivation. Dwelling thus reflects varying levels of intimacy, privacy and publicness, expressed across different spatial scales. By focusing on dwelling practices, I aim to examine the embodied experiences of ageing and draw insights into how urban spaces influence those experiences.

4. Methodology, Research Perspectives and Design

This chapter elucidates the methodology underpinning this study and outlines the research process, from gaining field access to conducting data analysis. It is structured in three parts: *First*, I establish the methodological foundation by integrating insights from geographies of everyday life and subjectivation research (*Chapter 4.1*). In this sense, this section provides a bridge to the theoretical groundings illustrated in the preceding (see *Chapter 3*). I conceptualise spaces of everyday life as a methodological lens for examining spatial experiences of ageing. Building on this, *Chapter 4.2* presents the research design, which adheres to grounded theory methodology. I detail the data collection process, including the sampling strategies (*Chapter 4.2.1*) and describe the steps of the data analysis process (*Chapter 4.2.2*). The theoretical categories derived from this endeavour inform the structure of *Chapter 6*, where the findings of the empirical research are demonstrated. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations and a critical reflection on potential biases (*Chapter 4.3*).

4.1. Spaces of Everyday Life as Methodological Lens

I approach space, on the one hand, as an empirical parameter and aim to identify concrete spatialities in relation to old age through researching experiences of older people in Vienna. On the other hand, and related to this, space is perceived as a constitutive element of ageing. Thus, I consider space equally as an analytical dimension and methodological entry window for the empirical study. The following chapter is dedicated to this endeavour and aims at introducing spaces of everyday life as a methodological lens. It thus serves as a conceptual link, connecting the theoretical foundations outlined in *Chapter 3* with the empirical implementation detailed in the section following this part (*Chapter 4.2*).

The methodology of this research is grounded in conceptual work on everyday life (see e.g. Gardiner, 2000; Highmore, 2001b) and its extensions to ageing research (see Katz, 2018c), including perspectives on space analysis (see e.g., Eyles, 1989; Kessl & Reutlinger, 2008). As discussed previously (see *Chapter 2.1*), ageing is understood as relational and as a contingent process, in which bodily, socio-structural and cultural

factors are intertwined. In this sense, I consider old age as a lived experience that is shaped in and by everyday life. Baars (2009, p. 90) suggests, as introduced in the preceding remarks, understanding ageing as "living in a changing bodily–social–personal world." His definition not only covers the multidimensional nature of ageing, which is also reflected in the various disciplinary perspectives within ageing research (ranging from biology to psychology and sociology). His proposition further illustrates the methodological challenge in studying the phenomenon of ageing: understanding ageing as both an individual lifecourse trajectory and as relationally embedded within the broader socio-political and cultural context (see *Chapters 2.1 & 3*).

This means – and given the specific interest of this study, which lies in the ageing subject and the constitutive role of space in the process of subject formation – for examining experiences of ageing, it is methodologically important to systematically include the socio-structural contexts in the research without disregarding the individuals' agency. Or to put it in another way and as Richter, Denninger, Dyk, and Lessenich (2013, p. 36, ref. to Amann & Kolland 2008, translation A.G.) highlight: "The interconnection of the micro and macro levels is central to the development of theory as well as to the empirical knowledge process on the phenomena of age(ing)." Departing from the necessity for a methodological interweaving of 'the micro' and 'the macro', I draw on everyday life research and its conceptual bridging to ageing research. The analysis of geographies of everyday life allows for methodologically interweaving 'the micro', 'the meso' and 'the macro', positioning the everyday life as the dimension where social processes of scaling can be reflected (see also Gabauer et al., 2025, p. 110).

Everyday life can be characterised as "what happens every day, the routine, repetitive taken-for-granted experiences, beliefs and practices; the mundane ordinary world, untouched by great events and the extraordinary" (Featherstone, 1992, pp. 160–161). It is, as Katz (2018a, p. 4) demonstrates, "not just 'there' as an obvious empirical and factual constant; rather it is the perpetually emergent social sphere of human existence." It "is practiced, rather than reflected upon" (Palmberger, 2022, p. 103) and through our practices, "we constantly adapt the conditions of our everyday lives in subtle but often unconscious ways" (Katz, 2018a, p. 4).

At first glance, studying people's everyday lives may seem trivial, given that it is characterised by 'the ordinary', routine activities and mundaneness. It might also appear too abstract or vague for empirical research. So, why is it worth investigating?

First, its usefulness lies in the entanglement of individual biographies and structural conditions. Examining ageing through the lens of everyday life captures both the discursive framings of ageing and the diverse, creative ways individuals adapt to daily conditions and reconcile with age-related changes (Katz, 2018a, p. 8). In this respect, everyday life refers to "singular, individual acts" as well as to "an overarching structure common to a large group of people", hence it "sits uncertainly across […] the particular and the general" (Highmore, 2001a, p. 5). In this vein, research on everyday life – and its extension into gerontological studies – draws attention to the subjective experiences of ageing individuals: their daily activities, modes of engagement and negotiations with dominant narratives and societal perceptions of ageing (Katz, 2018a; see also Gabauer, 2022). Crucially, however, taking everyday life seriously as a research perspective also requires attention to the socio-historical contexts in which these experiences are situated. Everyday life is not merely a site for microanalysis; rather, it represents the intersection where personal experience and structural processes become entangled. Hence, everyday life enables diving deeper into "the relationship between the structures of society and the biographies of individuals […] Those structures and biographies are enmeshed in everyday life and experience" (Eyles, 1989, p. 103). In this respect, an everyday life lens proposes an approach to overcome structure–agency dualisms as everyday life is "the *plausible social context* and *believable personal world* within which we reside. From it, we derive a sense of self, of identity, as living a real and meaningful biography" (Eyles, 1989, p. 103, original emphasis). In a similar vein, Katz (2018a, p. 15) states, "echoing the critiques of everyday life from their beginnings, [leads us to the recognition] that the daily experiences of ageing bear the imprints of their wider historical, cultural, political and structural realities."

Positioning everyday life as a methodological lens also arises from a critique of the hierarchical construction of scales. Research that focuses primarily on political strategies, public discourses or global economic programmes tends to reproduce a socially constructed scale hierarchy, typically privileging the global as the most analytically significant (Franz & Strüver, 2021). Within this framework, the everyday – coded as the subjective and local 'micro' level – rarely serves as a point of departure for analysis

(Knierbein, 2021). Yet this scalar order is itself a social and scientific construct (Franz & Strüver, 2021; Gabauer et al., 2025, p. 110). As Herod and Wright (2002, p. 11) underscore, "scales do not exist except through the social practices by which they are, in fact, constituted […] social actors do not 'jump' from one scale to another but, rather, they actually constitute scale through their social praxis."

Moreover, a strong focus on discourses and structures bears the risk of a certain bias because it may lose sight of the individual as a subject with agency. Denninger, van Dyk, Lessenich, and Richter (2010, p. 209, translation A.G.), for example, speak in this context of a certain "structuralist surplus" that also underlies many studies despite their conceptualisation of subjects as active and reflexive producers of their selves. They all too quickly turn subjects' 'self-government' into a reflection of a one-dimensional external interpellation (Denninger et al., 2010; Richter et al., 2013). However, drawing on an understanding of the subject as performatively constituted (see *Chapter 3.1*), it is crucial to recognise that the structures and norms through which the subject is discursively constituted are never stable and fixed but have to be constantly re-established through social practices. Following Katz (2018b, p. 126), we can see how ageing is accompanied by manifold social orders and cultural images, some of which contradict and some of which reinforce each other, and how "people experience embodiments of ageing as a fractured process of resisting, accepting, denying and recreating narratives of ageing." I argue that using everyday life as an epistemological entry window is fruitful for analysing and understanding the complex process of subject formation. In the context of this research, the strength of everyday life as a field for examining conditions of ageing in urban space lies in its capacity to link individual, changing routines and experiences with broader socio-economic conditions, political structures and cultural norms – and to explore their mutual entanglement (Gabauer, 2022, p. 135). Or, to put it differently: "in the context of everyday life can be seen the dialectical relationship between 'individual' and 'society'" (Eyles, 1989, p. 116).

The value of an everyday life perspective also lies in how it renders space visible. Narrations of people's ordinary days, their rhythms and routines, consistently evoke spatial references. As something grounded, everyday life is inevitably materialised in space. Viewed through this analytical lens, the embodied and spatially embedded nature of social practices comes to the fore, allowing for a more situated understanding of space itself. This research perspective aligns with practice-theoretical approaches that

understand the social as materially expressed. These approaches emphasise the corporeality of the social and its continuous emergence as key to understanding the social world (Schäfer, 2016). However, I have argued for extending this perspective by incorporating relational theories of space (see *Chapter 3.1*). This offers the potential to direct greater attention to the ongoing becoming of space (Massey, 2005), and thereby to more fully grasp the constitution of the subject through space – without losing sight of the subject and its agency.

Central here is the *dialectical* approach to space. While some scholars argue for using two separate notions of social versus material space, relational space conceptions take both aspects of two sides of the same coin: "Space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression [...] space is not a photocopy of society, it is society" (Castells, 1996, p. 410). In this vein, the formation of urban spaces is a relational and dialectical process that is equally based on the agents – "ranging from professionals and practitioners to ordinary urban inhabitants; their perception and conception of urban territory and their collective imaginaries of the urban, as well as on the materiality of the built environment" (Streule, 2020, p. 423). This means that such a research perspective rests on the assumption that human experience – and how it can unfold in urban space – shapes people's everyday lives, self-perceptions and agency, while seeing the built arrangements as an essential part of that experience (see Gabauer et al., 2025).

A theorisation of the everyday, in the tradition of Lefebvre's (2014) oeuvre, takes the lived spaces of urban experience as an analytical ground for social analysis: "One element of a critical urban theory that is diverse and inclusive is a groundedness in the concrete and in everyday life" (Wood, 2017, p. 89). Scholars engaged in this body of thought advocate for starting from the everyday experience of inhabiting space, arguing that everyday life offers an analytical frame in which micro, meso and macro dimensions intersect and coalesce (see e.g., Knierbein, 2020). Adopting a critical research stance towards everyday life makes it possible to reveal the diverse experiences and socio-structural conditions that shape how older people navigate urban environments (see also Gabauer, 2022; Gabauer et al., 2025). Hence, a focus on everyday life also acknowledges the pluralisation of lived experiences,[29] meaning that a geography of everyday life, as I

[29] Even though there are analysis which argue for the tendency of homogeneity linked with industrialisation and mass consumption, capitalism, e.g., as in Lefebvre's understanding (Lefebvre, 1971): "Everyday life becomes an adjunct to consumer capitalism and all human

approach it, is inherently situated and context-specific. This perspective emphasises people's experiences of ageing within "*concrete* […] spatial settings" (Eyles, 1989, p. 106, original emphasis).

4.2. Research Design: A Grounded Theory Empirical Study

> Overall, I'm rather uninteresting.
> *[Why do you think so?]*
> I always do everything the same way and have no problems
> (Dagmar Stetter, 01WI, Pos. 416-418).

When I asked the respondents of my empirical study to describe in detail their routines, usual day-to-day activities and habits, some looked at me with astonishment – if not suspicion. For some, naming the things that are usually just *done*, often unconsciously, proved difficult. Others were surprised that their seemingly banal daily lives could be of such interest to me. This became particularly evident when I asked if they would be willing to let me accompany them, along with a colleague, on one of their routine walks. The significance of their normal, 'unspectacular' and mundane everyday experiences seemed difficult to grasp.

I, too, especially in the early exploratory phase of the data collection, found myself often questioning the direction of my research. Amidst detailed accounts of morning routines and cleaning habits, lengthy digressions into biographical life events, deeply personal experiences and nostalgic reflections on how things 'used to be', I often wondered: Is this *really* relevant?

A study interested in the everyday as the mundane, banal, routine or 'taking-for-granted' aspect of social life poses fundamental empirical challenges. How to research the everyday when, as Highmore (2001a, p. 4) aptly points out, its "contours might be so vague as to encompass almost everything (or certain aspects of everything)"? Related to that was another key challenge: to leave behind the many individual stories of the

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relationships are seen as extensions of the market, that is they are commodified and objectified" (Eyles, 1989, p. 108) – nevertheless "the apparent homogenisation of everyday life and of public issues in general can affect us in quite different ways" (Eyles, 1989, p. 106).

respondents – some deeply moving, distressing, humorous or captivating – and to do justice to the fact that individually experienced lifecourses are always embedded in specific, temporally determined socio-material contexts, following qualitative research's objective to condensate and derive generalised findings.

The aim of this study is to examine the processes of subjectivation in old age and how they are produced *through* and *within* spaces. This includes systematising and making sense out of the myriad detailed, very fragmented everyday stories and personal life events. The focus of the empirical investigation is on the lived experiences of older people in Vienna, as everyday life is considered a valuable analytical lens. I see a biographical approach – one that places the ageing individual and their lived, daily experiences and practices at the core – as essential for researching subject formation and how modes of subjectiviation unfold in space. Thus, my research design builds on the assumption outlined in *Chapter 4.1* that broader societal structures become manifest within seemingly personal, present-day routines of everyday life, intertwining the present with past experiences and future expectations.

The structure and methodological approach of the research are guided by a grounded theory methodology (see Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 190–223; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The basic objective of grounded theory is the close interweaving of empirical field research and theory building (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 192). In that sense, theory should be generated through empirical research, which means that it is not invented 'from above' but rather is grounded in the empirical study (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 192). Glaser and Strauss' (1965, p. 5, original emphasis) formulated aim of "*substantive theory*" (later they called it 'grounded' theory) illuminates "the concern for grounding theory in the data and makes clear that grounded theory can encompass both 'substantive' and 'formal' theory" (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 193, translation A.G.).

A further basic principle of grounded theory methodology is its explorative and open approach to the field. In this vein, my first access into the field was organised very openly and gradually became more definite. In concrete terms, this means that the entire empirical study was structured along three phases (and an additional preliminary study

phase[30]), whereby the design and implementation of all research phases integratively built on one another, and the guiding research questions, sampling and subsequent methodological decisions for data collection and analysis have been continuously specified during the empirical investigation. Accordingly, and in the sense of a "practice of weaving back and forth between data collection and analysis" (Strauss, 2017 [1990], p. 420), the case selection was predominantly based on theoretical sampling – a process in which the researcher decides on an analytical basis what data to collect next and where to find it (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 181). In the beginning, it was combined with snowball sampling, which proved to be useful to access the field. The sampling was guided by the search for minimal and maximal contrasts with regard to theoretically relevant categories until theoretical saturation was gradually reached (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 182).

Based on the alternating between data collection and analysis (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 199–201), the research endeavour follows an inductive–deductive explorative approach,[31] which means that the process was characterised by different and mutually dependent phases of empirical and theoretical explorations. Through using so-called verification strategies (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002), the empirical approach was shaped by going back and forth between findings and theoretical literature, contacting respondents and reaching out to new respondents to cross-check findings, and continuously rethinking the fit between findings and the overarching aims of the study.

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[30] My involvement in a third-party-funded research project (*Geographies of Age*, a collaboration between ETH Zurich, KTH Stockholm and TU Wien) served as an initial exploration into the field (see two resulting publications: Gabauer et al., 2022; Lehner & Gabauer, 2020).

[31] Drawing on the often-raised critique on the inductive–deductive dichotomy in Glaser and Strauss' approach, which, however, is also partly misunderstood (for a summary, see Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 196–198), my research hinges on "the interplay of induction and deduction in a process that leads to new insights" (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 197, translation A.G.): "A closer examination of Glaser and Strauss' work reveals this very interplay. It is not solely about the 'induction' of concepts (generalisations) from data but rather a continuous sequence of inductive and deductive steps. This involves data collection and hypothesis generation (inductive), followed by new, theory-guided data collection based on these hypotheses (deductive), and subsequent testing and refinement of theoretical concepts, and so forth. Thus, induction and deduction are equally integral to the research process" (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 197–198, translation A.G.). Accordingly, I align with critiques rejecting the notion of a 'theory-free' initial analysis, a view Strauss himself later moderated, particularly in collaboration with Corbin (Strauss, 1991 [1987]; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 277); in contrast to Glaser's (2004) stance (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 196).

In this sense, the research foci were developed in the course of the empirical field research, culminating in the continuous refinement and adjustment of the guiding research questions throughout the study. Initially, I approached the field without imposing any restrictions regarding specific forms of housing. The exploration was driven by the broad interest in how spatial arrangements matter in and shape the everyday lives of older people in Vienna – regardless of their housing type or living arrangement. Hence, starting point were debates revolving around the idea of age-friendly cities and communities (see e.g., WHO, 2007), reflecting the growing recognition of the need to design and plan for ageing populations in urban development as well as in planning, urban design and architectural approaches. My initial approach to the field in this sense was characterised by urban development-related attempts in relation to ageing. Concerns about old age accumulate spatially in particular at the neighbourhood level and are strongly influenced by health promotion and activation policies.

The decision to adopt ageing-in-place as an empirical focus emerged during the first phase of data collection. This was accompanied by a shift from the level of the neighbourhood, which in this context represents a predominantly policy-driven concept, to the idea of 'dwelling' (see *Chapter 3.2*). The analytical concept of dwelling emerged through empirical data collection alongside and shaped by ongoing theoretical grounding and iterative loops. Adopting such a perspective allowed for a better exploration of the lived experiences of older people at the intersection of and between various shades of publicness and privateness. At the same time, it enabled an empirical operationalisation that allows conclusions to be drawn in relation to the original research question – the overall interest in the role of space in processes of subject formation in old age.

Accordingly, the specific research interest has been specified through the empirical fieldwork, culminating in the following development of research questions:

- *What role do urban spaces play and what effects do they have on the constitution of ageing subjects?*
- *In the context of 'ageing in place' in Vienna, how are everyday experiences of old age and ageing spatially produced?*
- *In the context of 'ageing in place' in Vienna, what are dwelling practices of older people? How do they experience age-related changes and how does this manifest spatially?*

4.2.1. Data Collection: Combining Qualitative Interviews with Mobile Ethnography

The project combines a qualitative interview study with urban ethnographic research (mobile ethnography). Across three interlinked data collection phases, I conducted narrative, unstructured ethnographic interviews (see Schütze, 1983; Spradley, 1979), problem-centred interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) and go-along interviews (e.g., Kusenbach, 2003b) with old and very old people in Vienna. Additionally, I employed mental mapping (for an overview, see Boettner, 2007, pp. 282–285), a visualisation technique used during sit-in interviews to capture spatial experiences. The collected material is triangulated with expert interviews (e.g., Bogner & Menz, 2009) and policy research to provide deeper insights into programmatic frameworks, strategies and political agendas. In line with the grounded theory principle that 'all is data' (Glaser, 2004), the corpus includes not only verbatim interview transcripts but also memory protocols in the form of written notes or transcribed audio memos from observations and informal conversations. Additionally, it incorporates field notes, memos from non-audio-recorded interviews, documentation from site visits and guided tours, publicly accessible project descriptions, masterplans and strategic programmes, reflections and protocols from my participation in relevant events, as well as cartographic visualisations and photographs from the go-along interviews. Furthermore, written memos documenting conversations with my colleague, who accompanied and supported me during most of the go-along interviews, were also included in the dataset.[32]

Qualitative Sit-in and Go-Along Interviews

In total, 37 interviews were conducted with older people between March 2022 and February 2023; 6 narrative-ethnographic, 20 problem-centred and 11 go-along interviews with 28 persons, whereby two of the problem-centred interviews were subsequently removed from the corpus. Therefore, the overall data material consists of 35 interviews with 26 people who are retired, aged between 63 and 92, and who live in their accustomed housing conditions without the support of continuous 24-hour care services. *Figure 2*

[32] Go-along interviews were conducted with the support of Olivia Kafka, who took photos and created a cartographic sketch of the route during the interview. A companion is recommended for pursuing go-along interviews to effectively address their multifaceted demands, including simultaneous interviewing, observation and documentation (see Kusenbach, 2003b). Olivia was not otherwise involved in the research. The collected data were used and analysed solely within the scope of this research.

gives an overview of the interviews with the indication of the three collection phases. The provided names of the respondents are synonyms.[33] Most of them were conducted in the form of single interviews, four as pair interviews. All of them were in German, except for one, which was conducted with simultaneous translation between Turkish and German. The choice of location was left to the interviewees. The sit-in interviews took place either in the respondents' private homes or in publicly accessible places such as cafés, in a neighbourhood centre, a pensioners' club and a day centre. Some of the interviewees invited me to their homes immediately for the first meeting, while others showed their apartments during our second appointment as part of the go-along interview. The interviews in the third data collection phase were conducted exclusively in publicly accessible places.

The initial interviews were highly explorative in nature, unstructured, deliberately open-ended and at times lasted very long – up to five hours. Unstructured interviewing during the first phase of data collection helped to generate an intensive, detailed examination of the research subject (see Bryman, 2012, p. 68). Accordingly, the first interviews followed a conversational style – I worked with a list of topics, but my phrasing and sequencing of questions strongly varied from interview to interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 213). Respondents were invited to speak as freely as possible in order to capture biographical and life-world experiences in a coherent narrative flow (Schütze, 1983) to enable an in-depth reconstruction of individual life stories and subjective meanings. The interviews and their structure were thus highly context-specific and situated, focusing on biographical narrations, including individual life histories and current living conditions, driven by an interest in the lived experience of ageing in relation to space. I adopt the term 'ethnographic interview' introduced by Spradley (1979), which represents a form of unstructured interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 213), while also drawing on key elements of Schütze's (1983) narrative interview.

[33] The respondents were informed both verbally and in writing about the research and the anonymised use of their data, and they provided consent both verbally and in writing through a consent form. They were also informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time.

Conducting Period		Respondents #ID		Sit-in interview #ID	Duration	Go-along interview #ID	Duration	Field Access
1st Collection Phase	Narrative-ethnographic interviews: March – April 2022	Af	Dagmar Stetter	01PI	2 hr	01WI	1 hr	· Neighbourhood Project 8th · Neigbhourhood Centre 15th · Recruting through respondents
		Bf	Birgit Weiss	02PI	1 hr	02WI	2,25 hr	
		Cf	Isolde Richter	03PI	1,5 hr	03WI	0,5 hr	
		Df	Irina Huber	04PI	1 hr	04WI	2,5 hr	
		Em	Hubert Weber	05PI	5 hr	05WI	2 hr	
		Ff	Edit Weber	05PI	5 hr	05WI	2 hr	
		Gm	Peter Dreyer	06PI	1,5 hr			
2nd Collection Phase	Problem-centred interviews: April – July 2022 Follow-up go-along interviews: June – July 2022	Hf	Magdalena Winkler	07PI	1,5 hr	07WI	1,75 hr	· Neigbhourhood Centre 15th · Vienna for Seniors (Email List) · Recruting through respondents
		If	Marina Neumann	08PI	1,5 hr			
		Jf	Adele Wimmer	09PI	1 hr	09WI	0,5 hr	
		Kf	Tabea Horvat	10PI	2 hr	10WI	1,25 hr	
		Lm	Harald Horvat	10PI	2 hr	10WI	1,25 hr	
		Mm	Vinzent Wallner	11PI	1 hr			
		Nm	Otto Meier	12PI	1,5 hr	12WI	0,5 hr	
		Of	Jutta Ludwig	13PI	2 hr	13WI	0,25 hr	
		Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	14PI	1,5 hr	14WI	2 hr	
		Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	15PI	1,5 hr			
3rd Collection Phase	Problem-centred interviews (partially including mental mapping): November 2022 – February 2023	Rf	Lucija Milošević	16PI	1,75 hr			· Pensioners' club 15th · Day centre 15th · Verein Lokale Agenda 21
		Sm	Omar Ertürk	17PI	0,75 hr			
		Tf	Gerda Obermüller	18PI	1 hr			
		Uf	Franziska Kranz	19PI	1 hr			
		Vm	Fritz Paschner	20PI	1 hr			
		Wf	Beritan Çil	21PI	1 hr			
		Zf	Ivana Rogić	24PI	0,75 hr			
		AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	25PI	1 hr			
		BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	26PI	1 hr			

Figure 2: Interview Material with Older People, indicating Collection Phases and Field Access. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

The interviews in the second and third data collection phases were more structured, while still retaining a highly exploratory character. I followed the method of the problem-centred interview (Witzel & Reiter, 2012), which addresses the apparent tension between being theory-driven and maintaining openness, attempting to reconcile this by organising the researcher's insights through an inductive-deductive interplay (Witzel, 2000). Drawing on this method, the interviews were organised openly and biographically, but with specific foci. An interview guide was used, developed based on the initial narrative-

ethnographic interviews, and further adapted and refined for the third data collection phase. Importantly, the guide was not followed dogmatically in a 'bureaucratic' manner; instead, the interviews were "primarily oriented towards the content relevance structures and communicative patterns of the respondents, rather than the pre-established orders and structures" (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 126, translation A.G.).

During the first phase, it quickly became apparent that asking the research participants about their homes serves as a stimulating opening question, functioning as a narrative stimulus that provoked autobiographical narrations with concrete spatial references. In addition to the aspect of their homes and housing conditions, respondents were asked more specifically about their neighbourhood – the Viennese *Grätzl* – and meaningful social spaces as well as their daily life, regular routines and practices in the form of inviting them to describe a typical day and/or week. Depending on the insights generated through the thematic clusters of housing/home, neighbourhood and everyday life, respondents were further prompted to share personal perspectives on ageing and encouraged to reflect on key turning points throughout their lifecourse. The interview concluded with an associative question about their imagination of an age-friendly city.

In the scope of the third data collection phase, the interview guide was reduced in length while retaining the core thematic clusters of housing/home, neighbourhood and everyday life. This resulted from findings of the preceding interviews, indicating theoretical saturation. Additionally, the duration of the interviews was shortened, particularly since this phase included participants with health limitations and bodily restrictions. To ensure their comfort and accommodate their needs, interviews were designed to last no longer than one hour.

The third phase of data collection adopted a more structured form of interviewing. In line with the principle of 'methodologically controlled external understanding' (see Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 14–17), data collection was partly integrated into a university course I taught. Students were trained in interview techniques and guided to independently conduct problem-centred interviews, using a provided guide. However, importantly, even though the last phase of data collection was characterised by a more structured style of interviewing, interviews still followed the narrative flow of the respondents, incorporating immanent questioning, instead of rigid adherence to the guide (Hopf, 1978, cited in Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 126). Two of the interviews

conducted by students (*#ID 20PI* and *21PI*, see *Figure 16, Appendix*) were included in the corpus after prior review. Integrating data collection into a university course proved highly beneficial for my research project, as collaborative reflection with students enriched interpretive insights and advanced the research process.

In the course of the second phase, alongside stationary narrative-ethnographic and problem-centred interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with the participants from the first and second phases, accompanying them on a typical regular walk outside their homes (e.g., walking the dog, going shopping or visiting the doctor). The ethnographic method of go-alongs (or walking interviews) combines some of the strengths of ethnographic observation and interviewing and allows for the exploration of environmental perspectives, everyday lived experiences, spatial practices and biographies at the intersection of the built environment and the social world (Kusenbach, 2003b). In this vein and as Kusenbach (2003b, p. 458) aptly points out, the method of go-along "is a tool particularly suited to explore two key aspects of everyday lived experience: the constitutive role and the transcendent meaning of the physical environment, or place." Hence, the connection between biographical life stories and spaces especially becomes apparent through empirical research *in situ*.[34] 'Being in a place' can provoke deeper feelings and affective relationships with spaces and make it easier to verbalise them instead of 'talking about a place' in an interview room. In this sense, walking and accompanying older people on their daily and regular routes "can capture the sometimes hidden or unnoticed habitual relations with place and the environment" (Evans & Jones, 2011, p. 850).

Forms of mobile ethnography can reveal dimensions of spatial practice more concretely than communication-based methods, where these often remain implicit as interviewees frequently perceive them as 'the most normal thing in the world' and 'not worth mentioning' (see e.g., Boettner, 2007, p. 285). It is precisely these ordinary, mundane or even seemingly banal aspects of the spatiality of everyday life that this research project is interested in. For the go-along interviews, I asked the participants to follow them during

[34] The powerful dimension of the situatedness of empirical research also applies to the constitution of old age. As Barron (2021b, p. 669, original emphasis) points out, "older age emerges, to some extent, *in situ*" and this form of emplaced constitution can also occur in the course of an interview situation, e.g., in relation to me and my position as 'young' researcher (for further reflection on this aspect, see *Chapter 4.3*).

an everyday walk, which should be set as 'normal' as possible, hence, carried out during the usual time and starting from their homeplace. I prepared some framing questions tackling the characteristics of the route, such as how often, when and why this route is taken, possible advantages, restrictions and barriers, as well as questions addressing the social realm, in respect of possible encounters and, additionally, general aspects on mobility patterns. However, these questions were not strictly asked; rather, the focus was on what the respondents came up with while following them.

Hence, employing go-along interviews was guided by the interest in older people's perspectives on the spatiality of ageing – both their past and current experiences and circumstances, the role of certain places, their spatial practices and their tactical everyday knowledge of using, navigating, inhabiting or appropriating spaces in the city. Most of the go-along interviews lasted far longer than the actual walk. Many invited me and my colleague afterwards to their apartments or their allotments for coffee and cake, or we made a longer stopover in one of their favourite cafés on the way. The interviews, therefore, often had a two-part structure: a go-along and then a narrative-ethnographic sit-in.

A second interview appointment, regardless of the format of walking, proved useful for building trust. This was evidenced by the fact that, except for one person, all interviewees invited me into their homes if they had not done so already during the first meeting. This was especially valuable for initially reserved respondents, such as Birgit Weiss (*#ID Bf*), who exemplifies the benefits of multiple interview encounters in interpretive research. In our first meeting at a neighbourhood café she chose, Ms Weiss was hesitant and guarded in her narratives, requiring several prompts to achieve a natural storytelling flow. During the second interview, which lasted almost twice as long and included an extensive walk with a visit to a pub and a tour of her flat, she appeared noticeably more open and approachable. Generally, follow-up interviews fostered trust and also deepened insights into respondents' everyday lives by accompanying them on daily routes. This was not only due to gaining access to more intimate dimensions of their lives but also because certain aspects reappeared throughout the interviews. Recurring narrations across interviews provided valuable perspectives on 'meaning structures', helping to reconstruct the deeper meanings that individuals assign to their experiences and practices (see Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 11–21). Nevertheless, not all respondents were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. As *Figure 2* indicates, four persons refused

a second meeting: Marina Neumann (*#ID If*) rejected, clearly stating that this was too intimate for her; the other three (*#IDs Gm, Mm, Qm*) more indirectly by not finding a suitable date.

The go-alongs were audio-recorded, and additional handwritten notes were taken on observations. A cartographic record of the route was created, including spatial markings of specific comments by the respondents or occurrences along the way. For example, it was noted when interviewees happened to meet acquaintances on the street or when certain locations and spatial features triggered memories of the past. Furthermore, photos were taken for additional visual documentation. A colleague accompanied me during the go-alongs to assist with visual documentation by taking photographs and sketching maps, as managing all these tasks alone would not have been feasible. Moreover, the joint reflection after the go-alongs proved to be highly beneficial (akin to the university course). Conversations between my colleague and me were incorporated into the data material as verbatim transcribed memos or in the form of written notes.

In the third data collection phase, the additional go-along interview was omitted. Instead, mental mapping techniques were incorporated into the problem-centred interviews – particularly to address potential critiques regarding the lack of alternatives for respondents with mobility limitations. It was driven by the concern of how the city is experienced and how these subjective experiences can be made visible (see Lynch, 1973). Participants were asked to either draw or describe their home or neighbourhood to me for drawing. Although the results were included in the data corpus, this method proved less suitable within the applied context.

Expert Interviews and Policy Research

Expert interviews were conducted both for exploratory purposes and for accessing specific knowledge, such as identifying key institutions, organisations and strategic municipal programs at the intersections of urban development, housing, ageing and health. Hence, I interviewed professionals and staff in municipal or organisations closely affiliated with and operating on behalf of the City of Vienna, such as a district management office, the Vienna Health Promotion (*Wiener Gesundheitsförderung, WiG*) and the Vienna Social Fund (*Fonds Soziales Wien, FSW*), non-profit organisations such as the Vienna Welfare Services (*Wiener Hilfswerk*) which operates neighbourhood centres and community-based support facilities, and the *Caritas* in the role of key actor in the

field of housing for the elderly. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with people directly working in old age-specific institutions, like pensioners' clubs and day centres and persons involved in co-housing projects and neighbourhood initiatives with a focus on older people.

These interviews, together with policy research, served as a baseline study to gain insights into programmatic frameworks, strategies and political agendas in Vienna. The aim was to understand key actors, responsibilities and service structures of the city, identify thematic areas and focal points, and, based on these insights, refine case selection. Expert interviews thus provided initial orientation in the field and, notably, some interviewees acted as gatekeepers, facilitating access to diverse groups of older people in Vienna. Yet, the interviews were not solely conducted to access specialised knowledge but also used for their *theory-generating* value (see Bogner & Menz, 2009). In light of the interpretative paradigm in which the study is situated, the objective was to analyse and reconstruct the "specific configuration of knowledge" (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 55) by triangulating expert interviews with those conducted with older people.

In total, 14 expert interviews were carried out, some of which included on-site visits, with five individuals serving as key gatekeepers to access the field; a table outlining these interviews is provided in the *Appendix* (see *Figure 17*).[35] Additionally, as sketched out in the introductory paragraph of this chapter section (*4.2.1*), handwritten notes of informal conversations from relevant events, presentations, as well as recorded lectures representing positions of the City of Vienna, were included in the dataset. Project documents and reports – available online or forwarded by experts – such as descriptions and evaluations of publicly-funded projects or strategic urban development guidelines, were also incorporated. This form of data collection was relatively unstructured and follows the grounded theory's principle of *all is data*. As Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr (2014, p. 195, translation A.G.) emphasise, "The focus here is clearly not on the method of data collection but on the process of sampling and theory development, which are organised in parallel."

[35] The interview partners were informed about the research project, provided consent and were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time.

Access to the Field and Sampling

I approached the interlocutors primarily through different organisations that are engaged with the topic of ageing and urban development. Hence, on the one hand, the interviewed 'experts' were important informants for programmatic frameworks, discourses and political agendas in the context of ageing, health, housing and urban development in Vienna. On the other hand, some of them served as gatekeepers for reaching out to older people living in Vienna. This also applied to some of the older adults themselves. At the beginning of the study, it proved helpful to recruit interview participants among acquaintances of respondents in order to facilitate broader access to the field. This was not only a form of snowball sampling, as the case selection was also theory-driven. For example, respondents were asked to help recruit neighbours of theirs with the aim of ensuring possible contrasts within a residential area. Furthermore, it proved easier to approach men in particular through acquaintances rather than through organisations.

The starting point was neighbourhood projects implemented within the framework of community-based policy programs, following the paradigm of 'age activation' and health promotion. Two key projects served as valuable recruitment opportunities, both funded through the program 'Healthy Neighbourhood' (*Auf gesunde Nachbarschaft!*)[36] and featuring an explicit spatial focus on two contrasting districts: a neighbourhood initiative in the 8th district and a neighbourhood centre in the 15th district. These will be outlined in the following section.

The neighbourhood initiative 'Mindful 8th: Being Old and Living Well in Neighbourhoods and Communities' (*Achtsamer 8. Alt sein und gut leben in Nachbarschaften und Grätzeln*) was realised within the thematic cluster of 'Health promotion, health literacy and equal opportunities for older people in neighbourhoods: Caring communities'.[37] The project was initiated by the *Verein Sorgenetz*, an association active in various projects addressing the topic of care in the community (see Sorgenetz, 2019). One of the association's founding members served as an important facilitator in securing field access. The project 'Mindful 8th' aims to foster a caring community by

[36] For more information about the program, initiated, operated and funded by *Fonds Gesundes Österreich*, see FGOE, n.d.-a.
[37] Original in German: *Phase III Gesundheitsförderung, Gesundheitskompetenz und Chancengerechtigkeit älterer Menschen in Nachbarschaften (2018–2021): Caring Communities* (see FGOE, n.d.-b)

promoting social and cultural participation, particularly for groups like 'the elderly', people with dementia and their caregivers, through neighbourhood networking and inclusive initiatives.[38] It is located in the 8th district, an inner-city district characterised by a dense building structure with a high building quality and large dwelling units (see City of Vienna, 2018, p. 36; City of Vienna, 2019a, pp. 82–84). The 8th is generally a rather quiet residential district, centrally located, with important cultural landmarks and close to the historic centre of Vienna. The area is characterised by a low unemployment rate and a low level of poverty (City of Vienna, n.d.-e). The age structure is higher than the Viennese average (City of Vienna, n.d.-e; see also *Figure 14*).

The project 'Active Guides in Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus' (*Aktivlots:innen in Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus*) served as a flagship project focusing on the group of older people in the framework of the funding phase 'Healthy neighbourhoods for older adults and pregnant women/families with young children'.[39] It was initiated by the Vienna Social Services (*Wiener Sozialdienste*) and the Vienna Welfare Services (*Hilfswerk*), and located at the neighbourhood centre of the 15th district, which is operated by the *Hilfswerk*. The project was aimed primarily at older people who are affected by poverty, are subject to major social and economic constraints, and have few or no opportunities for social participation.[40] By the time of the empirical research, the project had already concluded. Nevertheless, it served as an entry point for establishing contact with the neighbourhood centre and involved seniors there. Neighbourhood centres are facilities run by the *Hilfswerk*, a non-profit social organisation, with locations in many districts of Vienna. The community work offered in these centres ranges from counselling and social support to events, courses and volunteering opportunities. Many of the actively involved volunteers are older adults. The manager of the neighbourhood centre in the 15th district also played a pivotal role in enabling my field access.

The neighbourhood centre in the 15th district was selected because its location contrasts with that of the community project 'Mindful 8th'. Contrary to the 8th district, the 15th

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[38] Details about this neighbourhood project were gathered primarily through an interview with one of its initiators (07EI).

[39] Original in German: *Leitprojekt für die Zielgruppe Ältere Menschen, Phase II Gesunde Nachbarschaften für Ältere und Schwangere/Familien mit Kleinkindern (2014–2018)* (see FGOE, n.d.-c).

[40] Information about this project was obtained from an expert interview (08EI) and the website of the *Fonds Gesundes Österreich* (FGOE, n.d.-d).

district is located beyond the *Gürtel,* a semi-circular major traffic thoroughfare and concentric element of Vienna's urban structure (for more details on Vienna's typology and urban fabric, see *Chapter 5*). Unlike the more affluent inner district 8, the 15th district has traditionally been a working-class area. Both areas are characterised by *Gründerzeit*[41] architecture, however, the 15th district is predominantly shaped by the type of 'tenement housing' (*Arbeiterzinshaus*), featuring more affordable construction methods and smaller dwelling units (City of Vienna, 2018, p. 36; City of Vienna, 2019a, pp. 82–84). In comparison to the 8th district, it has a younger population structure and is strongly characterised by international immigration – featuring a notable 'multi-cultural' atmosphere influenced by shops offering a broad range of Turkish, Balkan and Arab products. It also exhibits higher unemployment rates among third-country nationals (City of Vienna, n.d.-f). Historically regarded as a transit and lower-income district, ongoing urban renewal projects and enhanced infrastructure have sparked growing interest in the area.

The significance of ageing at home and the desire to remain in familiar surroundings emerged during the first phase of data collection, leading to 'ageing-in-place' becoming the empirical focus of the study. Accordingly, the primary selection criterion was older people living in Vienna in their accustomed housing conditions without the support of continuous 24-hour care services. The category of age was systematised in that the participants were in their post-professional phase and felt addressed with the attributions of seniors, pensioners, being old and/or aged. The goal was to encompass a broad spectrum of chronological (calendar) ages, ranging from early years of retirement to the later stages of the 'fourth age'. This was linked to an interest in the varied experiences associated with the transition from employment to retirement and the evolving organisation of the post-employment phase. The experience of retirement, along with the activities and responsibilities that develop during early and later stages of old age, is strongly interwoven with gender and partnership status, both representing important contrasting factors in data collection. The sampling also aimed to capture contrasts in socio-economic and educational status, migration biography and type of housing. While

[41] The Viennese *Gründerzeit* (founders' period) refers to a period of rapid urban development and architectural flourishing in Vienna between 1848 and 1914, characterised by the construction of grand, historicist-style buildings funded largely through private investment (City of Vienna, 2018, p. 32). This era, driven by economic growth and industrialisation, transformed the city's landscape with ornate residential and public structures, reflecting the prosperity and cultural ambitions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (City of Vienna, 2021).

differences between residential districts appeared less significant, more decisive factors included duration of residence, mobility patterns, relocation histories and access to secondary residences. These differences were examined through contrasts within single districts and neighbourhoods, aiming to explore spatial dynamics among individuals living in the same area.

Departing from the two sites of the neighbourhood project in districts 8 and 15, the initial field access was characterised by interviewing older persons who were involved as volunteers, demonstrating a rather high level of activity, social engagement and personal relationships. Nevertheless, the sampling across the first and second phases – partly shaped by recruitment through acquaintance networks – revealed notable contrasts in voluntary engagement, social participation, kin relations, mobility patterns and housing arrangements. Yet, despite this diversity, case selection tended to remain concentrated within specific 'communities' that were relatively homogeneous in terms of migration background and origin.

The third phase of data collection aimed to further diversify the sample in terms of migration biographies, socio-economic status, educational background and health condition. This was achieved by recruiting respondents through a pensioners' club and a day centre – both located in the 15th district but frequented by people from across the city. With interviewing participants in a pensioners' club and a day centre, the data collection of the third phase was guided by tackling the issue of socio-spatial separation of age groups and the questions of how age segregation plays out in space or manifests spatially. This was motivated by an interest in understanding why individuals engage with places associated with old age or, conversely, choose to avoid them. Accessing participants through the day centre was also motivated by the aim of introducing contrasts in terms of the use of formal care services. This, in turn, was linked to an interest in experiences of age-related bodily limitations and health restrictions, which was assumed to correlate with a reduced mobility radius and fewer social contacts.

The pensioners' clubs[42] are deeply embedded in Vienna's social infrastructure. They are operated by *Häuser zum Leben* ('Homes for Life'), Vienna's largest senior care provider,

[42] These accounts are derived from conducted expert interviews (11EI, 15EI, 17EI, 18EI) as well as from the official website presenting the Viennese pensioners' club (Häuser zum Leben, n.d.).

and funded by the respective district administrations (*Bezirksvorstehungen*). They are considered an important point of contact for city authorities to reach out to and engage with older people in Vienna, also functioning as a critical interface to identify care needs or precarious living conditions. They aim to address older people by offering a broad range of activities while undergoing a recent attempt to transform their traditional image as mere 'passive card-playing venues' into vibrant hubs promoting active lifestyles in later life. Their diverse offerings include art and culture programs, language courses, digital literacy, sports, fitness and outdoor pursuits. The range of activities is diverse, though programs vary across clubs. They might target specific groups such as older adults with limited financial means, at risk of social isolation or from non-German-speaking communities. One club, for instance, specifically addresses queer older people. The researched club in the 15th district especially targets older people with migration backgrounds, particularly former Turkish guest workers. Many of the participants there have limited German skills and/or low levels of education and income.

Day centres for seniors (*Tageszentren für Senior:innen*)[43] are facilities for older people, combining care and support with social contact and activities. In addition to individual care and therapy measures, they also offer social activity programs such as craft workshops, music and other social gatherings. The day centres are open during the day, usually from Monday to Friday, serving three meals daily and can be visited throughout the week or on individual days. Placement and funding are managed by the *Fonds Soziales Wien* (Vienna Social Fund), which evaluates care needs prior to assigning a place. The day centres thus serve older adults who live at home but require some level of care, while also supporting family members by making care responsibilities more manageable.

Figure 2 outlines how respondents were recruited throughout the three phases of data collection. As indicated in the table, in addition to the aforementioned approaches to the field, one respondent was reached through a call for participation distributed via relevant email lists. Another was recruited through the local office in the 15th district of the *Verein Lokale Agenda 21 Wien*, an organisation that promotes citizen participation in sustainable urban development by supporting local initiatives, fostering community engagement, and

[43] The information is based on conducted expert interviews (15EI, 16EI) and the official website of the *Fonds Soziales Wien* (FSW, 2020a).

facilitating projects to improve public spaces and neighbourhoods across Vienna (see LA21, 2025).

4.2.2. Data Analysis: Developing Integrated Theory

The data analysis employed a theory-oriented coding approach, aimed at integrated theory building by condensing interview statements and events into concepts, moving beyond mere description (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 201). Drawing on grounded theory, I followed an iterative process of *open coding* to identify initial concepts through paraphrasing and labelling data segments, *axial coding* to explore relationships between categories and subcategories, and *selective coding* to integrate these around a core category, refining a cohesive theory (see Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 190–223). To preserve the contextual richness of participants' personal stories, I integrated Riessman's (2008) narrative analysis, ensuring that coded concepts retained the biographical depth of individual stories (see also Duque, 2009). This hybrid approach balances grounded theory's systematic theorising across cases with the narrative coherence of personal accounts, avoiding a too-early fragmentation of the data.

Coding began within individual cases, emphasising narrative themes to maintain the integrity of personal stories. Consistent with grounded theory's principle of constant comparison, the analysis progressed from case-internal to cross-case comparisons, gradually integrating biographical narratives into a broader theoretical framework (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 217–218). Within the case-internal comparison, particular attention was paid to individuals' references to the past. This means, respondents' narrations were analysed in relation to self-concepts and practices of past times as recalled through memories. Additionally, personal images and expectations of ageing, along with self-perceptions, were examined in conjunction with their illustrations about concrete practices, such as daily routines (for a similar approach, see Denninger et al., 2014, p. 60). The cross-case analysis extended this by comparing emergent themes across respondents, situating individual accounts within broader social and spatial contexts to uncover shared patterns and variations in the experience of ageing.

The data analysis was processed with MAXQDA. I adopted the approach of Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr (2014, pp. 213–215), who advocate for incorporating a first level of abstraction beyond mere paraphrasing already in the process of open coding, thus

differing from Strauss and Corbin's tradition. Overall, the process of open coding was guided by the following questions:

- How are old age and the process of ageing experienced, and what associations are linked with them?
- How are old age and the process of ageing imagined? What are narratives and perceptions of old age, e.g., ideal forms of ageing, negative associations, etc.?
- What references to discursive images of ageing can be found in older people's narrations, in general and at the nexus between old age and urban development?
- What spatial references (spaces, places, scales, etc.) are made in relation to ageing, both explicitly as well as implicitly?

Figure 3 illustrates the process of open coding. It presents the code structure and initial concepts derived from open coding, including visual representations of connections and clustering among codes. From this process, two overarching concepts emerged: 'ageing as change' and 'urban change', which informed the development of three higher-level categories characterising their interconnections: 'individual-spatial configurations', 'social-spatial configurations' and 'spatio-temporal configurations'. *Figure 4* outlines these categories, reflecting the results of axial coding by analysing the interrelationships between concepts related to ageing and urban change. Previously coded segments, concepts and integrated subcategories were assigned to these categories, with segments recoded or discarded as needed. The categories' distinct yet interconnected dimensions are summarised with key dimensions and anchor examples, as illustrated in the table.

Biographical internalisation of space, initially derived as a subcategory under 'spatio-temporal configurations' (see *Figure 4*), developed as the core category, tackling "the central phenomenon of the study" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 424). It captures the entangled and mutually constitutive relationship between the temporality of ageing and the temporality of space. Hence, selective coding was carried out around this category, aiming to develop a theory that articulates the relationship between ageing and space as shaped by an inherent dual temporality. Inspired by Riessmann's (2008) narrative analysis, the process prioritised biographical coherence, ensuring that coded concepts preserved the contextual richness of participants' narrations – particularly with regard to their experiences of ageing and their perceptions of shifting urban landscapes. Concepts and categories were iteratively re-coded in relation to the core category ('biographical internalisation of space'), leading to the identification of two additional major categories:

embodied spatialities of old age and *spatialised othering*. These categories both reinforce the core category and independently encapsulate key dimensions of the ageing–space nexus, contributing to a layered, systematic theoretical framework. This three-stage process of theory construction is reflected in the structure of *Chapter 6,* where the findings of the analysis are presented.

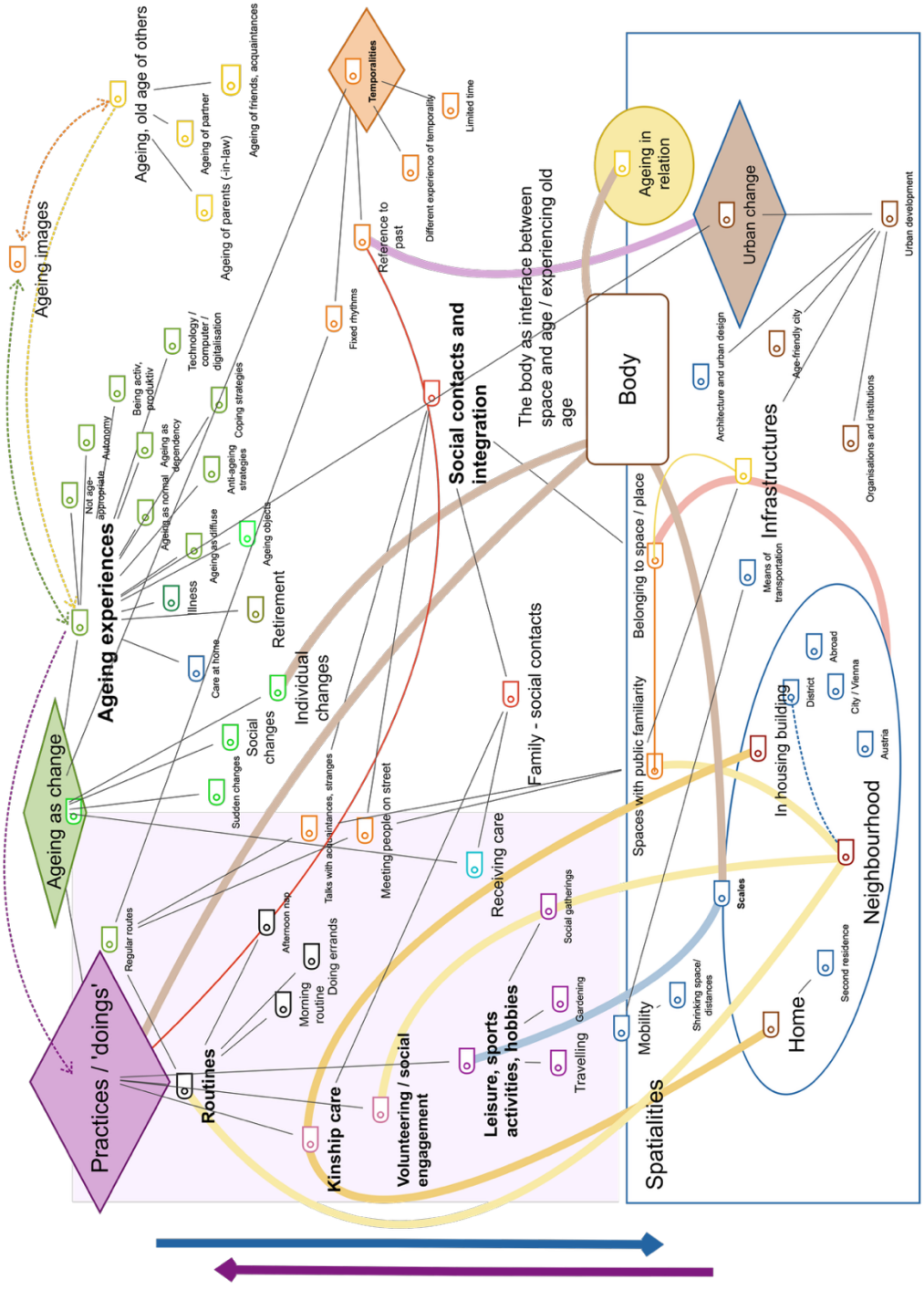

Figure 3: Code System Developed during Open Coding. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Figure 4: Categories Developed throughout Axial Coding. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Category	Individual-spatial configurations	Social-spatial configurations	Spacio-temporal configurations
	Changes in relation to one's own lifecourse in intersection with space: • Bodily changes (e.g., abilities and appearance) • Changes in social relationships (e.g., decreasing circle of friends, death of spouse, grandchildren growing up, etc.) • Change in socio-spatial activities, needs, preferences • Change of social roles and institutional affiliations, particularly transition from working life to retirement → Ageing is constituted in relation to oneself, through one's body in relation to space	*Changes in relation to 'others', i.e. the social context in intersection with space:* • External addressing – 'othering' • Comparisons with other age groups, age peers and others' ageing processes in the present and with reference to the past (e.g., the ageing of parents, etc.) • Age-related connotations of spaces: positioning within certain socio-spatial contexts → Ageing is constituted in relation to others, in and through specific socio-spatial contexts and settings	*Changes in the socio-material living environment, i.e. transformation of the socio-cultural and physical-material fabric:* • Changes in the social environment, e.g. residents in neighbourhoods • Urban planning and infrastructural changes • Urban transformations and entanglement with generational dimension → urbanisation • Biographical internalisation, i.e. personal histories are interwoven with places, extending into the present through everyday practices and shaped by intersecting temporalities → Ageing is constituted through the perception of transformations in the social and material environment
Anchor examples	"Well, like I said, it's just this slowing down of my usual energy, you know, how it is. I mean, my apartment isn't big, but back in the day, I could clean it […] in two hours […] mop, vacuum, everything. Now it takes me three. That's when I notice it myself; everything's just getting slower" (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 364-370) "Now, I just wish I had one [a friend] to do things with. (.) So I'm not stuck at home feeling so trapped. (..) It's such a shame. All our people have passed away, and the new ones	"Yeah, things have definitely changed. Like, that you can no longer walk so far. Yesterday, I was in [town anonymised] at my daughter's place, and we all went together to the neighbour's house you could walk uphill there. I couldn't do it on my own, so they gave me a little push from behind. And I walk best with poles, but of course I'm embarrassed. I never walk with poles, even though it'd be so much easier. But in the countryside. I'm not embarrassed. And there are so many people who walk with walking poles nowadays. (.) So	"these small shops and so on are missing. And so the small butcher's shop that used to be there. Or the little restaurant where you could go for a meal or the patisserie, none of that exists any more. So there are only larger restaurants, there's a Spar, there's a Billa, a Hofer *[supermarket chains]*. That's all great, but it's not what it used to be like, they knew you. If you forgot your wallet, they'd say, 'Give it to me next time'. This familiarity is missing" (Fritz Paschner, 20PI, Pos. 224-236) "I used to go there with the kids all the time.

	are all busy working. [...] Yeah. Yeah. (..) To be honest, getting older is only tough now because I'm alone. I'd just love to find a woman, a friend, to go to a café with again or stroll around the city. Because I can't go too far with this crutch anyway" (Elisabeth Zajc, 26PI, Pos. 175-189) "There are, well mostly young families with small kids around who I- I don't really see them because they've got totally different daily routines. First, I don't have a car anymore, and they all take the elevator straight to the garage, hop in their cars, and off they go. So, I don't even run into them in the staircase. Plus, they're working or driving to the kindergarten or whatever. Their daily rhythms are just completely different. We don't cross paths in the staircase" (Marina Neumann, 08PI, Pos. 96-102)	when I walk in the countryside, I walk with poles" (Dagmar Stetter, 01PI, Pos. 1092-1099) "And once, as I was travelling to the dance school, I was standing by the underground as it pulled in. And there was someone sitting in the seat for the old people. And he saw me standing outside. And he looked at me like that. And I immediately looked away and got in. Because that's when I realised he wanted to make room for me. And I looked away, got in. I kept showing him my back. [...] Then once again he.., I said, 'No no, I'm getting out anyway.' 'No', he said, he'll make room for me. And all the people around said, 'Why don't you sit down, sit down!'" *["Why does this bother you?"]* "Because you are old! You still just wanna be young" (Edit Weber, 05PI, Pos. 715-727) "a senior co-housing project. Something like that would totally appeal to me. But, well, I'm still too young for that now, of course […] Then it'd be a bit annoying. If I, I don't know, have to care for someone with dementia or something. Me, being the one who hasn't got dementia yet. And yeah, I suppose that wouldn't really work out so well. Like, I'm just saying, having someone with some kind of dementia issue in the shared living community" (Peter Dreyer, 06PI, Pos. 393-401)	Um with the stroller; but it was totally different back then. (.) Um. There was the Touring Club there before and now they've torn it down. […] well I don't like that. […] Every green space is getting built up, and then they keep talking about climate change. But it's just about building, building, building" (Edith Weber, 05WI, Pos. 15-23) "Isn't it lovely? And when you sit there, it's <u>really</u> quite cosy. I used to always sit there back when the kids were doing their A-levels. I'd wait for them there" (Isolde Richter, 03WI, Pos. 138-140)

Figure 4: Categories Developed throughout Axial Coding. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

4.3. Critical Reflections: Research Bias and Limitations

Over two-thirds of the interviewees were women. This overrepresentation aligns with the empirical reality of women making up a bigger proportion of the older population due to higher life expectancy (Kolland et al., 2022; Tews, 1993). As such, the overrepresentation is also reflected in their greater spatial participation, particularly in care-related infrastructure. Furthermore, women often comprise a larger share in community-based voluntary initiatives (Auth & Leitner, 2018, p. 2), which has also facilitated access to the field. However, recruiting men proved significantly more challenging beyond their smaller numerical presence. Despite deliberate efforts to include men, they were simply less willing to participate in interviews compared to women, who generally showed greater openness to discussing their experiences of growing older.

My interview request emphasised personal experiences and perspectives on ageing – topics often associated with vulnerability, loss of independence or decline and which carry gendered connotations that may discourage male participation. My own positionality as someone perceived as a woman may have further contributed to this gender imbalance, as the researcher's gender can influence participant recruitment. The gender imbalance extended to the follow-up go-along interviews, with men more likely to decline participation for a second appointment. However, ad-hoc conversations emerged particularly with men, for example, a lively exchange with café patrons during a male respondent's interview, partially offsetting the dominance of female ageing narratives in the dataset.

A gender-specific pattern was also evident in the expert interviews, where female-identified individuals predominate in fields related to ageing and late life. This applies not only to professionals from social institutions related to care and health, i.e. areas traditionally dominated by women, but also to networks in architecture and planning focused on age-friendly urban environments and housing for older adults. Additionally, I noted a similar tendency while teaching and in exchange with colleagues from other universities, where female students showed greater interest in ageing-related issues. Taken together, these observations suggest that ageing is a 'female topic' in academic research and urban development contexts. Hence, rather than a mere limitation, the overrepresentation of women can be analysed as a finding, and the gendered dimensions of ageing narratives were incorporated into the analysis and are reflected in the results.

Research suggests that migration experiences regain significance in later life, influencing daily coping and multi-locational residency (see e.g., Palmberger, 2022). Vienna's migrant population is projected to reach parity with native-born residents in approximately 30 years (Bauer, Speringer, Haydn, Prinz, & Remmel, 2023, p. 26). However, my sample underrepresents older adults with migration backgrounds, only partially reflecting this demographic shift. Although a revised field access strategy in the third data collection phase incorporated more diverse origins, most interviewees are autochthonous Austrians, though a significant number had internal migration biographies and, thus, did not grow up in Vienna. While the category of migration influenced sampling, it did not substantially contribute to theoretical insights. This represents a gap, as both existing research and the interviewees' biographies suggest that migration and mobility patterns inform what I term the 'biographical internalisation of space' (see *Chapter 6.3*). In this context, future research could focus on a more systematic exploration and elucidation of migration-related connections, offering a promising avenue for further studies.

Furthermore, the sample lacks diversity in family constellations: No interviewees were in same-sex relationships or childless, reflecting a heteronormative bias and, hence, potentially overlooking varied ageing narratives.

As illustrated in more detail in the following *Chapter 5*, the study does not systematically compare structural differences of residential neighbourhoods, such as the availability or lack of social and material infrastructure. While the relevance of public services and the design of places emerged in interviews and shaped the analysis, the sampling strategy was not primarily driven by site-based considerations, such as a multi-sited ethnographic case selection. Here, too, I see opportunities for further research providing a greater socio-spatial depth, for example, through a more systematic comparison of residential areas with a twofold contrast in terms of infrastructure and age structure. Such an approach could, for example, enrich the research landscape on 'naturally occurring retirement communities' (NORCs), which remains underexplored in German-speaking contexts.

The category of age, as an inherently relational and socially constructed identity, is vividly enacted in qualitative interview settings, where my role as a 'young researcher' is negotiated alongside the respondents' identities as 'the old'. The research participants often positioned me as their opposite or as a 'future subject' of ageing, stressing that their

current lived experiences remained inaccessible to me *by virtue of my youth*. Yet, what distinguishes age from other identity categories is its fundamental transience. My youth was not framed as a fixed identity, but as a temporary state – connected to their own experiences of ageing and, crucially, destined to end. As one participant remarked pointedly, "Well, you'll experience it too, everyone does" (Edit Weber, 05PI, Pos. 729), underscoring the inevitability of the ageing process and suggesting that 'their old identity' will eventually become mine.

This dynamic transforms the interview into a microcosm where age is performed and negotiated 'in situ' (Barron, 2021b, p. 669), revealing processes of othering based on age attributions. By systematically integrating this performative dimension into the analysis, the research gains a richer understanding of how old age is co-produced through everyday spatial practices, while simultaneously calling for critical reflection on my own role in this co-production.

Ethnographic go-along interviews are well-suited for linking biographical narrations with the spatial dimensions of everyday life; nevertheless, they always remain to some extent 'staged'. During guided spatial explorations, participants selectively reveal aspects of their lifeworlds, often highlighting sights deemed noteworthy for outsiders or pointing out 'flaws' to advocate for change (Boettner, 2007, p. 281). To address this selective bias, I used probing questions during walks, complemented by verbal commentary, spatial mappings and photographs, to capture more nuanced, multi-layered data for analysis. This selective curation extends to all interview settings. In the conducted interviews, forms of performed self-representation emerged, particularly when respondents described their daily routines. Many portrayed themselves as exceptionally active and busy, possibly to project an idealised self-image to me. This underscores the need for qualitative research to strive to understand the 'unsaid' and 'implicit' meanings while critically reflecting on the own positionality – for instance, how my younger age or my role as researcher shapes participants' narrations, influencing what they emphasise or omit.

Going *beyond* the literal and explicit content of statements – their intentional, expressed meaning – is central to this research. It involves reconstructing the implicit meaning structures that emerge from respondents' narrations, particularly the silences and patterns that reveal context-specific, embodied knowledge shaping social interaction. Following Denninger et al. (2014, p. 59), I acknowledge the impossibility of *fully* reconstructing

meaning structures, countering assumptions often found in the tradition of the sociology of knowledge.[44] Nevertheless, I argue that agents' 'orientational', embodied knowledge exists and can be accessed through context-sensitive approaches. This project's aim to understand how old age is spatially co-produced underscores the need to situate narrations within everyday practices. I therefore regard qualitative interviews – notwithstanding their limitations and artificial nature – as dynamic, reflexive spaces for exploring age dynamics and gaining insights into the lived experience of ageing. Both stationary and walking interviews are crucial for examining how older individuals' subjectivation is spatially negotiated, as implicit meanings are embedded in their situated practices.

4.4. Summing Up

The methodology of this research builds on work that conceptually combines ageing studies with approaches to everyday life and its geographies. With this, I have proposed to use spaces of everyday life as a methodological lens in order to explore the spatial experiences of old age. Such a research perspective offers a possibility for the analysis of the performative constitution of ageing subjects insofar as it can provide a way of analytically intertwining scales. It starts from the perspective of spatial experiences and practices of older people without losing sight of the socio-historical context in which they are embedded.

The research design follows a grounded theory methodology (see Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 190–223; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The first access into the field was therefore organised very open and explorative, guided by the overarching question of what role urban spaces play and what effects they have on the constitution of ageing subjects, and gradually became more definite. In concrete terms, this means that the entire empirical study was structured along several phases (three in total and an additional preliminary study phase), whereby the design and implementation of all research phases integratively built on one another, and the guiding research questions, sampling and subsequent methodological decisions for data collection and analysis have been continuously specified during the empirical investigation.

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[44] This applies in particular to the *Documentary Method* (Bohnsack, 2003; for an overview, see Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 277–314).

I conducted narrative-ethnographic interviews (Schütze, 1983; Spradley, 1979), problem-centred interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) and go-alongs (Kusenbach, 2003b) with old and very old people. Following a grounded theory methodology and in the sense of a "practice of weaving back and forth between data collection and analysis" (Strauss, 2017 [1990], p. 420), the selection of research participants was based on theoretical sampling and, at the beginning of the field research, was combined with snowball sampling. This means it was guided by the search for minimal and maximal contrasts with regard to theoretically relevant categories, until a theoretical saturation was gradually reached (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 182). Case selection was driven by the aim of achieving a heterogeneous sample of older individuals who are retired and 'age in place' in Vienna. This included people with a high level of activity and social engagement, such as those involved in voluntary work, caregiving or attending old age-specific leisure facilities (e.g., pensioners' clubs), as well as those with no involvement in such formal and/or institutionalised settings. These interviews were contrasted with individuals who appeared less active and socially integrated, including respondents with very limited social contacts and mobility, as well as those with care needs who utilise professional services. The sampling was also strongly driven by considering contrasts in socio-economic and educational status, gender, chronological age, migration background and type of housing. During the first phase of data collection, differences related to the district of residence were taken into account, with the focus shifting to variations within districts in the second and third phases.

The first interviews were organised very open and biographical, leading to more structured problem-centred interviews focusing on three thematic clusters: the individual home and housing situation, neighbourhood and social spaces, daily life, regular routines and practices. In addition to the sit-in interview, I set up a second appointment with the respondents from the first and second collection phases for a follow-up interview where I accompanied them on a typical regular walk outside their home (e.g., walking the dog, shopping, visiting the doctor, etc.). The ethnographic method of go-alongs (or walking interviews) combines some of the strengths of ethnographic observation and interviewing and allows for the exploration of environmental perspectives, everyday lived experiences, spatial practices and biographies at the intersection of the socio-material fabric (Kusenbach, 2003b). In the third collection phase, mental mapping techniques were used in the interviews with the respondents, some of whom had severe mobility impairments.

The conducted material with the older people was triangulated with expert interviews with professionals and staff in community centres, care facilities and from different organisations engaged in elder care and healthcare, housing cooperatives and the city administration. These interviews, in combination with strategic documents (e.g., policy programmes), allowed for gaining insights into programmatic frameworks, strategies and political agendas in Vienna and also for better contextualising the subjective narratives of the older persons interviewed. Furthermore, some of these actors also served as important 'door openers' to reach groups of older people. All in all, the empirical material consists of 35 qualitative interviews with older people including mappings and photo documentation from the go-along interviews, 14 expert interviews (some with on-site visits), recorded and non-recorded expert inputs, several memos of conducted interviews, (project) site visits, guided tours and participation in relevant events as well as selected policy documents, project descriptions and the like. *Figure 5* briefly sketches out the process of data collection. It is an extensive data corpus, whereby in the sense of a theoretical sampling, not all of the collected material was systematically analysed, but rather key interviews and documents, and sometimes only particular sections were selected for in-depth analysis (see further *Chapter 5*).

Qualitative study with older people	***Triangulation with:***
• 'Ageing in place' without 24-hour care service • Age: retirement & self-attribution • Contrasts in terms of activity, social integration, health, socio-structural characteristics, type of housing, place(s) of residence Phase 1: Narrative-ethnographic interviews (6) Phase 2: Problem-centred interviews + go-alongs (20) Phase 3: Problem-centred interviews + mental mappings (9)	Expert interviews, recorded and non-recorded expert inputs, (project) site visits, guided tours, memos of interviews and events, strategic documents (policy frameworks and programmes)

Figure 5: Overview of Data Collection. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

The data analysis used a theory-oriented coding approach, drawing on grounded theory to build an integrated theory by condensing interview data into concepts through iterative open, axial and selective coding, as developed by Corbin & Strauss (1990, 2008) and further extended and revised by Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr (2014, pp. 190–223). To maintain the richness of participants' narrations, elements of the narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) were integrated, ensuring biographical depth. This approach enabled the balance of systematic theorising across cases with narrative coherence, avoiding

premature data fragmentation. Overall, the core category of *biographical internalisation of space* with two subcategories *embodied spatialities of old age* and *spatialised othering* has discharged into a theory of the relationship between ageing and space based on an inherent dual temporality: A consistent interlinking of the temporal dimension of ageing, i.e. how people change over time and the temporal dimension of space, i.e. how places change over time offer new understandings what it means to age in place (see *Chapter 6*), culminating in a 'revisited' concept of ageing-in-place (see *Chapter 7*).

5. Mapping the Data: A Systematic Introduction to the Interviewees

The present chapter provides an overview of the empirical data gathered from qualitative research with older people. It aims at systematically presenting the entire material, which consists of 35 interviews (narrative-ethnographic, problem-centred and go-along interviews) with 26 persons. I organise the rich biographical material according to criteria developed during the field research, following the process of theoretical sampling and refined through preliminary analysis of the entire corpus. These dimensions for systematisation simultaneously serve as the foundation for selecting key interviews for further in-depth analysis, forming the basis of the subsequent chapter (*Chapter 6*).

This chapter also aims to provide an initial glimpse into participants' biographies. I introduce specific individuals in selected sections, chosen to highlight distinct experiences and contrasts within the group of research participants. Such an approach is designed to draw readers closer to individual cases, an effort extended further in *Chapter 6,* where I provide more detailed portrayals alongside the analysis. This culminates in *Chapter 7*, where the cases are dissolved and distilled into synthesised insights. Through this process, I seek to illuminate the methodological processing of qualitative research, navigating the interplay between individual cases, abstraction and condensation, while embracing the tension between unique biographical voices and generalised conclusions.

The chapter structures the cases according to socio-demographic categories, housing typologies and dwelling characteristics as well as dimensions of socio-spatial integration. The aim is to sketch out the biographical information and insights into the respondents' living conditions and to situate them within the spatial context of Vienna. To support this, information gained through the conducted expert interviews and from secondary data is incorporated. This includes (statistical) data on Vienna's housing market and urban infrastructure, as well as socio-demographic and socio-spatial characteristics of older adults living in Vienna.

Socio-Demographics

The sample includes 18 interviewees read as female and eight as male. All respondents are retired and aged between 63 and 92. Accordingly, the sample consists of people at different stages of their lifecourse and reflects both phases of later life: the 'third age' and

the ‘fourth age’ (Laslett, 1989). In a general sense, the gerontological distinction between ‘third age’ and ‘fourth age’ indicates two different periods of late life: The third age – or ‘young-old’ – marks the early phase of retirement which is linked to increased activity, autonomy and opportunities for personal development, while the fourth age – or ‘old-old’ – is characterised by health restrictions and vulnerability (see e.g., Kolland et al., 2022, pp. 15, 187). Such a contrast is important for my research interest, as it is assumed that the meaning of home and the needs and practices associated with it are perceived differently at different stages of life. Kolland et al. (2022, p. 187), for instance, argue that for the ‘young-old’ forms of housing are required that allow for activity, community and individual lifestyle organisation, while for the ‘old-old’ assisted living and care services become more relevant. Hence, the focus for the ‘young-old’ is rather on aspects of comfort, the ‘old-old’ are more concerned with adapting their homeplaces, safety and care (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 15).

There is no strict, formally valid distinction between these age cohort structuring in empirical ageing research – especially since the distinction is not only about chronological categories. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this chapter to provide a systematic overview of the material, the respondents are, in a first attempt, clustered into two groups based on years of life: younger than 80 years; 80 years and older (see *Figure 6*). This chronological division is informed by the data and aligns with most gerontological studies that use the age of 80 as a key marker. However, subsequently, this chronological categorisation was critically examined and contextualised qualitatively; for example, factors such as socio-economic status are central to the lived experiences of the ‘third age’ and the ‘fourth age’ (Müller et al., 2022, p. 51, ref. to Dannefer, 2003; see also van Dyk, 2020, p. 16).

The wide range of calendar age in my sample is also reflected in a considerable variation in the length of retirement – from less than five years to more than 30 years. In Austria, the current statutory retirement age differs for men and women. It is 65 for men and 60 for women, with ongoing reforms starting in 2024 to equalise the retirement age by 2033 (BMASGPK, 2024).[45] There are several specific regulations that allow retirement before the statutory retirement age, e.g., long insurance periods or physically very demanding work. There is also the option to retire earlier for individuals who cannot continue working

[45] Statistically, there is a gap to the ‘factual retirement age’, i.e. the average age at which individuals actually retire, which is currently around 62 for men and 60 for women (AK, 2025).

due to disability or long-term unemployment. Early retirement was the case for three of the interview participants: Harald Horvat (*#ID Lm*), Fritz Paschner (*#ID Vm*) and Beritan Çil (*#ID Wf*).

#ID		Age	Born in	Grown Up in	Citizenship incl. previous, if applicable	
Af	Dagmar Stetter	92	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Bf	Birgit Weiss	69	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Cf	Isolde Richter	86	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Df	Irina Huber	75	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Em	Hubert Weber	80	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Ff	Edit Weber	81	Lower Austria	Lower Austria	Austrian	
Gm	Peter Dreyer	69	Upper Austria	Upper Austria	Austrian	
Hf	Magdalena Winkler	65	Germany	Germany	Austrian	
If	Marina Neumann	69	Germany	Germany	Austrian	German
Jf	Adele Wimmer	66	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Kf	Tabea Horvat	66	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Lm	Harald Horvat	68	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Mm	Vinzent Wallner	80	Lower Austria	Lower Austria & Vienna	Austrian	
Nm	Otto Meier	80	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
Of	Jutta Ludwig	69	Lower Austria	Lower Austria & Vienna	Austrian	
Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	80	Lower Austria	Lower Austria	Austrian	
Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	83	Vienna	Vienna & Lower Austria	Austrian	
Rf	Lucija Milošević	75	Yugoslavia	Yugoslavia	Croatian	
Sm	Omar Ertürk	83	Turkey	Turkey	Austrian	Turkish
Tf	Gerda Obermüller	81	Lower Austria	Lower Austria	Austrian	
Uf	Franziska Kranz	78	Burgenland	Burgenland	Austrian	
Vm	Fritz Paschner	63	Vienna	Lower Austria & Vienna	Austrian	
Wf	Beritan Çil	72	Turkey	Turkey	Austrian	Turkish
Zf	Ivana Rogić	86	Yugoslavia	Yugoslavia & Vienna	Austrian	Yugoslavian
AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	93	Vienna	Vienna	Austrian	
BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	88	Burgenland	Burgenland	Austrian	

Legend
female
male
< 80 years
≥ 80 years
Vienna
Austria
Abroad

Figure 6: Respondents' Chronological Age and Migration Pattern. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Except for one respondent, all participants hold Austrian citizenship and have lived in Vienna for many years (some with interruptions), although about half were not born in the city. Lucija Milošević (*#ID Rf*), Croatian, is the only respondent who migrated to Vienna after retirement. She moved from Zagreb to Vienna in 2014, after the death of her husband, to be closer to her children living in Austria. All others were not born in Vienna, moved there in their early adulthood or even childhood, although some show short interruptions in living in Vienna. Marina Neumann (*#ID If*), for instance, with retirement, moved for a few years to the countryside, and Irina Huber (*#ID Df*) used her start of retirement to spend a considerable amount of time abroad in Australia with her ex-partner. A few respondents have transnational migration histories (from Turkey, Germany and the Balkan states), including one with refugee experience: Ivana Rogić (*#ID Zf*). *Figure 6* gives an overview of the respondents' migration biographies.

In terms of income and educational background (see *Figure 7*), the sample exhibits relatively strong contrasts. Respondents show a wide range in respect of their monthly pensions: Their incomes (according to their own information)[46] are between less than 1,000 euros and more than 3,500 euros net per month.[47] Some have to get by on a very low pension and receive what is known as supplementary allowance (*Ausgleichszulage*).[48] Even though several respondents show a very low monthly income, precarious housing and living conditions appear to be key themes only in two interviews: with Beritan Çil (*#ID Wf*) and Elisabeth Zajc (*#ID BBf*). Similarly to the monthly net income, the sample shows a variation regarding the highest level of education,[49] which ranges between no school graduation (illiterate) and a university doctoral degree.

As *Figure 8* indicates, many of the respondents live alone, namely about two-thirds. Of these, most are widowed, some are divorced and are neither in a new partnership. Exceptions to this are two women, Birgit Weiss (*#ID Bf*) and Irina Huber (*#ID Df*), and one male, Franz Oberndorfer (*#ID Qm*), who state that they are in a partnership but live alone. Another exception is Ivana Rogić (*#ID Zf*), who is married but has been living alone for two years now because her husband had to move into a nursing home due to increased need for care. Lucija Milošević (*#ID Rf*), who moved from Zagreb to Vienna eight years ago, lives with her son. Beritan Çil (*#ID Wf*) also reports that her son lives with her from time to time because he needs her support due to health problems. The other

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[46] One person, Otto Meier (*#ID Nm*) refused to disclose his monthly income. For some others, the question was rather difficult to answer, clearly felt overwhelmed. Hence, some did not know their exact monthly net income, especially in cases where financial arrangements were managed by their children.

[47] At the time of the interviews, the average monthly pension without supplements and allowances, gross (before deduction of health insurance contributions and taxes), paid 14 times per year, was for men in 2022 ~€1,900, in 2023 ~€2,020; for women in 2022 ~€1,170, in 2023 ~€1250 (BMASGPK, 2025).

[48] In 2022, the threshold for the pension supplement (*Ausgleichszulage*) was ~€1,030 for single persons and ~€1,630 for married couples or registered partnerships (SV, 2022). In 2023, the threshold was ~€1,110 for single persons and ~€1,750 for married couples or registered partnerships (SV, 2023).

[49] The Austrian education system is divided into the following levels: Primary Education (*Volksschule*, grades 1 to 4), Lower Secondary Education (*Sekundarstufe I*, grades 5 to 8), Upper Secondary Education (*Sekundarstufe II*, grades 9 to 13), Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education (*Kollegs*) and Tertiary Education (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate Degree). Upper secondary education includes different types of schools and certificates. A distinction is made here between A-levels (*Matura*) as the highest level of education completed (grades 9 to 12/13) and upper secondary education without *Matura*, which comprises an Apprenticeship Certificate or a Vocational Mid-Level diploma (usually grades 9 to 11).

third of respondents live with their spouses. None live with friends or in other rather 'non-traditional' constellations, such as in communal living arrangements.

#ID		Highest level of education	Monthly income personal	Montly income household, if applicable
Af	Dagmar Stetter	University Degree (Doctorate)	1800 - 2500	
Bf	Birgit Weiss	Vocational Mid-Level diploma	1200 - 1800	
Cf	Isolde Richter	A-levels ('Matura')	1800 - 2500	
Df	Irina Huber	Apprenticeship	1200 - 1800	
Em	Hubert Weber	A-levels ('Matura')	1200 - 1800	3200
Ff	Edit Weber	Apprenticeship	1200 - 1800	3200
Gm	Peter Dreyer	University Degree	2500 - 3500	4200
Hf	Magdalena Winkler	University Degree	1200 - 1800	
If	Marina Neumann	University Degree (Doctorate)	2500 - 3500	
Jf	Adele Wimmer	Apprenticeship	less than 1200	
Kf	Tabea Horvat	A-levels ('Matura')	1200 - 1800	3400
Lm	Harald Horvat	Vocational Mid-Level diploma	1200 - 1800	3400
Mm	Vinzent Wallner	University Degree	more than 3500	5000
Nm	Otto Meier	Apprenticeship	n/a	
Of	Jutta Ludwig	Vocational Mid-Level diploma	1200 - 1800	
Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	Lower Secondary Education	1200 - 1800	
Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	Apprenticeship	2500 - 3500	
Rf	Lucija Milošević	University Degree	less than 1200	n/a
Sm	Omar Ertürk	Lower Secondary Education	less than 1200	
Tf	Gerda Obermüller	Lower Secondary Education	1200 - 1800	
Uf	Franziska Kranz	Apprenticeship	1800 - 2500	
Vm	Fritz Paschner	Apprenticeship	more than 3500	5700
Wf	Beritan Çil	No School Education	less than 1200	
Zf	Ivana Rogić	Lower Secondary Education	less than 1200	
AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	University Degree	2500 - 3500	
BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	n/a	less than 1200	

Legend
female
male
max. Primary Education
Lower Secondary Education
Upper Secondary Education without 'Matura'
A-levels ('Matura')
University
less than 1200
1200 - 1800
1800 - 2500
2500 - 3500
more than 3500

Figure 7: Respondents' Highest Level of Education and Monthly Net Income. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

In addition to the general over-representation of single people in my sample, it is important to add that it is predominantly single women. This is in line with the living conditions of many older women in Vienna. A 2018 study on the living situations of older people in Austria shows that the proportion of people living alone increases with age and ultimately accounts for 57% of the over-80s, with older women living alone twice as often as older men (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 105). The sharp increase in single-person households in old age is mainly due to the increase in widowhood, which predominantly affects women due to longer life expectancy (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 105). In addition to that, the increased proportion of single households in old age can also be seen as an expression of a rising divorce rate. A growing number of people are ending long-term relationships also in later stages of their lives (Brown & Lin, 2012). In this regard, the sample reflects general trends towards a 'singularisation' and 'feminisation' of ageing, as part of the structural change of old age identified already in the early 1990s (Tews, 1993; see also van Dyk, 2020, pp. 25–26; Kolland et al., 2022, pp. 101–103).

#ID		Marital status	Houshold and living situation
Af	Dagmar Stetter	widowed	living alone
Bf	Birgit Weiss	divorced, in partnership	living alone
Cf	Isolde Richter	widowed	living alone
Df	Irina Huber	divorced, in partnership	living alone
Em	Hubert Weber	married	living with partner
Ff	Edit Weber	married	living with partner
Gm	Peter Dreyer	married	living with partner
Hf	Magdalena Winkler	divorced	living alone
If	Marina Neumann	widowed	living alone
Jf	Adele Wimmer	widowed	living alone
Kf	Tabea Horvat	married	living with partner
Lm	Harald Horvat	married	living with partner
Mm	Vinzent Wallner	married	living with partner
Nm	Otto Meier	widowed	living alone
Of	Jutta Ludwig	divorced	living alone
Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	divorced	living alone
Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	divorced, in partnership	living alone
Rf	Lucija Milošević	widowed	living with son
Sm	Omar Ertürk	widowed	living alone
Tf	Gerda Obermüller	widowed	living alone
Uf	Franziska Kranz	widowed	living alone
Vm	Fritz Paschner	married	living with partner
Wf	Beritan Çil	divorced	living alone, occasionally with son
Zf	Ivana Rogić	married	living alone, partner in nursing home
AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	widowed	living alone
BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	widowed, separated	living alone

Legend
female
male
single
in partnership
alone
family member

Figure 8: Respondents' Material Status and Household Size. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Housing Conditions and Socio-spatial Integration

What all respondents have in common is that they 'age in place', meaning they live in their accustomed housing conditions, thus 'grow old' in their familiar living environment, even if their residential biographies are not all equally continuous. As noted earlier, some respondents exhibit relocation patterns in later life. For example, Lucija Milošević's (*#ID Rf*) case deviates from the idealised notion of ageing-in-place. She left her hometown of Zagreb in her mid-60s to move to Vienna, primarily to be closer to her children, who are all settled there. Nevertheless, examining the extensive literature on ageing-in-place, it becomes clear that there is no universal definition. Ageing-in-place does not solely refer to long-term residence in one location. Many studies particularly emphasise the importance of the social environment and community. There are also studies that characterise assisted living as a form of ageing-in-place (though this tends to be the exception) (for an overview, see e.g., Wiles & Coleman, 2024, p. 184).

A key defining aspect mostly (though not uniformly) applied and which this study adopts, is that individuals "remain in their own homes without having to move to a congregate living environment with a range of support and care services (e.g., assisted living, extra

care housing, long-term care facility)" (Oswald et al., 2024, p. 38, ref. to Pani-Harreman, Bours, Zander, Kempen, & Van Duren, 2021). Hence, as I approach it, older adults age in place, when remaining in their residential environments, avoiding relocation to institutional care facilities (Cutchin & Rowles, 2024b, p. 4). Furthermore, at the time of the interview, none of the interviewees were in the process of moving or seriously considering moving into a retirement or nursing home,[50] or other assisted living arrangements. Likewise, neither of the respondents lives in any other forms of old age-related housing, such as alternative housing projects specifically designed for older people, like 'senior co-housing', accommodations with a focus on intergenerational living or similar.

None of the interviewees receive 24-hour professional care or full-time care from relatives or other informal care providers. However, some do use forms of professional care and/or are dependent to varying degrees on the care and support from family or professional domestic help. Three respondents, Ivana Rogić (*#ID Zf*), Cecilia Lorenz (*#ID AAf*) and Elisabeth Zajc (*#ID BBf*), regularly, between two and five times a week, visit a day centre and additionally receive mobile care services, where a formal care worker comes to their home up to twice a day. They further get 'meals on wheels' and report that in addition, they receive support from relatives, mostly their children. Two of the respondents, Isolde Richter (*#ID Cf*) and Adele Wimmer (*#ID Jf*) experienced a phase in old age when they were in need of mobile care services but returned to their former 'autonomy' without being dependent on professional care. Hence, the interviewees differ in their care needs, showing contrasts in the nuances of (professional) care dependency (see *Figure 9*), which represents a central aspect with respect to the sampling strategy.

A key focus for the selection of cases was, furthermore, to capture contrasts in socio-spatial integration, particularly in terms of neighbourhood involvement, family ties and

[50] In Austria, a distinction is made between retirement homes (*Altenheim*) and nursing homes (*Pflegeheim*) based on the level of care required (Federal Chancellery, 2023). In Vienna, the *Fonds Soziales Wien* (FSW) regulates the allocation, assignment and financial processing of care places. In this context, the year of 2012 marks a major change in strategic direction. Unlike before, moves to care facilities should only happen when living at home is no longer feasible (FSW, 2020b; 18EI). This emphasis on care and support services, moving away from institutional living towards mobile care services, aligns with the broader policy trend of aging-in-place. To qualify for a place in a facility, the FSW assesses care needs. A place in a retirement home is allocated starting from care level 2 (with individual exceptions, such as for 'social indications' like social isolation), while a nursing home place is assigned starting from at least care level 3.

other social contexts. As elaborated in greater detail in *Chapter 4.2*, the sample consists of individuals exhibiting varying degrees of volunteering and social engagement, participation in 'curated' old age-specific activity spaces (such as attending a pensioners' club or choosing not to participate in such formats) and the use of care-related infrastructure, such as regularly visiting a day centre.

#ID		Formal care services		Old age-specific activity space	Volunteering
Af	Dagmar Stetter	no		no	yes
Bf	Birgit Weiss	no		no	no
Cf	Isolde Richter	no	*	no	no
Df	Irina Huber	no		no	yes
Em	Hubert Weber	no		no	yes
Ff	Edit Weber	no		no	no
Gm	Peter Dreyer	no		no	no
Hf	Magdalena Winkler	no		no	no
If	Marina Neumann	no		no	no
Jf	Adele Wimmer	no	*	yes	yes
Kf	Tabea Horvat	no		no	yes
Lm	Harald Horvat	no		no	no
Mm	Vinzent Wallner	no		no	yes
Nm	Otto Meier	no		no	no
Of	Jutta Ludwig	no		no	yes
Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	no		yes	yes
Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	no		no	no
Rf	Lucija Milošević	no		no	no
Sm	Omar Ertürk	no		yes	no
Tf	Gerda Obermüller	no		yes	no
Uf	Franziska Kranz	no		yes	no
Vm	Fritz Paschner	no		yes	yes
Wf	Beritan Çil	no		yes	no
Zf	Ivana Rogić	yes	mobile care, day centre visit		no
AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	yes	mobile care, day centre visit		no
BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	yes	mobile care, day centre visit		no

Legend
female
male
use of care service
no formal care service
use of age-related activity space
no participation
volunteering activites
no volunteering

Figure 9: Respondents' Use of Formal Care Services, Old Age-Specific Activity Spaces and Volunteering Engagement. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Figure 9 provides a corresponding overview. The column 'formal care services' encompasses professional care, such as mobile care services (e.g., visiting nurses) or day centre visits, excluding receiving kin care and other forms of 'informal' support, such as from neighbours. Two respondents, marked with an asterisk (*) in the table, previously received temporary mobile care but no longer do due to recovery. The column referring to 'old age-specific activity spaces' captures participation in spaces formally dedicated to 'old age' or 'seniors', primarily pensioners' clubs. Indeed, this categorisation is simplified, as many respondents engage in activities popular among older adults, which are not exclusively senior-targeted but still attract older people as a key group (e.g., activities in neighbourhood centres). Furthermore, as indicated in the table, day centres are counted as both receiving formal care (as official care institutions requiring a formal care level) and old age-specific activity spaces for their social engagement role. The

category of volunteering reflects forms of official volunteering activities, such as church involvement, tutoring school children at neighbourhood centres, or participating in emergency services (e.g., volunteer rescue service). It, however, does not grasp rather informal activities, such as caring for grandchildren or assisting neighbours with daily errands.

What becomes clear is that the attempt to categorise the dimension of care, social participation and volunteer engagement remains simplified. Hence, adequately understanding the complexities of socio-spatial integration requires a qualitative exploration of interview narratives. Such finer nuances and distinctions are elaborated in *Chapter 4.2*, which details the sampling process and *Chapter 6*, which presents the findings on older people's dwelling experiences based on the in-depth empirical analysis. Nevertheless, the table can provide an overview of notable differences in respondents' involvement in formalised social settings and reliance on professional care services, which both served as grounding sampling categories.

All interviewees 'age in place', albeit their housing situation differs in several respects. In addition to the above-mentioned category of household size, the housing situation of the respondents differs in terms of the type of legal relationship, e.g. ownership or tenancy (*see Figure 10)*. Almost half of the interviewed persons live in property or property that they have already legally passed on to their children or grandchildren.[51] This is indicated in the table (*Figure 10*) as 'family home ownership'. It is included in the category of home ownership because based on the interview narrations, it appears to be more akin to ownership than to tenancy. Only two respondents live in a regular privately rented flat. A large proportion of people live in social housing. This high number is not surprising, as Vienna has a comparatively large proportion of communal housing, i.e. city-owned or subsidised and regulated. The share of social housing is around 43% of the total housing stock in Vienna, with municipal housing (*Gemeindewohnung*) and limited-profit

[51] No further questions were asked about the exact legal and financial arrangements.

housing[52] (*Genossenschaftswohnung*) each making up about half of the stock.[53] The group of respondents cover both types of social housing: five live in limited-profit housing, seven in municipal housing.

The respondents' homes vary in size, condition and facilities. With the exception of Vinzent Wallner (*#ID Mm*) who lives with his wife in a terraced house, all have flats with or without an outdoor living space, i.e. balcony, garden or terrace (although the quality of this feature varies greatly, ranging from a 25m2 roof terrace to a very narrow balcony). Furthermore, when it comes to quality of living, the availability of a second homeplace is also a decisive factor: More than half of the interviewed persons own or have access to a second residence, such as a house in the Austrian countryside or abroad, or to an allotment garden in Vienna. In most cases, the second residence is an inheritance, e.g., it is their parental home in which childhood was spent. In the case of Gerda Obermüller (*#ID Tf*), it is a self-built single-family house in the countryside that has never been fully occupied but is run as a permanent second household alongside her apartment in Vienna. Many of the respondents own their second residence or allotment garden. In some cases, however, it has already been legally transferred to their children or other relatives, but they still use it regularly by themselves. Accordingly, it is not differentiated here in terms of ownership but rather about access.[54] For example, Adele Wimmer (*#ID Jf*) has access to an allotment garden that she does not own, but which she can use in return for maintenance. Furthermore, the category of second homeplace says nothing about the specific use. Some respondents use a second house in the countryside or abroad (as is the case with the two respondents who grew up in Turkey) to spend several weeks there every summer. In other

[52] Limited-profit housing associations (LPHAs) in Vienna are organisations that build, manage and rent housing under strict regulations to prioritise affordable and inter-generational housing provision over profit. They "are one of the core actors in today's social housing construction", regulated by the national Limited-Profit Housing Act (since 1978) and "can either be organised as cooperatives, owned by its members or as limited liability corporations" (Friesenecker & Litschauer, 2021, p. 71).

[53] In Vienna, social housing refers to two housing sectors: the municipal housing stock, owned and administered by the City of Vienna, and the limited-profit housing stock administered and owned by limited-profit housing associations. Both sectors are not priced by the market and primarily targeted at low and middle-income households (Kadi & Lilius, 2022, p. 5). In 2020, social housing accounted for some 43.3% of all units, with 21.9% municipal housing, 21.4% limited-profit housing (Kadi & Lilius, 2022, p. 8). After social housing, the private rental sector is the second largest sector in Vienna, accounting for about 32.4% (Kadi & Lilius, 2022, p. 8). Homeownership, mainly in the form of flats rather than single-family houses, accounts for about 20.4% (Kadi & Lilius, 2022, p. 8). The proportion of older people who own their home is slightly higher, but renting still predominates in this group (unlike in more rural areas where people are more likely to have ownership) (see Kolland et al., 2022, p. 104).

[54] In some cases, this was also not fully made clear in the interviews.

cases, the second residence is only used for weekend stays. Likewise, the allotment garden in Vienna can serve both as a permanent summer residence as well as for simply spending half a day there. It is important to note that not all respondents view their second homeplace in an entirely positive light. Some explicitly perceive the maintenance more and more as a burden, such as Franz Oberndorfer (*#ID Qm*) and Gerda Obermüller (*#ID Tf*), while others show a more ambivalent attitude between benefit and hassle, such as Edit Weber (*#ID Ff*), Eleonore Rubinov (*#ID Pf*) and the couple Horvat (*#ID Kf* and *#ID Lm*). For a more in-depth analysis, therefore, a qualitative scrutiny is required. For example, it makes a difference whether the summer house in the countryside is already maintained by the children and they themselves can enjoy the privileges of the second home with little responsibility. However, this, in turn, can mean giving up decision-making power.

Another important aspect in relation to the housing situation, and what *Figure 10* indicates, is the duration of residence. The respondents differ in terms of how long they have been living in their current place of residence. This means that the sample ranges from having lived in the current place since childhood to having moved there three years ago. Yet, the majority of the interviewed persons have lived in the same home for several decades. More than two-thirds of the respondents have lived there for more than 30 years, including seven people who have lived there for more than 50 years, and two even grew up in the place where they live now. This means many of them have been living in the same home since their early/mid-adulthood. Their living circumstances might have changed over the years, with having children, or losing a partner, or children moving out, but these have not constituted a reason to relocate. However, not all of the interviewees show this kind of continuity in their housing biographies and four also did relocate in later life (which in this case means that they were already in their retirement years when moving): Irina Huber (*#ID Df*, within Vienna due to separation), Marina Neumann (*#ID If,* from Styria in the countryside back to Vienna due to illness and death of her husband), Lucija Milošević (*#ID Rf*, from Zagreb to Vienna because of the death of her husband and to be close to her children) and Beritan Çil (*#ID Wf*, within Vienna, due to poor living conditions).

#ID		Houshold and living situation	Duration of residence	Apartment typ & size	Outdoor living space	Second homeplace
Af	Dagmar Stetter	living alone	more than 50 years	Family home ownership	100m2	yes	no
Bf	Birgit Weiss	living alone	30-50 years	municipal housing	80m2	no	no
Cf	Isolde Richter	living alone	30-50 years	privat rent	110m2	yes	yes
Df	Irina Huber	living alone	5-15 years	limited-profit housing	35m2	no	no
Em	Hubert Weber	living with partner	grown up	home ownership	70m2	yes	yes
Ff	Edit Weber	living with partner	more than 50 years	home ownership	70m2	yes	yes
Gm	Peter Dreyer	living with partner	30-50 years	municipal housing	72m2	no	yes
Hf	Magdalena Winkler	living alone	15-30 years	home ownership	107m2	yes	no
If	Marina Neumann	living alone	less than five years	home ownership	75m2	yes	no
Jf	Adele Wimmer	living alone	30-50 years	limited-profit housing	70m2	no	yes
Kf	Tabea Horvat	living with partner	30-50 years	home ownership	84m2	yes	yes
Lm	Harald Horvat	living with partner	30-50 years	home ownership	84m2	yes	yes
Mm	Vinzent Wallner	living with partner	30-50 years	home ownership	200m2	yes	no
Nm	Otto Meier	living alone	more than 50 years	Family home ownership	80m2	yes	yes
Of	Jutta Ludwig	living alone	5-15 years	limited-profit housing	60m2	yes	no
Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	living alone	30-50 years	municipal housing	54m2	yes	yes
Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	living alone	15-30 years	home ownership	40m2	yes	yes
Rf	Lucija Milošević	living with son	5-15 years	home ownership	50m2	yes	no
Sm	Omar Ertürk	living alone	15-30 years	municipal housing	47m2	yes	yes
Tf	Gerda Obermüller	living alone	more than 50 years	limited-profit housing	57m2	no	yes
Uf	Franziska Kranz	living alone	more than 50 years	municipal housing	80m2	no	no
Vm	Fritz Paschner	living with partner	grown up	privat rent	84m2	yes	yes
Wf	Beritan Çil	living alone, occasionally with son	5-15 years	municipal housing	50m2	no	yes
Zf	Ivana Rogić	living alone, partner nursing home	more than 50 years	home ownership	62m2	no	no
AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	living alone	more than 50 years	limited-profit housing	79m2	yes	yes
BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	living alone	30-50 years	municipal housing	60m2	no	no

Legend
female
male
living alone
co-habitation
less than five years
5-15 years
15-30 years
30-50 years
more than 50 years
grown up
home ownership
social housing
private rent
access to
no access to

Figure 10: Respondents' Living Situation and Housing Conditions. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Place of Residence

Vienna, as the empirical site of this study, allows for exploring the dynamic processes of urbanisation and ageing population, both considered as the two main developments shaping contemporary everyday life in the 21st century (see e.g., Moulaert & Wanka, 2019, p. 106). Vienna holds a unique and dominant position within Austria: It is both a

city and a regional government in a federal country that grants its nine federal provinces (*Bundesländer*) a relatively high degree of autonomy and resources (Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021, p. 11). At the same time, with a population of more than two million inhabitants, far surpassing other cities in the country, Vienna can be considered Austria's urban centre. Vienna is part of the World Health Organisation's *Age-friendly Cities and Communities* network (WHO, n.d.-a) and has already, prior to its formal inclusion, demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing the challenges of the population's growing life expectancy through diverse policy and planning programmes targeting old age-related urban development.

The interviewed persons and their dwelling situation differ in terms of their residential district (see *Figure 11*). With a few exceptions, the interviewed people live in areas characterised by the *Gründerzeit*[55] (see *Figure 12*) and densely built neighbourhoods (see *Figure 13*). Although *Gründerzeit* structures dominate Vienna's urban fabric, all districts contain residential buildings from the interwar and post-1945 periods, varying in standard and scale. Many of the respondents live in *Gründerzeit* neighbourhoods, albeit not necessarily in *Gründerzeit* houses, but in buildings from the second half of the 20th century – partly in social housing, partly in owner-occupied flats (see *Figure 10*).

On a general note, Vienna's urban fabric is shaped by a historically concentric development pattern, in which a relatively strong degree of centrality has been gradually complemented by more polycentric and networked dynamics (Giffinger & Suitner, 2015; Hatz & Weinhold, 2009). As *Figure 11* illustrates, at the centre is the 1st district (*Innere Stadt*), the medieval core that continues to function as the city's symbolic and functional heart. Encircling this district is the Vienna Ring Road (*Ringstraße*), a monumental ring boulevard constructed in the 19th century in place of the former city walls, marking the transition from the historic core to the *Gründerzeit*-era expansion areas. A second concentric element is the *Gürtel*, a semi-circular major traffic thoroughfare aligned with the former second fortification belt and the Danube Canal to the north-east. The *Gürtel* runs along the western edge of the 3rd district and continues in a U-shape along the outer borders of districts 4 to 9. Another central structuring line is the Danube, to the northeast of which lie the 21st and 22nd districts.

[55] The *Gründerzeit*-era buildings in Vienna were constructed between 1848 and 1914 as an investment model that financed large-scale building projects with private capital (City of Vienna, 2018, p. 32).

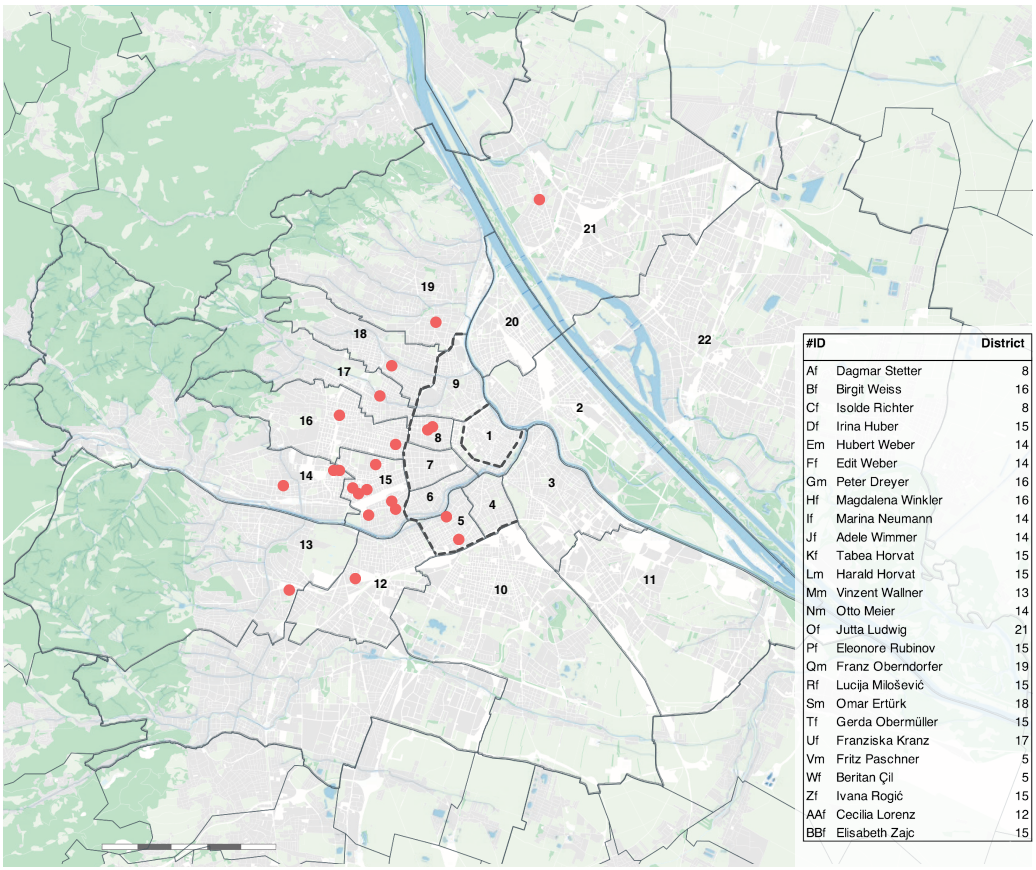

Figure 11: Respondents' Places of Residence. Source Maps: City of Vienna, 2015, pp. 10, 11, 15, adaptation with permission. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Between the *Ringstraße* and the *Gürtel* lie districts 3 to 9, with the 2nd district as well as the 20th district located across the Danube Canal and bordered by the Danube. These inner districts are characterised by a compact, high-density urban fabric predominantly composed of *Gründerzeit*-era buildings. The quality and typology of this building stock follow almost a linear gradient. Areas closer to the *Ringstraße* are dominated by higher-standard 'bourgeois housing' (*bürgerliches Zinshaus*), including representative apartment blocks and palaces (City of Vienna, 2018, p. 36; City of Vienna, 2019a, pp. 82–84). Closer to the *Gürtel*, the building stock is increasingly dominated by 'tenement housing' (*Arbeiterzinshaus*), characterised by smaller flats and more modest construction quality (City of Vienna, 2018, p. 36; City of Vienna, 2019a, pp. 82–84). The 5th district is an exception. It does not border the *Ringstraße* and is predominantly composed of dense tenement structures. In the 2nd and 20th districts, the urban fabric near the Danube consists of a mix of lower-density tenement housing and former industrial areas, many of which are currently undergoing redevelopment.

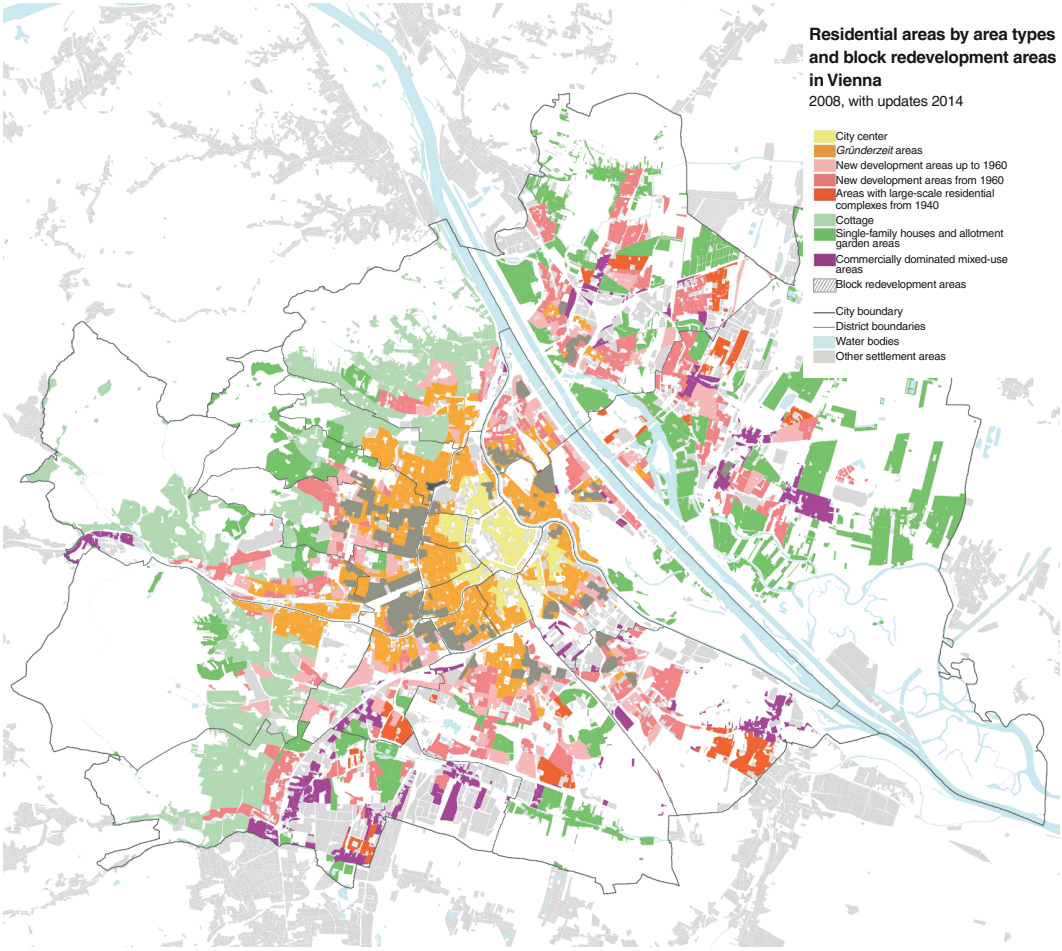

Figure 12: Building Typology of Vienna, 2008, 2014. Source: City of Vienna, 2015, pp. 44–45, adaptation with permission, Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Beyond the *Gürtel* lie districts 10 to 19, which exhibit decreasing building density and greater variation in housing typologies, reflecting a shift towards a more suburban residential character. Areas directly adjacent to the *Gürtel* continue the *Gründerzeit* pattern with high-density tenement housing. Further outward, the building stock transitions into lower-density multi-family housing, giving way to urban villas and single-family homes. The 13th, 17th, 18th and 19th districts are characterised by late *Gründerzeit* villas, typically three-storey buildings on spacious plots with low building and population densities (City of Vienna, 2018, p. 36). These are interspersed with detached houses, terraced housing and villas from later periods. The areas of the 21st and 22nd districts follow a different development pattern and are characterised by a more heterogeneous and suburban morphology. The built environment consists of a mix of preserved village centres, a patchwork carpet of single-family houses, large post-war housing estates and former agricultural land. In recent decades, these districts have also absorbed a significant

share of Vienna's new residential development. Compared to the more compact concentric pattern south of the Danube, these districts exhibit a fragmented and functionally diverse morphology.

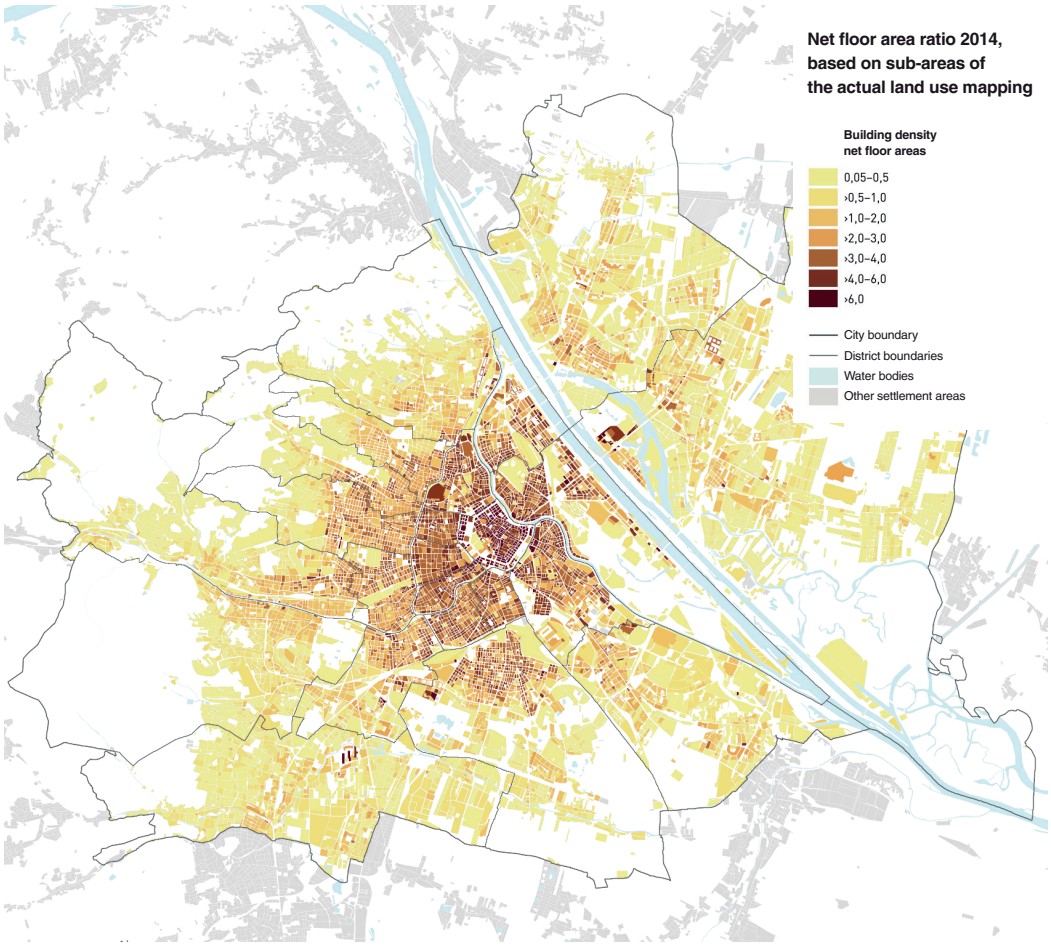

Figure 13: Density Vienna, 2014. Source: City of Vienna, 2015, pp. 42–43, adaptation with permission, Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

As previously noted, the residential areas of most interviewees are characterised by high density and *Gründerzeit* architecture (see *Figures 12 & 13*), with many residing in housing constructed in the second half of the 20th century, comprising both social housing and owner-occupied flats. Vienna's housing policy, renowned for its social inclusivity, has garnered global attention for its redistributive approach to urban development through specific social policy interventions and housing programmes (Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021). Vienna is widely recognised for its affordable housing alongside its social mixing policies, compact mixed-use urban form, efficient public transportation system and abundant public green spaces (Mocca et al., 2020).

The ‘Vienna model’ is rooted in the ‘Red Vienna’ era (1919–1934) and continued throughout the post-war period, after the Second World War, as part of the corporatist welfare state model (Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021, p. 2; ref. to Reinprecht, 2014; Österle & Heitzmann, 2020). The interwar period was defined by the large-scale expansion of municipal housing to combat housing shortages, unemployment and poverty following the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s collapse after the First World War. The city’s Social Democratic administration funded the construction of approximately 64,000 dwellings, many featuring communal amenities like kindergartens, libraries and laundries (City of Vienna, n.d.-c; Novy, Redak, Jäger, & Hamedinger, 2001, p. 136). While socially progressive, these efforts were also characterised by a strong top-down mode of governing (Novy et al., 2001, p. 135). The 1934 Austrofascist coup halted this democratic model, ushering in authoritarian rule until 1945. After the Second World War, municipal housing continued to expand, though, in many cases, the early post-war housing stock was characterised by simpler construction and reduced communal standards. From the late 20th century, design quality and communal amenities improved again, supported by new investment in public housing and urban renewal initiatives. However, with socio-economic and demographic shifts since the 1980s and 1990s, the Viennese social democracy has started establishing new forms of urban governance in line with neoliberal political restructuring in other EU countries, including the re-commodification of housing through legal changes and deregulation (Novy et al., 2001, p. 131). This tendency has led to exclusionary processes; for example, recent immigrants, particularly those with lower education levels, face greater barriers to housing compared to long-term residents (Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021, p. 11). While exclusionary trends exist, the city’s robust public sector has mitigated neoliberal trends, keeping disparities smaller than in many other cities. In this sense, as Kazepov and Verwiebe (2021, p. 14) conclude, “Vienna can still be considered a city in which recognition and redistribution play an important role.” Vienna’s evolving policy landscape increasingly integrates participatory practices, fostering innovative housing solutions that address diverse needs and advance social and environmental justice (Friesenecker & Litschauer, 2021; Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021).

Looking at Vienna’s population development, net-migration[56] has contributed to a rapid increase in inhabitants, while simultaneously facing a declining birth rate and an ageing

[56] The influx of primarily young people is evident in the demographic structure of Vienna: At the start of 2024, 35.4% of Vienna’s residents were foreign nationals, 40.2% were born abroad,

native population (City of Vienna, n.d.-b; Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021, p. 7). The population reached 2,005,760 in 2024 (City of Vienna, 2024, p. 2) and is expected to grow further, reaching 2,292,000 by early 2053, despite a slower pace of growth due to declining immigration compared to recent trends (City of Vienna, 2023b, n.d.-b). Examining Vienna's demographic development over the 20th and 21st centuries reveals a transformation from one of the world's most populous cities – reaching its historical peak of approximately 2.03 million inhabitants in 1910 – to a shrinking and significantly aged metropolis after the two world wars: In the 1960s and 1970s, Vienna was considered one of the demographically oldest cities globally (Bauer & Himpele, 2019). Since the early 1990s, particularly since the turn of the millennium, Vienna has experienced dynamic population growth, driven by young immigrants, re-evolving into a growing and demographically young European city (Bauer & Himpele, 2019). As projections anticipate lower net migration gains in the coming years compared to recent trends, Vienna's relatively young population in 2023 will gradually age demographically (City of Vienna, 2023b, n.d.-b). The proportion of residents aged 65 and older, which stood at 16.4% in 2023, is expected to rise to over 20% within the next 30 years (City of Vienna, 2023b, p. 24). More than half of this projected increase in the over-65 population by 2053 is attributed to significant growth in the over-80 age group, with the number of very old residents expected to grow by approximately 70% in Vienna over the same period (City of Vienna, 2023b, p. 24). The demographic composition of Vienna's population aged 65 and older will also shift: Due to the improving life expectancy of men in older age groups, the proportion of men in the highest age brackets will increase (City of Vienna, 2023b, p. 24). Moreover, the number of foreign-born seniors will rise sharply: By 2053, nearly half of the city's population aged 65 and older and about 40% of those over 80 are projected to be foreign-born (City of Vienna, 2023b, p. 26).

When examining the age structure on a smaller scale, certain areas in Vienna are characterised by a higher proportion of older residents. These include the historic city centre (1st district), the northern and western margins, the southern parts of the 10th district, and, to a significant extent, parts of the inner-city districts 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 (see *Figure 14*). This demographic pattern is reflected in my sample, which reveals a distinct contrast in age structure with regard to the residential districts of the interviewed persons.

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and 45.4% were of foreign origin, indicating that they either held foreign citizenship or were Austrian nationals born abroad (City of Vienna, n.d.-d).

Interviews were conducted in districts with a higher share of older residents, such as the 8th district and the northwestern parts of the 19th, 18th and 14th districts, as well as the 13th district and parts of the 12th district. These areas stand in contrast to respondents living in *Gründerzeit* neighbourhoods along the *Gürtel* (14th, 15th, 16th, 17th) and in the 5th district, where the population tends to be younger. Additionally, these neighbourhoods show significant differences in terms of lower socio-economic status and are strongly characterised by (international) immigration (see *Figure 18, Appendix*). As detailed in *Chapter 4.2*, case selection was guided by achieving a diverse sample by considering residential districts shaped by migration, diverse socio-economic statuses and varying educational backgrounds.

In contrast, case selection was less driven by infrastructural differences between residential districts. While the people interviewed live in areas of Vienna, which differ in terms of their urban quality, design and availability of infrastructure (with public transport, shopping facilities and cultural offerings generally more accessible in densely built-up inner-city *Gründerzeit* structures), the study does not aim to shed light on objective differences in and availability of social infrastructure in Vienna.[57] Therefore, the sample does not show any extreme contrast in terms of the (in)availability of infrastructure in the respective neighbourhoods. For instance, all respondents live in areas where public transport stops are less than 500 metres away.[58] The same applies to the walking distance to the nearest grocery store, which is less than 500 metres for all but three of them. For respondents living in districts 13th, 21st and 17th, the nearest grocery store is less than 650 metres away.

[57] In principle, the availability of social infrastructure, i.e. medical services, shopping facilities, public transport, banks, post offices, restaurants and cultural offerings as well as green spaces, street furniture such as public toilets or benches, is central to how and whether ageing well in place succeeds and how the process of ageing is generally experienced. There is a great deal of research on these aspects as illustrated in *Chapter 2.3*. The relevance of infrastructure is also repeatedly evident to varying degrees in the interviews conducted, which is taken into account in the analysis with regard to my research interests. However, the objective availability of public services was not part of the sampling strategy. Details of the sampling process and the decisions involved are illustrated in *Chapter 4.2*.

[58] Overall, the City of Vienna has a very well developed and dense public transport network. In 2023, 32% of all journeys are made by public transport, 32% on foot, 10% by bicycle and 26% by car (City of Vienna, 2024, p. 15).

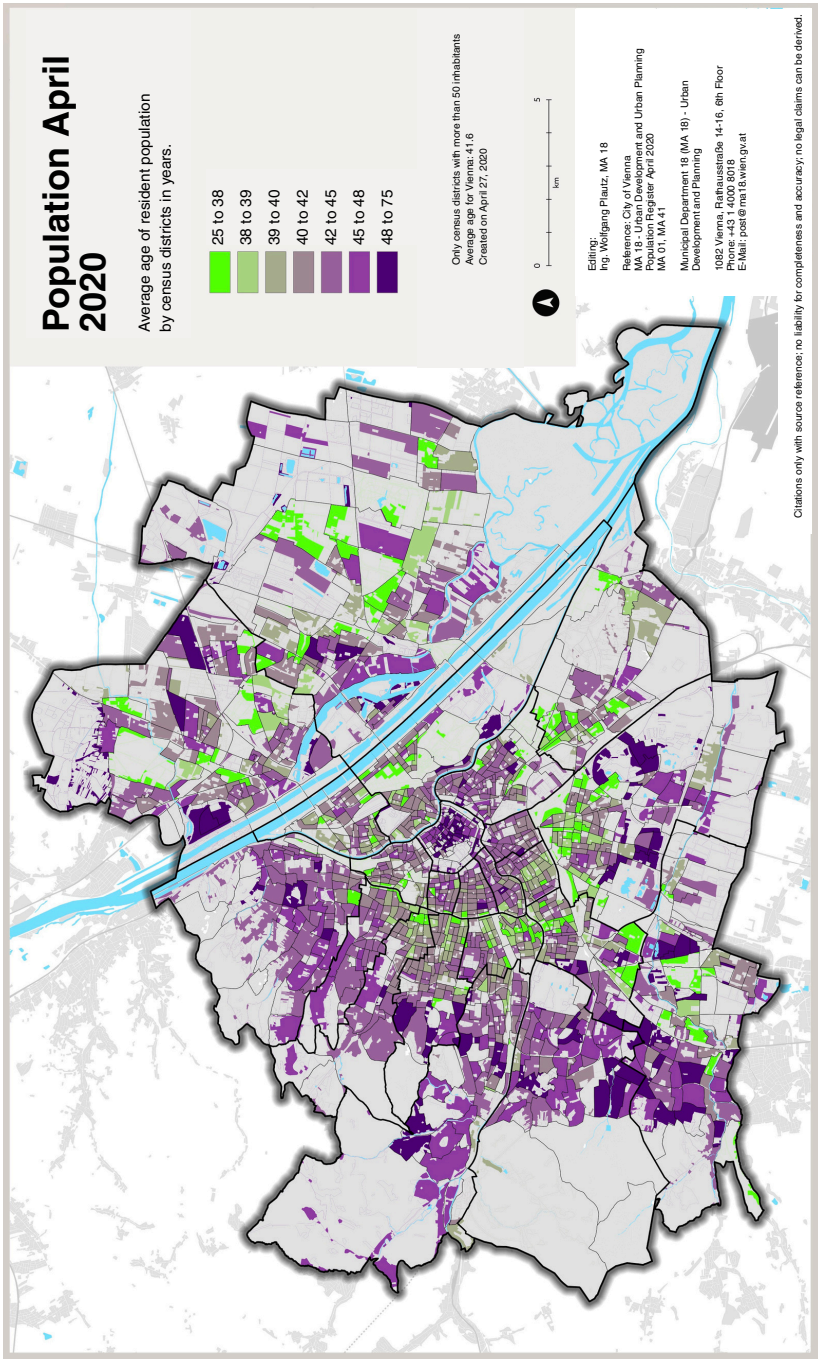

Figure 14: Population Age Vienna 2020. Source: City of Vienna, Municipal Department 18 (MA 18), 2020, adaptation with permission, Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

5.1. Summing Up

This chapter provided insights into the material from interviews with 26 older individuals. It structured it along key dimensions to systematise and contextualise the diverse

biographical qualities of the respondents. In alignment with the previous chapter where the sampling strategy was presented (see *Chapter 4.2*), it descriptively illustrated major contrasts of the material, which serve as the basis for the selection of key interviews for further in-depth analysis.

For the fine-grained analysis, 13 cases were selected, with an additional five cases examined during the process of verifying theoretical saturation (see *Figure 15*). The selection was based on the aim to achieve a heterogeneous sample with regard to life phase (‘young-old’/‘third age’, ‘old-old’/‘fourth age’); gender; material resources and economic situation; ownership of or access to a second residence or allotment garden; residential district, duration of residence, household size and marital status; socio-spatial integration in terms of volunteering, family relationship, care responsibilities, the use of ‘curated’ age-specific activity spaces or no participation in these formats; and care needs.

	Interviews		Respondents		Marital status and living situation	Duration of residence	Second homeplace	Monthly income personal	Formal care services	Old age-specific activity/care	Volunteering
	#ID SitIn	#ID Go-along	#ID								
Collection Phase 1	01PI	01WI	Af	Dagmar Stetter	widowed, living alone	more than 50 years	no	1800 - 2500	no	no	yes
	02PI	02WI	Bf	Birgit Weiss	divorced and in partnership, living alone	30-50 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
	03PI	03WI	Cf	Isolde Richter	widowed, living alone	30-50 years	yes	1800 - 2500	no, previously	no	no
	04PI	04WI	Df	Irina Huber	divorced and in partnership, living alone	5-15 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
	05PI	05WI	Em	Hubert Weber	married, living with spouse	grown up	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
	05PI	05WI	Ff	Edit Weber	married, living with spouse	more than 50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
	06PI		Gm	Peter Dreyer	married, living with spouse	30-50 years	yes	2500 - 3500	no	no	no
Collection Phase 2	07PI	07WI	Hf	Magdalena Winkler	divorced, living alone	15-30 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
	08PI		If	Marina Neumann	widowed, living alone	less than five years	no	2500 - 3500	no	no	no
	09PI	09WI	Jf	Adele Wimmer	widowed, living alone	30-50 years	yes	less than 1200	no, previously	no	yes
	10PI	10WI	Kf	Tabea Horvat	married, living with spouse	30-50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
	10PI	10WI	Lm	Harald Horvat	married, living with spouse	30-50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
	11PI		Mm	Vinzent Wallner	married, living with spouse	30-50 years	no	more than 3500	no	no	yes
	12PI	12WI	Nm	Otto Meier	widowed, living alone	more than 50 years	yes	n/a	no	no	no
	13PI	13WI	Of	Jutta Ludwig	divorced, living alone	5-15 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
	14PI	14WI	Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	divorced, living alone	30-50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	yes	yes
	15PI		Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	divorced and in partnership, living alone	15-30 years	yes	2500 - 3500	no	no	no
Collection Phase 3	16PI		Rf	Lucija Milošević	widowed, living with son	5-15 years	no	less than 1200	no	no	no
	17PI		Sm	Omar Ertürk	widowed, living alone	15-30 years	yes	less than 1200	no	yes	no
	18PI		Tf	Gerda Obermüller	widowed, living alone	more than 50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	yes	no
	19PI		Uf	Franziska Kranz	widowed, living alone	more than 50 years	no	1800 - 2500	no	yes	no
	20PI		Vm	Fritz Paschner	married, living with spouse	grown up	yes	more than 3500	no	yes	yes
	21PI		Wf	Beritan Çil	divorced, living alone, occasionally with son	5-15 years	yes	less than 1200	no	yes	no
	24PI		Zf	Ivana Rogić	married, living alone, spouse in nursing home	more than 50 years	no	less than 1200	yes	yes	no
	25PI		AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	widowed, living alone	more than 50 years	yes	2500 - 3500	yes	yes	no
	26PI		BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	widowed, separated, living alone	30-50 years	no	less than 1200	yes	yes	no

Legend	Case selection in-depth analysis	Case selection theoretical saturation

Figure 15: Case Selection. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

6. Spatialities of Ageing: Dwelling Experiences in Old Age

People experience ageing and old age taking place in a myriad of different ways. This chapter follows the question of how dwelling practices, the meaning and scope of the home change as people grow older. It, therefore, explores everyday experiences of older people and the ways in which these experiences are 'emplaced'. That is, it examines the spatial dimensions of ageing: where ageing occurs and how particular spatialities co-constitute old age. By focusing on the reciprocal relationship between ageing and space, this chapter aims to scrutinise how ageing is co-produced in and through socio-material environments.

The chapter draws on an in-depth analysis of 17 interviews (12 sit-in and five go-along interviews) with 13 individuals (two of whom were interviewed twice as a couple).[59] The interviews were selected from a corpus of in total 35 interviews (narrative-ethnographic, problem-centred and go-along interviews) with 26 persons. The selection was based on the aim to achieve a heterogeneous sample with regard to socio-demographic characteristics, housing conditions, mobility and relocation patterns, participation in social spaces, volunteering activities and care needs (for more details, see *Chapter 5*). The analysis of the conducted interviews with the older people is triangulated with qualitative expert interviews and a review of policy- and planning-related documents. More details on the sampling and data analysis can be found in *Chapter 4.2*.

The present chapter is structured into three main parts, each carving out an empirically informed conceptual development and concluding with a summary section: (1) *Embodied Spatialities of Old Age*; (2) *Spatialised Othering*; and (3) *Biographical Internalisation of Space.* Scattered throughout the chapter and interspersed between the passages are short biographical portraits of individual interviewees, recognisable by the different formatting.[60] This is intended to give the reader a better insight into the interview material – particularly where respondents are specifically presented as individual cases in the text.

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[59] In line with the principle of theoretical saturation, additional interviews were cross-checked – specifically, four problem-centred interviews with five individuals for a more in-depth exploration (see *Chapter 5*).

[60] Some biographical details have been slightly modified to protect the anonymity of the research participants. These changes do not affect the overall integrity or meaning of the data presented.

These short asides into personal introductions aim to offer context within the individuals' narrations and biographies, though they can also be skipped without compromising the comprehensiveness of the text. An overview of all interviewees, indicating key biographical and socio-structural accounts, can be found in *Chapter 5* and in the *Appendix* (see *Figure 16*).

At this point, I shall briefly summarise the key theoretical underpinnings, reflecting the identified research gaps within which the analysis is situated:

I approach ageing as an embodied experience that is inherently constituted by change. Ageing, in this sense, can be broadly defined as the experience of specific changes over time (Baars, 2009). While understanding ageing as a contingent process necessarily implies recognising forms of change, the aim of this research is to carve out the different qualities of these transitions and their spatial entanglements. Ageing is, for example, characterised by bodily, social and psychological changes as well as shifts in institutional affiliations, which often unfold simultaneously, interwoven and overlapping in complex ways. Emphasising 'change' as an essential feature of ageing and old age does not mean neglecting the routines, patterns and regularities of the everyday lives of older people. Rather, change highlights the temporal dimensions inherent in both ordinary routines and mundane practices, as well as sudden disruptions and profound shifts in individuals' lifecourse trajectories.

Focusing on change as an analytical lens allows us to grasp the processual nature of age as a social category (van Dyk, 2015a, p. 6; see *Chapter 2.1*) and highlights the importance of time and temporality in theorising ageing in relation to space (see *Chapter 3.1*). This means that ageing *as such* is a temporal category – in the sense of 'living in time' (Baars, 2009) –, an understanding that is captured in concepts such as lifecourse and age transitions (see e.g., Katz, 2003; Neale, 2015). Additionally, understanding ageing as an embodied process underscores that old age is not simply something one *has* but something one *does* – an identity position that is continually constituted through repetitive social practices. In this sense (and following a practice-theoretical perspective), older people continuously 'perform' their age, in relation to and influenced by societal images of ageing, cultural norms and social relationships (see e.g., Gallistl, 2020; Schroeter, 2012). Such a performative approach emphasises that the ageing subject is always in becoming, hence inherently temporal.

Like the subject, space is permanently in a state of becoming. An inquiry into the spatialities of ageing must therefore also address the *temporal dimensions of space* itself. As discussed in *Chapter 3.1*, space is approached as dynamic and emergent, with its social and material dimensions understood as dialectically interwoven (Massey, 2005). Spaces and places are not fixed containers but are continuously shaped and reshaped over time. In such relational understanding, time is immanent to space. Massey, in particular, has powerfully critiqued the conceptual separation of time and space, emphasising that

> precisely *because* space is the product of relation-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices *which have to be carried out*, it is always in a process of becoming; it is always being made (Massey, 1999, p. 2, original emphasis).

The conceptualisation of space as always in the making – emergent through ongoing embodied practices – underlines that temporality cannot be separated from spatiality. Following such a relational space understanding means that temporality is inherently inscribed into spatial arrangements. Just as the ageing subject is performatively constituted through social practices, so too is space continuously emerging.

Although relational theories of space are well established and largely recognised in theory, a closer look at research on ageing and space reveals that these insights are rarely consistently integrated into empirical analyses (for a similar critique, see Andrews, 2024; see also *Chapter 2.4*). Most space-related gerontological studies still treat space as static and fixed, focusing primarily on *how individuals change over time* as they age. The temporal dynamics of space – that is, *how places themselves are continuously changing* – are strongly underestimated, or, if addressed, urban change is predominantly approached on a macro-level only. However, the temporalities of everyday geographies, which often do not align harmoniously with broader socio-structural transformations, with the result of potential disruptions, disharmonies and tensions, are largely overlooked. This perspective necessitates understanding ageing as a relational process, constituted through its interplay with socio-material arrangements. In this sense, ageing individuals co-produce spatialities, while space simultaneously co-constitutes their subjectivities. Methodologically, I start from the spaces of everyday life of older people, which empirically materialise in the dimension of dwelling, with the aim of exploring the embodied experiences of ageing and gaining insights into how urban spaces shape these experiences (see *Chapters 3.2 & 4.1*).

6.1. Embodied Spatialities of Old Age

Dagmar Stetter

Ms Stetter is 92 years old and lives in a 100m2 *Gründerzeit* apartment, centrally located in the 8th district, with a smaller second flat next door. Both apartments are owner-occupied whereby she already passed them on to her two daughters. She grew up in an area around the Vienna City Hall located in the 1st district at the border to the 8th, thus not far from where she lives now. In her current apartment, she has lived since 1967, first with her husband and three children, and after her husband's death three years ago, she lives alone. She has a high socio-economic background with a doctorate degree as the highest level of education. She was not in paid employment for most of the time, but a 'housewife' and – outside the private realm of the home – engaged in numerous voluntary activities. She is still very active and deeply involved in community volunteering – from the church to the local neighbourhood centre and self-organised neighbourhood projects. Her self-conception in that respect comes up several times in both interviews I conducted with her and takes up a lot of space. She emphasises her social responsibility and points out her awareness of giving to and caring for others. Her motivation for her social engagement comes also, as she notes, from her privileged position as she was born into a rich and well-educated family. Retirement does not seem to be an appropriate category for her, as she continues her 'work shifts' in the church and other social organisations without interruption.

She is a typical example of having a high degree of social integration and a high level of social engagement. Besides her volunteering activities, her rootedness in her neighbourhood also manifests itself in having long-term relationships. She is still in regular contact with friends from school and has relatives living close by, including in the same housing building. Her case further challenges chronological age cohorting: Despite her high calendar age and even though she frames her experience of old age through increasingly bodily changes, she does not fit the attributes of the 'fourth age'.

When asking the respondents about how they experience ageing, a crucial and recurring aspect is the perception of changing bodily conditions. Ms Stetter, for example, remarks "that you can no longer walk so far" (Dagmar Stetter, 01PI, Pos. 1092-1093), noting that she particularly struggles with going uphill. Interviewees report their increasing bodily limitations, linked with a loss of capacities and skills, a general decline of health condition and the rising of "aches and pains" (Hubert Weber, 05PI, Pos. 738). Changes in the body are also expressed in appearance, such as wrinkles or grey hair. At first glance, therefore,

old age is commonly associated with fluctuating levels of bodily competence, with situations where previous activities and roles are lost or at least need to be adapted to ensure their continuation. In this sense and apart from a few exceptions of linking ageing with rather positive connotations such as gaining new abilities like wisdom due to "a wealth of experience" (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 818), narrations about old age-related changes predominantly appear against the backdrop of the perception of 'ageing as bodily decline'.

Departing from this quite dystopian picture of old age through bodily change reveals the body as the smallest scale level for socio-spatial analysis (see Madanipour, 2003). The body is the intermediate instance between the inner self and the outer social world (Madanipour, 2003, pp. 5–33). This means the body is the central point of reference for the constitution of age in relation to oneself and through the lifecourse in a twofold and intersecting way: firstly, through the actual bodily experience and, secondly, as a mediating instance between the bodily experience and the experience of the socio-material environment. In this sense, we can see the body and certain bodily characteristics, on the one hand, and, as gerontological research has shown (e.g., Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991; Mowl et al., 2000; Twigg, 2004), as a crucial identifier of old age (see *Chapter 2.1*). On the other hand, the ageing – that is, the *changing* – body is primarily and foremost experienced in interplay with space. And these spatialities are not static. Rather, space is always in the process of becoming (Massey, 1999), thus, it is relational, constantly evolving and created through the dynamic interconnections between and among places and social relations (see *Chapter 3.1*). This dual conditionality of age and space, which accumulates in the body, is what I capture with the concept of *embodied spatialities of old age*.

> ***Isolde Richter***
>
> Ms Richter lives in the same area as Ms Stetter, very centrally in the 8th district. They know each other on the level of neighbourly acquaintances. She is 86 years old, widowed and has lived alone since the death of her partner. She moved into her flat in 1981 together with her husband and their five children. Similar to Dagmar Stetter, her paid employment biography ended with marriage and the birth of her children. Her privately rented flat is also a large *Gründerzeit* apartment with around 110m2 including a small

balcony. Additionally, she has a second residence in a town close to Vienna, where she usually spends the summer.

Like Dagmar Stetter, she has a high pension, comes from an educated middle-class background, has a large circle of acquaintances and a big family network, with children and grandchildren in her immediate residential area, including in the same building. Unlike Dagmar Stetter, she is not active in voluntary work. This often prompted her to compare herself with Ms Stetter throughout our two interviews, frequently citing Ms Stetter as an exceptionally active and fit example of ageing. Beyond this, her narrations strongly feature the loss of social contacts and growing bodily limitations in old age. Her experience offers a poignant example of navigating a period of sudden dependency followed by regaining autonomy: Following complications from a knee operation, she spent several weeks in the hospital. Subsequently, she depended on a wheelchair, then a walker and crutches, for many months, supported by a mobile care service twice daily and meals on wheels.

For Ms Richter, one of the ways in which she experiences her old age is by "walking worse" (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 415), which she connects with a recent knee operation. It is since then that she feels "a bit unsteady" (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 258-259) and places this later in the interview in a concrete spatial situation: She explains that she prefers "now […] to walk only on asphalt", adding that if she walks on a forest path, she has "to be very careful not to trip or anything" (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 644-646). What shall be highlighted here is that it is not simply about the activity of walking that turned out to be more difficult. In addition, her bodily limitation becomes apparent in and through certain places and spatial conditions: It is the forest path, compared to asphalt, that disables her and produces her (recognition of) old age.

Similar to Isolde Richter, Dagmar Stetter connects her old age to physical limitations, particularly concerning her ability to walk longer distances. This is the reason why it would be actually more convenient for her to walk with poles, but she rejects using them. She feels "embarrassed" (Dagmar Stetter, 01PI, Pos. 1096), explaining "that makes you look too old" (Dagmar Stetter, 01PI, Pos. 1147). Nevertheless, as she concedes, "in the countryside, I'm not embarrassed [...] there are so many people who walk with walking poles nowadays. (.) So when I walk in the countryside, I walk with poles" (Dagmar Stetter, 01PI, Pos. 1097-1099).

The quote from Dagmar Stetter not only illustrates the underlying associations of old age with bodily limitation but also reveals the *spatial contingency* of these perceptions. For Ms Stetter, the perceived usage of poles differs significantly between her neighbourhood in the city and the countryside. In the countryside, their use is viewed more positively, often associated with sportive activity rather than frailty or impairment, and thus less likely to evoke negative connotations of old age or the embarrassment of appearing 'too old'. In the city, however, poles threaten her self-identity. Reflecting Ms Stetter's deep social integration – having lived there for over 50 years, grown up nearby, participating in various organisations, engaged in volunteer work and maintaining numerous social connections with frequent encounters on the street – her refusal to walk with poles stems from a concern that doing so would fundamentally alter her established role as a 'caregiver within the community' to one of being perceived as dependent and in need of care.

This fear of being labelled or judged by acquaintances and friends underscores how her body and its movement in space serve not only as a self-identifier of old age but also as a key external identifier (see *Chapter 2.1*). Thus, old age-related bodily changes are equally constituted in relation to others, meaning individuals are defined as 'old' by those around them – neighbours, age peers, family members, strangers – based on bodily appearance and demeanour. Ms Stetter's narration exemplifies that othering does not necessarily involve direct actions or explicit statements from others. Rather, it also occurs through her internalisation of others' presumed perceptions, expectations and judgments ('they could perceive me as being old'), which are deeply entangled with socio-cultural norms and ideas of old age and embedded in concrete spatial settings.

Changing relationships between the ageing body and space manifest in daily routines and ordinary practices which can no longer be carried out as usual, need to be adapted or new practices need to be established, encompassing different spatial settings on different scales – from the intimate place of the domestic sphere to the neighbourhood and beyond. What is crucial is to move beyond viewing space simply as a positivist backdrop and instead understand it as a constitutive element of the ageing process. This means that changing bodily abilities and appearances are fundamentally expressed *in and through spatial arrangements*, and it means that space is not merely a physical container that envelops the lives of ageing individuals.

Understanding ageing from such a spatial(ised) perspective means emphasising not only the changing ageing body and how it interacts with the socio-material environment, as illustrated, for example, by Isolde Richter's difficulties with walking. Additionally, such a focus allows for looking more carefully at the ageing body, its changing abilities *and* its constitutive relations to places, architectures, objects and other (human) bodies, emphasising the constant emergence of spatial arrangements. It is often through concrete spatialities – the design and formations of places, such as the uneven forest path – that bodily limitations associated with old age become apparent, or more precisely: that *in and through a particular spatial situation old age is co-constructed*. Such a perspective also sheds light on how spaces and possible meanings inscribed through specific experiences associated with them can change with growing older. The bathtub, for example, which might have been a place associated with taking a rest and relaxation, can become associated with effort and stress due to difficulties with getting out of it. In all these examples, it becomes evident that the body functions as a central mediating instance. Socio-material experiences of ageing and old age are shaped and mediated through the body.

Furthermore, what should be stressed here is that ageing is not a linear trajectory and, accordingly, bodily changes do not happen in the sense of a gradual decline. Rather, several interviews revealed that experiences of ageing are often characterised by 'ebbs and flows' of changes and, therefore, also by fluctuating bodily competencies. Hence, bodily changes can be perceived as definite and ambiguous, and they can be both temporary and long-term. It is particularly sudden bodily changes that lead to a significant and noticeable disruption in the relationship between age and space. After her knee operation with complications, Ms Richter unexpectedly found herself unable to walk. She was dependent on a wheelchair and on the help of professional care. This situation required physical changes in her apartment, where she has been living for more than 40 years, accompanied by a series of adjustments in her daily routines. However, as she states, "you get very handy" (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 878), meaning that she quickly got used to this new situation.

Her case illustrates that the adaptation to changed bodily competencies takes place in the interweaving of the body, the material environment of the home – in her context, especially the bathroom and kitchen with their furnishings and objects – and the social relationships. As she notes, what hindered her from developing new routines that ran

smoothly was that there were always different care persons visiting her twice a day. In this sense, it was not primarily the condition of her body or the structural conditions of the flat, such as a bathroom door that was not wheelchair-accessible, that were decisive. Above all, it was crucial how the carer behaved and reacted and, thus, supported her in the particular situation of morning hygiene. The perception of old age, which is defined here primarily in terms of bodily abilities, is co-constituted and constantly recreated through the social practices and relationships within the spatial arrangements. This is also particularly addressed in the need to adapt to external schedules and routines when dependent on mobile care services. Dependency or loss of independence is then not only a question of the bodily assistance needed, e.g., for bathing, but also of submission to a different time regime in which the usual practices of everyday life are carried out. Being dependent on mobile care services, hence, also involves the need to adjust to an external schedule, which is strongly driven by efficiency and cost reduction (see Aulenbacher, Dammayr, & Riegraf, 2018).

With the concept of embodied spatialities of old age, I aim to highlight the temporal dimensions of space. Such an emphasis draws attention to how ageing bodies and their impacts on everyday practices are deeply intertwined with new experiences of time. Respondents often illustrate bodily changes in their narrations with that "everything takes much longer" (Edit Weber, 05WI, Pos. 68). This interplay between loss of bodily abilities and differently experienced temporality materialises in an exemplary way in household tasks. In many narrations, particularly of older women, housework is a central and recurring theme in which newly embodied temporalities manifest themselves. The respondents emphasise that they still do most of the housework themselves; however, it has become more strenuous and takes up more time than it used to.

Due to its typically regular and mundane nature, structured around clear routines and often performed within a set time-frame (such as specific times and days of the week), housework represents an ideal-typical practice for experiencing old age – especially for women (the gendered aspect will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter section, *Chapter 6.2.1*). Ageing, as a bodily change that leads to a loss of strength, is manifested in a different experience of the time it takes to do the housework: Cleaning the home takes longer than it used to. This subjectively experienced *expansion of time* is accompanied by a subjectively experienced *expansion of space*, in the sense that the flat appears larger because it takes more time to clean it.

A key idea underpinning gerontological studies is that old age is inevitably accompanied by a 'shrinking of space' – in the sense of a reduction of an individual's personal mobility radius (see *Chapter 2.3*). However, this finding tends to overlook the fact that spatial distances are not only objective measurements but are also shaped by *embodied* experiences. Bodily limitations may indeed lead to a reduced spatial radius, such as the inability to leave the home. At the same time, however, bodily restrictions can give rise to a subjective perception of 'expanded space', as illustrated by the example of how cleaning the home takes longer, making the flat feel larger. In this way, the perception of spatial scale is altered through changes in the perception of temporality.

Ivana Rogić

Ms Rogić is 86 years old and was born in Yugoslavia. She came in the 1940s as a refugee to Vienna. Her husband is also from the Balkan states fleeing the war and coming to Vienna. They have four children and until recently lived together in a 62m2 owner-occupied flat in the 15th district. For two years now Ivana Rogić lives there alone because her husband had to move into a nursing home due to increased care needs.

The place where she grew up did not play a significant role in the interview. It also seems that she has no family or other social ties there. However, she repeatedly emphasises how important it is for her to stay in her apartment in Vienna where she lives by now for more than 60 years. Under no circumstances does she want to move into a retirement home, even though she struggles with the fact that she eventually let her husband moving there alone. In this context, she explains several times that he requires a high level of care – one that she could no longer provide by herself at home. And even if she were to move into the retirement home as well, she would not share with him the same room anyway, as he is in the nursing ward.

She visits her husband every weekend and spends weekdays at a day centre. She also experiences bodily constraints and relies on a walking aid. She seems to have close ties to her children, who look after her very well and support her in various everyday matters, for instance buying groceries or driving her to appointments, such as her weekly visits to her husband. She grew up in rather modest circumstances, shaped by experiences of war and displacement. She completed a lower secondary school diploma and was primarily at home raising her children while taking on occasional side jobs; she used to work in a meat factory.

In the case of Ivana Rogić, the experience of spatial arrangements as barriers due to bodily limitations is evident. She is dependent on a walker and her flat is on the third floor. There is a lift, but it goes up only from the mezzanine floor, meaning that she still would have to walk over a few steps. Due to this structural barrier, she is unable to leave her flat without help from others. However, she gives the impression that she has got used to this situation, which has been the case for about three years. At least she does not frame it as a major restriction on her daily life, and it is by far not a reason for her to move out. The fact that she is embedded in a social and care network certainly plays a role here. Nevertheless, her narration also reveals newly experienced temporalities that materialise at the interface of bodily limitation and spatial experience. Daily actions, habits and regular routines take longer, affecting her radius of movement and the perceived spatial extension of everyday life. Ms Rogić, however, expresses no real concern that her limited mobility might restrict her ability to organise her day or lead to feelings of boredom, being trapped in her apartment or even loneliness. Instead, she describes her everyday life as full – not least because 'anyway things take longer' than they used to do.

While the shrinking of a personal movement radius certainly applies to Ivana Rogić, understanding age–space relationships primarily through the lens of absolute, 'objective' space neglects the embodied experience of space. This suggests that personal space is not simply shrinking in an absolute sense due to reduced movement radii. Instead, a diminished mobility radius creates new forms of perceived distance. Thus, spatial relationships are reconfigured through the lived, embodied and temporal experiences of ageing.

A reduced mobility radius does not necessarily translate linearly into the 'shrinking' of social space, i.e. the networks of relationships that are integrated into and/or connected to places (see also Wiles et al., 2009). In the case of Ms Rogić, this means that her restriction in moving around outside of the domestic space of her flat does not equally lead to a reduction of social relations with her neighbours. When asked about her neighbourhood and whether she is in contact with her neighbours in the housing building, her walking constraint is not the predominant cause for a decrease in social networks. What appears is that it is rather about the 'dying away' of neighbours, which leads to the circle of social contacts getting smaller. Nevertheless, she is still in regular telephone contact with the few who remain. In this way, previous embodied encounters, such as those that have regularly taken place in the staircase or in the courtyard (as it is assumed), are continued

through the emotional experiences of regular conversations on the phone and the imaginative continuation of memories of the past – albeit they may have a different quality. Ivana Rogić is not the only example of how social contacts are maintained differently. Other respondents also point to the increasing use of social media and telecommunication technologies to replace previous face-to-face interactions. Through the usage of these technologies, social spaces of the neighbourhood and beyond are enmeshed in the domestic sphere of the homeplace.

Hence, the idea of embodied spatialities of old age also sheds light on how experiences can endure through places in cases when social activities can no longer be pursued due to age-related changes. Dagmar Stetter used to go mountaineering, but she had to give up her hobby due to her advanced age. She vividly describes how much she enjoyed climbing the *Rax*, a mountain range on the border between the federal provinces of Lower Austria and Styria. She then recalls an experience with her father, who was also a passionate mountaineer:

> And once, we were sitting by Lake *Attersee* and he was looking up at the *Höllengebirge* and watching the chamois through his binoculars. And I asked him, 'Daddy, doesn't it bother you that you can't go up there anymore?' 'No,' he said, 'I've been up there before'. And now, I say the same: 'No, I've been up there before, and I can imagine what it looks like' (Dagmar Stetter, 01PI, Pos. 371-378).[61]

The fact that she 'used to be up there' and therefore knows 'what it looks like' helps her to cope with age-related changes. Rowles (1978) has argued already several decades ago

> that while from the perspective of middle-aged values older people may appear to have small or shrinking life worlds, their geographical imaginations are also expanding into 'beyond spaces'. These are both temporal, through reminiscence, and spatial, as they engage with experiences and events of friends and family far away (Wiles et al., 2009, p. 665, ref. to Rowles, 1978).

Such a focus allows for emphasising "older people's elastic physical, imaginative, emotional and symbolic experiences of, and connections to, place across time and in scope, including the home, neighbourhood and 'beyond' spaces" (Andrews et al., 2013, p. 1350; ref. to Wiles et al., 2009). While there is a dominance of relational thinking within

[61] The *Höllengebirge* is a mountain range in Upper Austrian, part of the Northern Limestone Alps.

space-related ageing research on a conceptual level, the aspect of temporality and how spatial experiences are influenced by old age-related experiences of time remains under-researched (as I have discussed in more detail in *Chapter 2.4*). However, I argue that to understand the relationships between ageing and the socio-material environment with their immanent changes as constitutive requires a temporal perspective that is inscribed in relational space. This challenges the dominant idea within gerontological research of 'shrinking space' coupled with 'shrinking social worlds' in the later stages of life.

Furthermore, I argue that research focusing on analysing movement radii and the frequency of visits to particular places – in order to show that as people age, the distances they travel in their daily activities become significantly shorter, thereby highlighting the increasing social relevance of the immediate neighbourhood – relies on the idea of a container space. It neglects the different ways of relating to space throughout the lifecourse in general and in old age in particular. This reproduces the idea of a rather linear process of ageing that intersects with a linear shrinking of geographical and social worlds. While, for instance, the reduction of social contacts is, on the one hand, also presented by interviewees as something generally negative and embedded in a decline narrative, it nevertheless also appears that the reduction in the number of friends and the increase in aloneness is not necessarily perceived as a restriction or forced withdrawal. The circle of friends might become smaller, but, to put it in the words of Isolde Richter, "honestly, you don't really want that much anymore" (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 302-304). The example of Ivana Rogić, who cannot leave her apartment alone due to structural barriers of stairs, illustrates that what is perceived as an obstacle, the extent to which bodily limitation is experienced as obstructive in everyday life, is highly subjective. Yet, I do not argue against (empirical) accounts of the 'satisfaction paradox of old age' (see e.g., Kolland et al., 2022, p. 112, ref. to Höpflinger, 2009; Motel, Künemund & Bode, 2000). Accordingly, reported and/or perceived high levels of satisfaction with the dwelling condition do not necessarily mean that there are no objective shortcomings. Certainly, forms of adaptation to and of the homeplace, of coping in behaviour, and even resignation play to some extent a role here. Nevertheless, what I aim to demonstrate is that the extent to which bodily limitations are experienced as obstructive in everyday life is also socio-culturally produced, discursively situated in the perspective of middle-aged lifestyles and, hence, deeply rooted in an idealised norm of an able-bodied person.

6.1.1. Summing Up

With the idea of *embodied spatialities of old age,* focus is drawn on the body as the intermediate instance between the inner self and the socio-material environment. The ageing body serves as identifier of old age and as interface through which spatial experiences are continuously reconfigured. In this sense, old age is constituted both through bodily experiences and interrelated interactions with the socio-material fabric. Hence, changes in the body, such as experiencing limitations in walking, become apparent in and through certain places and specific spatial conditions. In terms of understanding the interplay between ageing and space, this means that it is not only about questions of how the socio-material environment disables or enables older people. Rather, it is also about how spatial arrangements reproduce old age. In this sense, such a perspective sheds light on how individuals are constructed as 'old' through their encounters with potential barriers and obstacles. It explores and addresses how people come to perceive themselves as ageing or experience what it means to age through their spatial relationships and practices.

Old age is co-produced through the embodied experience of space. Crucial here is the temporal perspective that is inscribed in space. On a conceptual level, there is a dominance of relational thinking within space-related ageing research. Nevertheless, the temporal aspect of space, particularly how spatial experiences are shaped by altered perceptions of time in older age, remains under-researched. Hence, the concept of embodied spatialities of old age highlights, on the one hand, the temporal dimension of the ageing body (in the sense of understanding ageing as a process). Equally to the ageing body as immanent changing, it emphasises, on the other hand, that space is temporal and constant in the making. This challenges the dominant idea within gerontological research of 'shrinking space' coupled with 'shrinking social worlds' as people age. While bodily changes may restrict physical mobility, the lived experience of space is subjective and multifaceted. Such an embodied space conception – meaning understanding space as perceived and experienced through the body – takes a relational understanding of space seriously in that it highlights the temporal dimension of space. This emphasises that spatial distances are not merely absolute but are shaped by embodied practices and newly experienced temporalities.

An expanded understanding of age-related spatial experiences through the body highlights new and divergent forms of temporality. This allows for a sharper awareness of how reductions in mobility range may not necessarily be experienced as a limitation. While mobility may decline, this does not inevitably correlate with a decrease in social engagement, personal connections or a linear shift in other forms of spatial relationships. Past experiences can persist through spatial imagination, and people can derive meaning from memories embedded in spatial contexts across different scales. Neighbourhood connections can be brought into one's domestic space, fostering a sense of emotional connection despite bodily limitations. Technologies, for instance, enable the maintenance of relationships that extend beyond the immediate physical environment, demonstrating that changes in mobility do not necessarily equate to social isolation.

However, this is not meant to idealise or overlook real experienced age-related discrimination caused by restricted mobility, coupled with a lack of accessible infrastructure and the like. Rather, my goal here was to show that societal ideas of age-related spatial relationships tend to be viewed within a normative perspective and such normative ideas are also embedded in policies and planning initiatives. They often overlook the diverse ways ageing individuals experience space and time. Planning agendas predominantly proceed on the basis of able-bodiedness (Stafford, Leonor, & and Bates, 2022). This becomes particularly evident when a reduced radius of movement is equated with a 'shrinking of life worlds', accompanied by notions of deteriorating health and physical restrictions. By focusing predominantly on bodily limitations in the context of old age-specific planning supporting ageing-in-place, these approaches risk reinforcing a perspective that simplistically equates ageing with decline. Planning measures may then be primarily driven by the attempt to respond to ageing framed as a *problem* to be solved through making changes to the built environment based on criteria of accessibility and mobility (for critical discussion, see e.g. the collected contributions in Hauderowicz & Serena, 2020; also Gabauer, 2022). I argue that deficit-oriented biomedical perspectives on ageing may be embedded in ageing-in-place debates. This underscores the need for ongoing critical scrutiny and reflection on planning interventions and policy measures for ageing-in-place, which will be further explored in *Chapter 7*.

6.2. Spatialised Othering

Hubert Weber & Edit Weber

Mr Weber, 80 years old and Ms Weber, 81 years, are married since their early 20ties. They live in the 14th district in an area characterised by lower density and having a more suburban character, while at the same time undergoing extensive urban development. Hubert Weber grew up there and has lived in the same house since he was a child. Edit Weber was born in the countryside of Lower Austria and moved to him after they got married. They live in a 70m2 flat on the ground floor with a small garden in the inner yard in a three story *Gründerzeit* house with other family-owned flats, some of which are used by their children and grandchildren. They were running a *Greißlerei,* a small family-run grocery store on the ground floor of their apartment building, which Mr Weber had taken over from his parents.

I approached Mr Weber through his engagement in a neighbourhood centre where he occasionally helps children with their schoolwork. The couple, appearing to be a very close-knit pair, warmly invited me into their home, offering drinks and food. They are an example of individuals with strong family ties, high neighbourhood integration and a deep sense of place attachment. Both are very well anchored and known in the neighbourhood, largely due to their former family business. While they are still well-integrated and know many people, their connection to the neighbourhood changed significantly with the closure of their business. In other words, they perceived their new roles as pensioners as having a considerable impact on their daily lives and their relationship with the community.

Both still display a strong ambivalence towards retirement. While they no longer wish to return to work and enjoy their current phase of life, they continue to associate retirement with a loss of productivity, social role and meaning for society. They describe it as a decline in their social status as owners of a well-known and valued *Greißlerei* along with an experience of disconnection from the local community. In the interviews with them, much of their narration revolved around the past, particularly their time running the business. Even though they have been retired for a long time, their work in the grocery store remains a central theme, which they predominantly frame in a very positive light. They strongly define themselves by being hard-working and busy throughout their lives, and this mindset heavily influences their stories about their early retirement years. Their last few years, however, have increasingly been characterised by age-related illnesses and physical limitations.

Experiences of old age are shaped in relation to others. Hence, people's perceptions of their age are closely tied to how they experience others and how these others address them (see *Chapter 2.1*). This means that old age as a category of difference is produced through forms of othering which are situated, thus, dependent on and interrelated with spatial arrangements. To capture these forms of spatialised age attributions, I introduce the concept of *spatialised othering*.

In the following, I argue that forms of spatialised othering materialise in various spaces of mundane everyday life, such as 'transitory zones' like metro cars and staircases of apartment buildings, (semi-)public spaces like parks and grocery stores, as well as the domestic space of the home. At first sight, many of these places seem to be 'age-less' and therefore not imbued with specific age categories. Upon closer examination, however, they are not age-less but rather refer to middle age, which is merely concealed as age-less under the guise of representing the social norm. In this sense, while these places might not be restricted to a specific age group, they nevertheless seem to carry a specific age norm, marking older people as 'others' who are not part of this norm. Consequently, people experience ageing through and in these spaces.

I distinguish these seemingly age-less spaces from spaces that are clearly associated and labelled with the attribution of old age. These places are dedicated to specific chronological age cohorts through processes of institutionalisation, such as schools versus retirement homes or youth clubs versus pensioners' clubs. This chapter section is structured along these two types of spatial arrangements, starting with the production of old age in seemingly age-less spaces of everyday life, followed by old age-specific spaces.

6.2.1. The Production of Old Age in 'Age-less' Spaces of Everyday Life

> And once, as I was travelling to the dance school, I was standing by the underground as it pulled in. And there was someone sitting in the seat for the old people. And he saw me standing outside. And he looked at me like that. And I immediately looked away and got in. Because that's when I realised he wanted to make room for me. And I looked away, got in. I kept showing him my back. [...] Then once again he.., I said, 'No no, I'm getting out anyway.' 'No', he said, he'll make room for me. And all the people around said, 'Why don't you sit down, sit down!'
>
> *[Why does this bother you?]*

> Because you are old! You still just wanna be young (Edit Weber, 05PI, Pos. 715-727).

This paragraph is a quote from Edit Weber in which she recalls a situation where she got offered a seat in the metro on her way to dance classes she took in her early years of retirement. It clearly shows how the appearance of her body with certain characteristics serves as a central identifier of old age and is crucial for the social construction of later life (for a more detailed discussion, see *Chapter 2.1*). The seat as an object combined with the offer to sit down is associated with old age, underlining the equation of the old body with frailty and neediness. The 'priority seat' (i.e., the seat reserved for people with 'disabilities'[62]) represents the materialisation of what Mowl et al. (2000, p. 189) have framed as the "peripheralization of older people into discrete locations."

Spatialised othering appears through specific actions directed at individuals identified as old. This process also presupposes the corresponding interpretation by the 'othered' person, which can ultimately lead to self-identification as old. In other words, the construction of old age is also shaped by Ms Weber's own interpretation; it depends equally on her self-conception and on her internalised image(s) of old age (in the same vein: the example of Dagmar Stetter and her refusal to use walking poles, see *Chapter 6.1*). While spatial situations are always contextually specific and shaped by local conditions, they are also interconnected across broader spatial and scalar dimensions (see *Chapter 3.1* for a relational understanding of space). As such, spatialised othering is embedded within wider cultural norms and symbolic regimes. The strong association between old age and the act of offering a seat on public transport is anchored in a societal value system – a connection that is made visible through signage displayed at various points on the train and reinforced through frequent audio announcements. These symbols communicate normative expectations about who is entitled to – or in need of – assistance. In doing so, they implicitly categorise certain bodies as dependent, thereby contributing to the spatial marking of older individuals as 'other'.

[62] The signs for priority seating in Viennese metro trains depict not only older people (represented by a figure with a walking aid, glasses and a stooped posture), but also pregnant individuals, people with small children and persons with disabilities (indicated by a figure with a white cane and a symbol for blindness on the arm).

Even when framed as courteous or socially responsible, the gesture of offering a seat to an older person on public transport can function as an act of spatialised othering. While some may interpret it as politeness, many older individuals report such encounters as unwelcome, even humiliating. This is because the act signals their categorisation as fundamentally different – both from the general passenger population and from their own younger selves. As in Ms Weber's experience, this external attribution often feels misaligned and undesirable, casting the recipient as frail, dependent or otherwise in need of special consideration. Such assumptions are embedded within dominant social narratives that construct middle adulthood as the normative life stage, framing both youth and old age as deviations (see *Chapter 2.1*). Within this framework, old age is defined in relation to a middle-aged ideal – marked by perceived deficiencies in ability, autonomy or vitality – and thus reinforces the status of the older person as 'other'. However, ageing is not only marked by a process of being differentiated from others; it also entails a process of differentiating from one's former self over time. As Gullette (2004, p. 111, cited in van Dyk, 2015b, p. 230) puts it, ageing is a "process of difference from oneself."

Ahmed's (2000) notion of the stranger offers a useful lens for understanding how older individuals are spatially marked as 'other': "Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognised as not belonging*, as being out of place" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 21, original emphasis). Applied to the ageing body, this suggests that older people can be rendered 'strange' in everyday spaces – not because they are unknown, but because their bodies are read as incongruent with dominant norms. I argue that this external process of being marked as a 'stranger' intersects with an internal sense of estrangement: the moment one is addressed or treated as 'old' may clash profoundly with one's self-perception. This discrepancy can destabilise identity. Encounters such as being offered a seat on the metro are not merely moments of awkward social interaction; they can constitute existential disruptions – brief, unsettling recognitions of how one is perceived by others in ways that conflict with one's self-image. These micro-interactions, then, are not trivial; they carry the weight of broader cultural narratives around ageing, belonging and body norms.

The following second quote by Edit Weber represents another example of how old age is co-produced in a specific spatial arrangement. Here, she describes her experience of taking classes in a dance school with her husband:

> But you know, when we started that dance class, (.) it was all young people. I mean, we were the oldest- like by far (.) the oldest. And […] they all admired us for dancing along with them […] and we were really eager because, well, we just needed a bit more time to get everything right. And um, the [dance instructor, name anonymised] […] he was such a gentleman. He always highlighted us a lot […] whenever we learned a new dance, he would pick a woman from the group to demonstrate the dance with her. And every single time, I was terrified (.) when he picked me I was so nervous insanely uh, uh, but we did it! (Edit Weber, 05PI, Pos. 259-268).

For Ms Weber, it seems to be clear that she and her husband 'took longer' to 'get it all right' because of their older age, compared to the other participants who 'were all young'. Her experience of being treated differently because of her age did not lead to withdrawal, nor did it stop her and her husband from pursuing their hobby (as further references in the interviews about their passion for dancing indicate). While such othering could lead to forms of socio-spatial exclusion, Ms Weber turned it into a kind of positive narrative. This resonates with what van Dyk (2016, p. 113) has coined as "othering-by-valuing." The other participants of the dance class, including the instructor, have positively emphasised her and her husband's dancing performance while clearly linking this special appreciation to their older age. Despite the positive connotation, their participation and presence in the dance studio still seem to be 'age-inappropriate', insofar as Ms and Mr Weber participated in a place that is for 'young' people. However, it is important to add that the dance school is not a space specifically dedicated to young people; 'young' rather represents the general norm, and Ms Weber's and her husband's participation, due to their older age, represents a divergence. Accordingly, we can assume that if they were part of the middle-aged norm, they would not be considered as performing 'exceptionally special'. They experienced their deviation from middle adulthood as the 'normal', unmarked stage of life through processes of othering, whereby not in the form of disparagement but rather in the form of valuation (see van Dyk, 2016). In contrast, Ms Weber's demonstrated experience of spatialised othering taking place in the metro suggests the opposite. She connotes this experience with a rather negative old age attribution linked with appearing frail and in need.

Van Dyk (2016, p. 110) introduces this two-fold way of othering of old age in the context of the discursive distinction between the 'young-old' and the 'old-old', "with the young-old being valued as other and the oldest old disdained as other." What the demonstrated experiences of Ms Weber reveal is that this twofold othering along the categories of the

'young-old' associated with activity and vitality, and the 'old-old' with frailty and neediness, is spatially contingent. It is highly dependent on the situated context and can be inscribed in the subject through the respective spatial arrangements, i.e. it is spatially co-produced. I argue that a space-sensitive perspective shows how external attributions of old age are 'emplaced'; hence, they take place in a specific spatial arrangement, leading to everyday situations where the same person is othered in both ways. Ms Weber describes her participation in dance classes as 'othering-by-valuation'; on her way there, she faced 'othering-by-disparagement'. Both forms of othering can overlap and intersect in a person, depending on the specific location and spatial setting.

A spatial perspective on forms of othering, thus, puts emphasis on particular places and spatial arrangements in which othering takes place. It draws attention to the body, materialities such as objects and built forms, as well as the involved agents, their actions, movements and practices. It furthermore looks at the specific places, taking into account the discursive and institutionalised frameworks and their possible age-related attributions. Spatialised othering illuminates that attributions of old age are not statically attached to individuals. Old age rather "emerges as a phenomenon through the entanglement of diverse materialities, practices, discourses, and subjectivities" (Depner et al., 2023, p. 7). The concept, therefore, ties in with accounts from material gerontology studies and their understanding of ageing as "co-constituted in a nexus of discursive-material practices" (Depner et al., 2023, p. 7). Spatialised othering, however, puts particular emphasis on places and the spatial co-constitution of ageing subjects. In that vein, its theoretical underpinning is a dialectical approach to relational space and, importantly, follows a human-centred approach to agency.[63]

A relational space approach sheds light on temporalities immanent in places. As discussed above in *Chapter 6.1*, this puts focus on the embodied experience of space and, therefore, how relationships to and perception of space are bound up with individual experiences of time. Furthermore, a focus on temporal dimensions of space reveals that cities are planned, built and organised along certain temporalities. This is related to temporal norms of how urban spaces are experienced and used. For example, navigation apps display

[63] In *Chapters 2.4 & 3.1*, an in-depth analysis of theoretical approaches to understanding the relationship between ageing and space is provided, articulating my theoretical framework and distinguishing this perspective from material gerontology approaches which are rooted in new materialism.

distances in walking minutes based on certain average norms of speed of movement. In this sense, I argue that spatialised othering is also manifested through new and deviant spatial rhythms. This is embedded in a normative framework that views the experience of older people in retirement as 'out of time' with the 'normal' rhythms of the city, which is predominantly organised and planned according to the norm of the middle-aged, productive and able-bodied dweller (Gabauer, 2022; Lager, Van Hoven, & Huigen, 2016).[64]

Retirement is one of the most important structural markers of old age that involves not only a new economic situation but also a restructuring of everyday life and a shift in public–private boundaries. As a lifecourse event, it has an essential impact on how daily rhythms and routines change, which also affects spatial practices. This aspect becomes apparent both in how individuals describe changes in relation to their own life course (retirement compared to working life) and in contrast to the daily rhythms of others (those who are not retired). In the conducted interviews, altered temporalities due to retirement and their spatialisation often culminated in descriptions of relationships with immediate neighbours. Diverging (institutionalised) age-related temporalities of everyday life can lead to a lack of encounters with neighbours on the staircase. The transition to retirement can mean that neighbours who are in the workforce or have school-age children are rarely or never met due to their different institutionalised daily routines. In this vein, spatialised othering also focuses on how old age is produced through new (out-of-norm) 'place-time' routines of older people. This links to what I will discuss further in the subsequent section (see *Chapter 6.2.2*), focusing on the organisation of urban societies along age cohorts and socio-spatial separations of institutionally defined age groups.

Spatialised othering is not only enacted by other age groups. Attributions of old and resistance against them are equally re-created by the older individuals themselves, through their everyday practices. Ageist practices of labelling, including and excluding can be exercised by and between older people and not just by 'non-old' persons towards them. As my study shows and also other research indicates, many older people tend to essentialise and make normative assumptions about 'successful' ageing and use negative

[64] That labour became the powerful organising time of urban societies to which other aspects of everyday life are subordinated, has been famously demonstrated by Lefebvre (2004) and his work on 'rhythmanalysis'. It has since been elaborated on and developed further by other scholars, including in relation to old age (see e.g., Lager et al., 2016).

age stereotypes to categorise and differentiate themselves from peers (see Barron, 2021b, p. 670; van Dyk, 2016, pp. 116–117). Respondents compare their ageing with other people in general, as well as with friends and especially with their partner, in whose ageing process and the way of dealing with it they often try to actively intervene. In that sense, comparing with others' ageing process is key for their self-identification. Watching and experiencing others' age shapes one's own conceptualisations and understandings of ageing (see Barron, 2021b).

> ***Birgit Weiss***
>
> Ms Weiss is 69 years old and lives alone in an 80m2 municipal housing apartment in the 16th district. She presents herself as very active, sportive and independent – aligning well with the ideal-typical image of the 'active retiree'. She has been divorced twice and is in a casual partnership for several years now, with separate households. Her partner is still married to another woman, with whom he also spends time regularly. Family – meaning particularly her two children, daughters-in-law and grandchildren – plays an important role in her life. In her weekly routine, she spends a significant amount of time with the one of her two granddaughters who lives in Vienna.
>
> She has been retired for nine years, a life stage she describes as very positive and self-determined – especially in comparison to her working years, which were shaped by full-time employment, being a single mother and later caring for her mother. Her self-image as a hard-working, persistent individual with a strong sense of responsibility and ambition is also reflected in the stories about her childhood. She frequently mentions that, as a 'working-class child' growing up in Vienna, life was not easy for her and she feels she received less support from her parents compared to her brother. Her pension is above the Austrian average for women; due to comparable long (fulltime) employment periods.

For Birgit Weiss, other people and how they are dealing with their ageing process mainly serve as bad examples. She presents her own ageing as predominantly exceptional compared to others and narrates her 'ageing performance' better than the way others age. In doing so, she makes judgements about what counts as a good or bad life in old age. This means she constructs her self-conception of being old by comparing her ageing process with others' ageing and, at the same time, drawing a distinct boundary to them. Stories about others serve as negative models for ageing and oldness, linking them with connotations of being like "grannies", who "are limited in terms of movement", "are

slow" and "need time to do something" (Birgit Weiss, 02PI, Pos. 138-139). In contrast to them, she presents herself as extremely active and fit. For her, becoming frail and looking old appears, to some extent, to be a matter of choice – implying a degree of personal responsibility. It is seen as the result of not taking proper care of one's body, of being lazy or passive.

How she 'comes across' when going outside, meaning how she appears and how others could judge her, is very important to her. It is about the condition and athletic appearance of her body, which is also expressed through her activities. She explains in great detail the types of sports she is doing and how she uses public spaces to be active. This was also vividly demonstrated during the go-along interview; hence, it has also become visible *in situ*. Unlike the go-alongs with the other research participants, which have been rather shorter ways for everyday errands, the one with her was a longer hike through the vineyards on the western edge of Vienna, which represents a regular "marching" route for her (Birgit Weiss, 02PI, Pos. 128). During the walking interview, she not only performed her own activity and physical fitness but also marked distinctions between herself and others through her spatial practices. She appears very sporty and athletic and is dressed in a youthful and stylish way. She walks briskly and gives the impression that it is very important to her to distance herself from the slower walkers and to present herself as highly physically fit.

The links between bodywork and (anti-)ageing are increasingly being examined by critical ageing research (for an overview, see van Dyk, 2020, p. 65). In addition to the body being cultivated, nurtured and transformed by sportive activity, by anti-ageing cosmetics, beauty services or even (new) technologies of plastic surgery, I argue that the appearance of the non-old, youthful body is also produced in and through urban space. This means, as highlighted in the previous section (see *Chapter 6.1*), it is about the dimension of how bodily changes serve as markers of age and how the body simultaneously acts as an interface through which spatial experiences are mediated. However, in this paragraph, I aim to broaden the focus and emphasise – as illuminated by Birgit Weiss' narratives – *that places are actively used and enable embodiments of active ageing*. With this, I draw on work that shows how public space "provides a stage for self-representation and self-performance" (Strüver, 2009, p. 77, translation A.G.), i.e. space outside of the domestic sphere is used for the purpose of seeing and being seen, hence for showing and performing (a certain ideal of) ageing. In this way (and drawing on a

dialectical understanding of relational space), through her use and appearance in public space, Ms Weiss is constituted as an active and sporty ager and, at the same time, constitutes the place as a space of active ageing (see also Strüver, 2009, p. 78). Understanding the constitutive interrelation between old age and space equally requires analysing how these meanings are constantly recreated; in a mutual interplay between discursive structures (e.g. active ageing and ideals of 'active retirees') and embodied practices of older people (e.g., going outside versus staying inside). The symbolic meanings of going outside versus staying inside have also been shown by other studies illustrating that leaving home is related to keeping the body active, young and fit, versus staying at home as connoted with passivity (Denninger et al., 2014, pp. 224–227; Mowl et al., 2000, p. 194).

Age as a social identifier does not play out on its own but rather powerfully intersects with other social positions. Hence, different and divergent images of old age are inscribed in certain places, and their meanings are always in relation to other social positions. In the narrations of Birgit Weiss, the intersection of age as a category of difference with ability is pivotal.

> ***Peter Dreyer***
>
> Mr Dreyer, a former teacher, is 69 years old and retired for four years. He lives in the same municipal housing building as Ms Birgit Weiss, in a 72m2 apartment together with his wife. He grew up in a small town in Upper Austria and moved to Vienna in the course of his studies. He shows a comparable high educational background and a high monthly income. Unlike Ms Weiss, he experiences his new role as a retiree with much more uncertainty. For him, it is accompanied by a deep search for meaning and a sense of dissatisfaction with himself and his life in general. He appears very pensive and unhappy in his relationship. He dreams of alternative ways of living, such as herding sheep in the mountains or moving into a shared living arrangement with others.
>
> Since retiring, he has been spending more time in the place where he grew up, having inherited his parents' house. He describes this as both beautiful and emotionally draining, as it deepens his reflection on his past – particularly his difficult relationship with his family, and especially his father, who died by suicide. He was one of the few who declined a second interview – not with a direct refusal, but rather through the absence of concrete responses, despite my repeated attempts to follow up.

Furthermore, we can observe a gendered dimension in the meaning of going outside versus staying at home. The significance of the domestic space is shaped by underlying, contrary social roles of men and women in the context of retirement. My data reveals that the negative perception of the domestic space, culminating in staying at home linked with unproductivity and redundancy, in contrast to going outside being linked with activity and social engagement, is more prevalent for men (see also Mowl et al., 2000). Peter Dreyer, who is in his early years of retirement, describes being out of the workforce as feeling "thrown back on oneself" (Peter Dreyer, 06PI, Pos. 71-72), largely characterised by the search for a new meaningful activity and by the fear of letting himself go too much. Staying at home, not going outside and getting lost in playing with the tablet or phone, as he reports, is for him connotated with passivity, inactivity and laziness, and as something that should rather be avoided. At the same time, he repeatedly emphasises the differences between him and his wife, who, unlike him, is much more attached to home and family life. He describes her, while also problematising this, as being very busy with the household, their children and grandchildren, including with her role as 'substitute granny' for children from other families. She is, as he puts it, constantly "bumbling around on a small scale" (Peter Dreyer, 06PI, Pos. 490).

Retirement represents a major event in a person's lifecourse, but one that indeed can be experienced quite differently. How the post-employment phase is organised, and which (new) social roles are linked with, is highly gendered. This means that the public–private divide seems to have different meanings for either men or women insofar as the female domestic role is ongoing beyond retirement (despite employment in paid labour), whereby the male's productive role outside the household stops with his retirement (see also Mowl et al., 2000). This, for instance, is also expressed in that it is mostly women who refer to experiencing age-related bodily changes through limitations in pursuing housework and domestic duties (see *Chapter 6.1*).

The gender-specific significance of the space of the household associated with femininity makes reproductive work at home a mostly female responsibility. As regards my sample, the home is (still) heavily feminised (in particular, reflecting the interviewed generations), meaning that women do not lose their social role and obligation with the transition to retirement and the associated withdrawal from the public sphere, as reproductive tasks in the private, domestic sphere continue into old age. Therefore, despite its negative connotations of passivity, unproductivity and decline, the domestic space of the home can

also be associated with a positive image of ageing, linking it with activity and productivity. This means that not being able any more to fulfil household duties can represent for women a stronger old age identifier compared to men. Hence, for women, experienced age-related bodily changes particularly materialise through disruptions in reproductive practices on the scale of the private home. For men, it is rather the inability to leave the domestic sphere and be active in the public. In this context, Mowl et al. (2000) even describe the continuation and maintenance of housework in old age as a form of 'female resistance to ageing'. Due to women's enduring domestic role, the home is more likely to serve as a significant symbol of "positive feminine identity and a form of resistance against negative old age identities" (Mowl et al., 2000, p. 194). Compared to men, for many women, a tidy home signifies someone who is active, capable and socially connected, while an untidy home implies that the inhabitant is isolated, frail and struggling to manage (Mowl et al., 2000, p. 194).

The spatiality of gender roles also appears in the increasing performance of care work in old age. For many women, kin care represents a form of continuation of labour biographies. Many interviewed women emphasise their continued caring activities with retirement: They care in their new role as grandmothers, for their parents and parents-in-law, and, later, for their husbands. Edit Weber, for example, explicitly frames her new role in taking care of her grandchildren as a way of compensating for giving up the family-led grocery store. In contrast, her husband, Hubert Weber, strongly links his activities in his retirement predominantly with the need 'to go outside', leaving the domestic space and "finding yourself something new" (Hubert Weber, 05PI, Pos. 386-387). In Edit Weber's narrative, caregiving for her grandchildren emerges as an extension of her paid work life, with significant implications for her everyday spaces. Her early years of retirement were characterised by commuting every two weeks between her home in Vienna and her daughter's home in Vorarlberg, the westernmost federal province of Austria, bordering Switzerland and Germany. She regularly took the overnight train, an about 10-hour journey, to look after her grandchildren while her daughter was at work. Thus, caring obligations in retirement are often not confined to one household but stretch across several multiple domestic spaces – from their own home to those of their children, grandchildren and parents(-in-law).

Even though caring for relatives in retirement can involve increased mobility in the form of regular travelling of longer distances and growth of embodied domestic space, it is still

characterised by a retreat into the private sphere. This becomes even more evident when it comes to caring for one's spouse, which again particularly affects women (see e.g., Auth & Leitner, 2018; Eriksson, Sandberg, & Hellström, 2013; Morgan, Ann Williams, Trussardi, & Gott, 2016; Williams, Giddings, Bellamy, & Gott, 2017). For Ms Stetter, her husband's illness in his old age was essentially accompanied by a retreat into the private domain. Even though he had a 24-hour carer, she had to be constantly available at home. She felt housebound, unable to leave their apartment and pursue activities she had done before. His death, as painful as it was, she experienced as a liberation, a 're-gaining of individual autonomy' and a re-expansion of her spatial scale of movement.

In academic and, above all, political debates, age-related withdrawal from public life and the reduction of mobility distances are predominantly discussed in the context of the 'fourth age' and, thus, associated with own physical limitations and frailty. The retreat into the domestic space as a result of pursuing care work in old age remains rather underestimated. This can be linked to a critique of ageing-in-place policies that few scholars have made, arguing that ageing-in-place can encourage tendencies towards privatisation and familialisation of care (e.g., Milligan, 2009; see also *Chapter 2.3.2*). Equating a shrinking spatial radius of movement with increasing physical limitations in later life stages is highly problematic, particularly from a feminist perspective. It does not take into account older people's caring activities, which (still) particularly applies to female biographies, and which often lead to a 'shrinking of space' in the sense of a reduction of mobility radii. It is especially women who take over care responsibilities for spouses in older age; not only due to the persistence of traditional gender roles but also to the structural trend of women outliving men, often referred to as the 'feminisation' of ageing (Tews, 1993).

6.2.2. Spaces of Old Age and the Institutionalised Lifecourse

My previous remarks highlighted seemingly non-age-specific or 'age-less' spaces where age-related norms are nonetheless deeply embedded, subtly shaping interactions and expectations. In contrast, certain spaces and places are explicitly designated as 'spaces of old age', overtly marked by their association with later life. These places are institutionally dedicated to specific chronological age cohorts through processes of formal categorisation and spatial organisation. Consequently, spatialised age attributions become highly institutionalised, and spatialised forms of othering emerge through the use or

avoidance of these age-defined places. This phenomenon connects to sociological accounts of how (urban) societies are organised around 'the institutionalised lifecourse' (Kohli, 1985), characterised by distinct life stages, transitions and chrono-normative expectations (see Freeman, 2010), that materialise in space (Gabauer, 2022, pp. 130–131; Müller et al., 2022, p. 51). This underscores how old age-related social infrastructures embody chrono-normative orders. Access to and use of these age-graded spaces often depend on formally belonging to a designated age group, reinforcing social boundaries and shaping the lived experiences of older adults within the urban fabric.

Ideal-typical spaces of old age are retirement and nursing homes or other old age-related housing, such as assisted and curated living arrangements in different nuances. As part of my research interest, none of the interviewed persons live in such facilities, and none of them are currently planning or seriously considering moving into old age-specific housing. All respondents articulate the general wish to age in place 'for as long as possible'; however, most of them do not completely dismiss the option of moving to old age-specific housing. Nevertheless, upon further questioning, it becomes clear that usually, relocation is seen more as an abstract possibility, something that might only happen at some point in the future. Only very few have actually looked into options more concretely, i.e. at least researched or visited specific projects. Furthermore, what the interviews reveal is that levels of care needs do not have any influence on personal opinions in this regard. Hence, the wish to stay put is equally expressed by people who already need help in the household or (professional) care in order to maintain daily life.

Hence, the general tenor is that "it's too early" (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 155-156) to move into a retirement home. This also applies to other age-specific housing options, such as new and 'innovative' senior co-housing projects. Respondents like Mr Dreyer, who express a general openness and curiosity towards such housing arrangements, nevertheless consider themselves "still too young for that now" (Peter Dreyer, 06PI, Pos. 394). This finding from the interviews with older people coincides with statements of interviewed experts, who precisely report difficulties in marketing projects that are aimed at the group of the active 'young-old', such as senior co-housing.[65]

[65] This finding draws on interviews with experts involved in senior co-housing projects (12EI, 14EI) both of whom additionally confirmed a pronounced gender bias, revealing that new housing forms for older adults predominantly appeal to women. The insight on challenges in effectively engaging and addressing older people was further substantiated through an

Contemporary empirical research, as discussed in detail in the *Chapter 2.3*, emphasises the aspects of growing place attachment and tendencies of decreasing willingness to relocate as people age (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 133). Indeed, the home and staying put for many of the respondents of this study is strongly linked with maintaining autonomy and independence. Relocating into old age-specific housing is associated with decline and a certain lack, i.e. it is only pursued when ageing at home is 'no longer possible' precisely because of a lack of ability to maintain a 'normal' life. This implies that the strong rejection of relocation in older age is embedded in symbolic meanings of old age-specific housing that correlate and are entangled with increased feelings of place attachment. I argue that this is not only the case of retirement or nursing homes, but also applies to so-called alternative and innovative housing options for older adults that emphasise a rather positive image of ageing. While promoting ageing with associations of activity and social engagement, these models nevertheless remain distinct from the mainstream housing market by being explicitly designated for 'old age' or 'senior citizens'. Consequently, relocating to such spaces symbolically marks individuals as 'old', carrying significant social and personal implications. These housing models can certainly be enriching and supportive for individuals in later life, promoting self-determination and social integration.[66] Yet, they are embedded within an old age-specific activity paradigm that aligns closely with the idealised image of the active, healthy 'third-ager'. This paradigm, however, perpetuates a form of 'othering-by-valuation' (van Dyk, 2016), as discussed earlier in the context of Edith Weber's experience with dance classes, where older adults are positively distinguished yet still set apart from societal norms. Despite their potential to enhance quality of life, these innovative housing models may thus risk reinforcing societal perceptions that marginalise older adults by framing them as a distinct group, defined by their age rather than their diverse identities and experiences beyond the category of age. This dynamic underscores the tension between promoting 'positive' ageing, addressing housing needs of older people and inadvertently perpetuating age-

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informal talk at a 2024 symposium on care and 'caring communities' in Vienna, convened at the intersection of academia, policy and practice (*3. Sorgenetz-Symposium: Über Caring Communities zur Caring Society! Gemeinsam unterwegs: Gesundheitsförderung, Soziale Arbeit, Pflege und Sorgepolitik*, November 27–28, 2004, Vienna).

[66] These highly positive narratives surrounding co-housing projects for older adults are primarily articulated by residents, initiators and implementers, as observed during a site visit to a prominent co-housing project in Vienna and at relevant events associated with the International Building Exhibition (IBA) Vienna on 'New Social Housing' (2016–2022). However, a closer examination reveals that these housing initiatives also exhibit a distinctly class-specific character: Typically, it is individuals with higher educational attainment and substantial financial resources who ultimately move into such projects.

based exclusion and stereotypes. Thus, despite their potential benefits on an individual level, these models mark older people as different and risk reinforcing societal perceptions that marginalise older adults.

Housing with care services tend to evoke a negative picture of old age, associated with fragility, loss of autonomy and dependency. I argue that this image is further reinforced by discursive shifts towards ageing-in-place policies. These shifts are closely connected with reforms in the formal framework governing entitlement to a place in a retirement or nursing home. In Vienna, the *Fonds Soziales Wien* (FSW, Vienna Social Fund) regulates the allocation, assignment and funding of places in care facilities. Crucially, institutional living is categorised into retirement homes (*Altenheime*) and nursing homes (*Pflegeheime*), with both requiring proof of care needs assessed in advance by the FSW (see FSW, 2020b).[67] The FSW's strategic framework explicitly prioritises institutional care only when living at home becomes untenable. This policy shift, which materialised with the introduction of new regulations in 2012, emphasises mobile care over institutionalisation, reflecting broader ageing-in-place trends.[68]

In this sense, moving into a retirement home in good health is no longer feasible, as care dependency has become a prerequisite. As Ms Richter notes, this was different at the time her parents moved into a retirement home when no formal requirement of a care level was needed: They "were actually in good health" (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 135). In her narration, her parents' relocation into a retirement home did not appear to be an urgent necessity due to age-related restrictions and care needs, nor did it seem to be accompanied by a clear break from their previous routines of everyday life. She rather frames their relocation as characterised by a continuation of their everyday practices:

> they still went on the same walks they always used to […] my dad kept getting his newspaper from the same tobacconist. […] Basically, they somehow just were living freely (Isolde Richter, 03PI, Pos. 178-180).

A crucial factor that seemed to play a role here was certainly the fact that the retirement home was in their residential neighbourhood, which meant they could visit the same

[67] Nursing homes are designed for older adults with significant care needs, while retirement homes also require residents to have a certain level of care dependency, typically at least care level 2. Exceptions may be granted for 'social indications', such as severe social isolation or when a partner requires relocation into an institutional setting due to care needs (see also *Chapter 4.2*)

[68] This information is based on insights from an expert interview (18EI).

places and pursue the same habits and routes as before their relocation. Nevertheless, this example also shows how the inscribed discursive meaning of age-connoted places is contingent and changes in relation to socio-cultural images of old age and how they are enshrined in legal frameworks. This means that over time, how and which spaces are socially constructed in relation to ageing by the public, by institutions and by older people themselves changes.

I argue that ageing-in-place is accompanied by a symbolic and material degradation of the care home. It reinforces the dichotomy between the active–frail; young-old–old-old; and independent–dependent.[69] Moving into an institutional home is heavily associated with 'the end', a last resort when there is no other option, as captured in the sentiment, "when you're in that situation, it probably doesn't really matter where you are" (Birgit Weiss, 02PI, Pos. 566-567). In this way, ageing-in-place represents an ideal that is deeply embedded in 'active' and 'healthy ageing' discourses. This is particularly evident when discussing ageing-in-place within the context of 'age-friendly' cities approaches. Corresponding political measures are closely intertwined with the WHO's model of age-friendly and communities, which is grounded in the WHO's active ageing and the subsequent healthy ageing framework (see WHO, 2018) – as explained in more detail above (see *Chapter 2.3.4*). While such movements indeed promote positive images of ageing – seeking to support diverse, self-determined ageing trajectories and to move away from deficit-oriented biomedical narratives – the devaluation of old age as such remains unchallenged. For example, van Dyk (2015, p. 106), among others, points out that deficit perspectives are primarily questioned only in relation to active and capable older people:

> While the young-old are increasingly addressed as co-producers of societal conditions and active subjects in political, media and scientific discourses, the very old remain in the status of objects as those to be cared for, supported and provided for (van Dyk, 2015a, p. 106, ref. to Gilleard & Higgs, 2000, p. 199; Katz, 2005, p. 136; translation A.G.).

The very old, sick and severely care-dependent are neglected within the activity paradigm of seeing older people (van Dyk, 2015a, p. 106) and, as I argue, are materially marginalised through the institutional form of the retirement or nursing home.

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[69] There are efforts in Vienna to develop housing models that span the 'third' and the 'fourth age': The association 'Living without Age Limit' *(Verein Wohnen ohne Alterslimit)*, for example, precisely aims to create co-housing concepts that support communal living in old age not only in the active retirement time but also when individuals become in need of care or assistance (WOAL, 2025; 12EI).

In this sense, the promotion of ageing-in-place as an ideal is linked to a desirable way of ageing, connoted with activity, health, autonomy and productivity. It remains aligned with an anti-ageing paradigm by idealising a specific way of ageing that is diametrically opposed to forms of ageing in institutional housing. This is reflected in studies showing that a person's expectations of their later life influence their housing preferences: People with positive images of ageing, who anticipate an independent and active old age, are more likely to reject institutional living; in contrast, those with a deficit-oriented perspective on health and social connections in old age tend to prefer institutional forms of housing (Kolland et al., 2022, p. 153, ref. to Spangenberg et al., 2013). This dichotomy between active and frail – where activity is associated with ageing-in-place and frailty with retirement and nursing homes – is challenged by the promotion of mobile care services, which advocate for staying put even in the context of increasing dependency and care needs. I will address this issue in *Chapter 7* by arguing for a reconsideration of this binary divide in the context of ageing-in-place.

Aside from forms of old age-specific housing, pensioners' clubs and day centres also represent clearly defined and institutionalised age-segregated spaces. Day centres in Vienna are managed by the *Fonds Soziales Wien* (FSW). Similar to residential care homes, the prerequisite for a place is proof of care needs officially assessed by the FSW.[70] For the interviewed people who visit pensioners' clubs and day centres, the places predominantly serve as an important point for social integration, activity and care. In contrast to day centres, which are merely considered care facilities, pensioners' clubs represent a place for leisure activity, which means joining them is much more a clear, self-determined choice at a stage of life when many still identify with the 'young-old'. Many other research participants who do not visit pensioners' clubs explicitly refuse to go there on the grounds that they may not be adequate for them.[71] Interestingly, what becomes evident in this context is that their reluctance to use these kinds of places stems not from a simple, one-dimensional association with old age, but rather from a specific image of old age that interferes with other social positions, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity/migration or ability.

[70] More details on the organisational structure can be found in *Chapter 4.2* where I introduce the field access.
[71] Similar applies to other curated programmes for pensioners offered by the City of Vienna, which many respondents negate to use.

Beritan Çil

Ms Çil, 72 years old, migrated from Turkey to Vienna in 1974 as a 'guest worker' without any education and/or training. She has been in precarious work conditions throughout her life. Her last job before retirement was a cleaner in a hospital. She receives a very small pension but clearly states that she is better off now that she no longer has to work. For her the award of an 80% disability was a form of liberation what allowed her to retire early, before the formal retirement age.

She is single, divorced for 25 years, lives in the 5th district in a small apartment where she moved seven years ago. She lives alone but states that sometimes her son stays with her because he is sick and needs her support. When he stays with her, she offers him her bedroom and she herself sleeps in the living-kitchen. Her housing biography is very fractured and characterised by several relocations with experiences of living in 'substandard' apartments. The interview with her is dominated by her descriptions of precarious living conditions and her wish to move in another 'better apartment' but which seems to be not possible due to financial constraints. It is further permeated by narrations about negative life events, diseases and bodily limitations. Regular visiting a pensioners' club represents a key social activity in her everyday life. The place became an important meeting point where friendships developed.

Viennese pensioners' clubs are often associated with working-class backgrounds and are aimed at people with lower incomes and fewer social resources.[72] This is especially true of the researched pensioners' club in the 15th district, which additionally has a strong focus on retired Turkish migrant workers.[73] As in the case of Ms Çil, the pensioners' club serves as an important place for leisure activities and social encounters, thus materialising a growing intimate and social space in retirement, compensating for a loss thereof. Especially for people with low income and few social contacts, the club represents an important meeting place for drinking coffee, chatting and playing games. In particular, the respondents with a Turkish migration history, many of whom speak little or no German, emphasise the presence of a Turkish community in the club as a crucial reason for their participation, including the fact that the club manager is also an immigrant from

[72] Furthermore, they are often associated with the Social Democratic Party, which dominates the political landscape of Vienna and was sole ruling party for long periods.
[73] This information steams from conducted expert interviews (15EI, 17EI).

Turkey and shares a certain 'ethnic identity' and speaks their language. For them, the place of the pensioners' club supports positive self-identification.

Hence, as a 'space of old age', pensioners' clubs can provoke both: They can support older people's sense of independence, self-determination and wellbeing. Conversely, refusing to go to such places allows individuals to distance themselves from negative discourses of old age by associating pensioners' clubs with 'other' social groups (see also Pain et al., 2000). For many participants of my study, pensioners' clubs evoke a rather passive and negative picture of ageing. They are seen as spaces for people who lack social integration and independence, and who are in strong need of a kind of 'curated entertainment programme'. This perception leads to a demarcation from such spaces by highlighting one's own high level of activity and extensive social network. In other words, respondents distance themselves by emphasising their strong social involvement and robust family and social connections, underscoring that they are not dependent on making new friends and are capable of occupying themselves in meaningful ways.

Irina Huber

Ms Huber is 75 years old and lives alone in a very small – 35m2 – apartment in a limited-profit housing complex in the 15th district. She is in a partnership, though she and her partner live separately. She is divorced once. The marriage resulted in a daughter with whom she has a very close relationship, including a strong bond with her daughter's family. Ms Huber grew up in Vienna, in the same area where she currently lives, but she has moved several times within the city – mainly within the western part and also in the 21st district, located in the northernmost part of Vienna.

She completed an apprenticeship and worked part-time for much of her life – initially in her ex-husband's business while raising her daughter, and later as an office worker in a large company. Her monthly income, consisting of a pension and maintenance payments from her ex-husband, amounts to around 1,400 euros, placing her in a lower income bracket.

I got in touch with Ms Huber through the neighbourhood centre in the 15th district, where she volunteers. She is a close friend of Birgit Weiss, introduced earlier. Like Ms Weiss, Ms Huber often refers to her age in relation to her partner's; both women note that their partners are several years older and increasingly affected by age-related limitations. However, they differ in how they respond to their partners' ageing. While Ms Weiss often criticises her partner for not actively dealing with his declining bodily condition and wishes he would do more for his health, Ms Huber tends to

> adopt a more caring and supportive role, approaching her partner's ageing primarily from a nurturing perspective.

Ms Huber is one of the respondents who clearly refuses to visit a pensioners' club even though there would be one just across her apartment. Nevertheless, she regularly attends a neighbourhood centre[74] where she is involved in community activities. While the centre is not exclusively a place for older people – unlike pensioners' clubs where retirement is a formal requirement for participation – people in their post-employment phase are one of its main target groups, and most of the actively involved volunteers are predominantly retirees.[75] I argue that, similar to visiting a pensioners' club, Ms Huber's participation in the neighbourhood centre can be considered as old age-related. She began her involvement there during her transition to retirement, which, as for many others in my sample, was accompanied by a search for a new occupation in order to do "something meaningful" (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 32). Crucially, however, her engagement in the neighbourhood centre is tied to a different narrative of old age: one that is associated with activity, social integration, productivity and contributing to society. She states that she wanted to engage in volunteer work while maintaining her autonomy and self-determination. At the same time, she clearly distances herself from certain activities in the neighbourhood centre such as the "crafting club", "memory training" and other "over-organised events" noting that these are not suitable for her (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 469-482). In her narrations, there is a clear rejection of the association of old age with a decline in self-determination. She emphasises her ability to make decisions for herself and contends, for example, that she does not need 'to be taught' what it means to 'age well' or be reduced to the role of a passive consumer of activities which, like the mentioned 'crafting club', carry an undertone of infantilisation.

In contrast to the pensioners' club, the neighbourhood centre primarily addresses older people as volunteers who are encouraged to actively contribute to the community and social life in the district. This includes established programs as well as opportunities for participants to propose and organise their own events and courses. Nevertheless, the

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[74] The neighbourhood centres are a facility operated by the Vienna Welfare Services *(Hilfswerk)*. More details on the organisational structure can be found in *Chapter 4.2* where I introduce the field access.
[75] According to the manager of the neighbourhood centre (08EI).

centre also offers activities that, like those in the pensioners' club, approach participants as rather 'passive recipients' – activities from which individuals like Ms Huber clearly distance themselves. The pensioners' club, on the other hand, offers fewer opportunities for participants to engage in program design and has a more pronounced consumer-oriented character. This is reflected in practices such as retirees sitting at tables while the staff serve them coffee and snacks. [76]

Nevertheless, some individuals take on different roles and, in doing so, challenge and negotiate the inscribed image(s) of old age. For example, Fritz Paschner plays a distinct role in the pensioners' club that he regularly visits. He is actively involved as a volunteer, contributing to the design and organisation of the club's programs and events. He was also the person introduced to me as the primary contact for conducting my research on-site. Initially, his demeanour gave me the impression that he was an employee responsible for managing the club. Drawing on Pain et al. (2000, p. 387), it can be argued that it is through the predominantly passive roles of other club members – who are largely service recipients – that Mr Paschner establishes his identity as an active and responsible senior, distinguishing himself from the others.

Spatialised othering, therefore, also occurs significantly through institutionalised frameworks and their spatial manifestation. In Vienna, this primarily materialises within the housing sector and through activity and 'activation' spaces. These dedicated, institutionalised places are designed based on the category of old age, a category that often overlaps with other social positionings. Yet, older people demonstrate agency over their self-definition by explicitly demarcating themselves – either by not using these spaces, or by participating selectively, taking on certain roles, or skipping certain programmes. In doing so, they distance themselves from negative age attributions and differentiate themselves from the 'others' who (fully) participate.

[76] Approaches and forms of organisation vary across Vienna's 135 pensioners' clubs. My analysis focuses specifically on one club in the 15th district. Despite this, expert interviews (11EI, 18EI) confirm that, in general, Viennese pensioners' clubs still project a rather 'old-fashioned', deficit-oriented image of old age. This perception has spurred increasing efforts in recent years to diversify the clubs' image and promote a more 'modern', dynamic and inclusive understanding of ageing (also reflected in their online presence, see Häuser zum Leben, n.d.).

6.2.3. Summing Up

The concept of *spatialised othering* illuminates the spatial dimensions of labelling older people as 'other'. It frames age attributions as 'emplaced', enabling scrutiny of how forms of exclusion or differentiation are situated within and dependent upon specific spatial arrangements. Spatialised othering bridges multiple scales, integrating individual experiences of ageing with broader structural conditions and discourses, such as policies and planning frameworks surrounding ageing-in-place. In this sense, old age, as a category of difference, is *locally situated* – tied to specific spatial contexts yet always embedded in and materialising through overarching spatial scales, societal images and norms.

I have demonstrated in this chapter that identities of old age are spatially contingent, shaped by divergent modes of subjectivation – from the 'active' to the 'frail ager' – depending on specific spatial arrangements. Spatialised othering materialises along the axis of everyday and institutionalised spaces, allowing for a typology of seemingly 'age-less' spaces of everyday life versus formally dedicated 'spaces of old age'. As illustrated with reference to van Dyk (2016), spatialised othering can manifest in the form of appraisal or disparagement.

Places are positioned and attributed with old age in relation to other places through discursive regimes and embodied practices. The perception that places are (in)appropriate for or dedicated to certain ages reflects the chrono-normative ordering of spaces, where societal norms assign specific age groups to certain spaces or activities, deeming them 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' based on age. It is also crucial to consider what is defined as 'old' and to recognise that spatialised images of old age are contingent and evolve over time, as illustrated by changing perceptions of retirement homes. The usage of spaces can be linked to stereotypical notions of old age within a decline narrative – such as vulnerability, immobility and dependency – or, conversely, to activity and productivity. Notions of old age intersect with other social categories, such as class, gender and geographical belonging, which can lead older individuals to avoid certain places because they reject their associated attributions. Consequently, they differentiate themselves from other older people through their spatial practices, such as how they use and appear in public spaces, or through the non-use of certain social spaces and the refusal of specific services. In doing so, they label and categorise others by assigning them to social

identifications alongside old age. As Pain et al. (2000, p. 382) highlight, for theorising and empirically exploring the spatial dimensions of ageism, it is important "to recognise that the sites in which ageism occurs are constructed of identities of class, gender, 'race', and so on, as well as of age." This perspective necessitates an intersectional analysis of age as a social category, acknowledging that age-related ascriptions are intertwined with other socio-structural conditions and social positionings. For instance, my analyses resonate with findings from Mowl et al. (2000), underscoring the deeply gendered nature of the domestic home's role in retirement and how the meaning of 'staying at home' versus 'going outside' unfolds differently for women and men. While male experiences of old age often involve seeking new activities outside the home, female old age is frequently shaped by bodily changes related to housework and potential physical limitations, with active and 'successful' ageing framed through the continued performance of domestic and care work.

In seemingly 'age-less spaces' – places not explicitly designated for a specific age group – the category of age is still inscribed through the overarching norm of the apparently age-less, middle-aged, able-bodied adult. People othered as old are marked as different precisely because their attributed age category is framed as a deviation from this normative standard of mid-adulthood. The production of old age through spaces specifically dedicated to older people follows the same logic: whether framed positively or negatively, old age represents a form of lack due to its binary opposition to youth (Cristofovivi, 1999; see also *Chapter 2.1*).

While curated spaces dedicated to old age can serve as crucial anchor points for social integration and health promotion, their strong age-specific connotations can lead some groups and individuals to avoid identifying with or accessing these services. Nevertheless, such places can also be important spaces of opportunity, addressing people who might otherwise be unreachable, often through not only the category of old age but in connection with other social positionings. Many of the City of Vienna's offerings for 'the elderly' are target-group-specific within the broader group of older adults, focusing on subgroups such as migrants, non-German speakers, low-income individuals, those living with dementia or potential volunteers for social engagement.[77] However, this targeted approach often overlooks the dynamic, processual nature of ageing, framing these subgroups as static and

[77] These insights are grounded on expert interviews (05EI, 08EI, 09EI, 10EI, 11EI).

fixed rather than fluid and transitory, thus limiting the adaptability of services to the evolving needs and identities of older adults. Additionally, such spaces can be highly discriminatory (even while enabling), as spatialised othering constructs individuals as 'old', 'migrant', or 'demented', reinforcing and reproducing these attributions.

6.3. Biographical Internalisation of Space

Mr Weber, who has lived in the same house since he was a child, repeatedly mentions the structural changes in his neighbourhood; "there is an insane, insane amount of construction going on here" (Hubert Weber, 05PI, Pos. 966). He tells me how he loves walking through his neighbourhood and looking at the houses, their old facades and historic entrance doors, advocating that "something like that, should be preserved" (Hubert Weber, 05PI, Pos. 1115-1117). While accompanying him and his wife on their morning walk with their dog through their neighbourhood, he points out where small houses used to stand, which, as he says, have been sold and are getting replaced by new large buildings. He finds this sad and complains that the suburban character of the neighbourhood is disappearing. His wife, Edit Weber, agrees with him about the changes in their residential district. She, too, laments the growth in construction and urban development and the decrease in green spaces. She recalls how different it was when she used to go there with the buggy when their children were small. Yet, despite the perceived changes, neither of them can imagine moving away. They want to stay in their home as long as possible, remembering the many things and possessions they have that they cannot imagine giving away. Relocation is out of the question for them.

In the interviews, respondents describe various changes in infrastructure and services, such as the expansion of public transport and the growth of shops and cultural amenities. Their accounts highlight how the existence, quality and accessibility of different forms of social infrastructure – ranging from large-scale systems like transport and healthcare to smaller-scale elements such as banks, post offices, green spaces, benches and public toilets – serve as reference points for perceiving change in their dwelling environments. They also frequently refer to new uses of commercial premises and the disappearance of local services and businesses that once played a meaningful role in their daily lives. Not always, but very often, when talking about these aspects, they draw references to the past. Especially for those who have lived in the same area for a long time, memories of earlier

periods – such as when they first moved in, when their children were young or when their parents were still alive – quite naturally emerge. By describing how places have changed in appearance or function over time, for example, due to different zoning policies or urban renewal, respondents express a sense of temporality. In this way, their ageing – understood as the passage of time (see Baars, 2009) – becomes inscribed in the socio-material transformations of their surroundings. In that vein, *old age is produced through a temporal experience of space*.

Changes in the dwelling environment become visible and tangible through the use of these spaces, what Blokland et al. (2023) term 'practical neighbourhood use'. Being regularly around, out and about in the neighbourhood provokes recognition of structural changes, such as the replacement of buildings or the closure of shops, as well as demographic change. Green recreational spaces can be recognised as becoming "really crowded", suggesting an increase in young 'newcomers' who have moved there in recent years (Birgit Weiss, 02PI, Pos. 690-692). This means, the everyday routines and regular everyday practices people carry out around their homes and in their neighbourhoods are key for the spatial production of old age. In this sense, *old age is materialised in space through embodied practice and with reference to the past*.

Furthermore, perspectives on urban change are usually intermingled with personal histories and memories that are inscribed in and bound up with places. This, for instance, becomes apparent when Ms Weber links her criticism of the densification of her neighbourhood with her personal memory of how it used to look at the time when her children were small. Hence, a particular street, square or park can provoke memories of previous phases and events in the lifecourse.[78] What is crucial in this context is that these biographical stories and memories of people, relationships and life events, which are deeply inscribed in spatial arrangements, are constantly re-created and enacted through socio-spatial practices in the present. This means that memories are tightly interrelated with embodied practices in the dwelling space. When, for example, Dagmar Stetter talks

[78] The connection between biographical life stories and spaces has become in particular apparent through empirical research *in situ*. In this context, accompanying older people on their daily routes – essentially 'being in place' – has prompted biographical narrations and provided insights into life trajectories that might not have emerged during a stationary interview. Moreover, engaging with places through embodied experience, rather than merely talking *about* them, activated sensory and emotional connections, enriching the understanding of how personal memories are inscribed in space. For more detailed information on my methodological approach and the use of go-along interviews, see *Chapter 4*.

about her neighbourhood, emphasising how deeply attached she feels to the area and the people living there, she refers to previous stories throughout her lifecourse and memories of experiences she has had with people over the many years she has lived here. These memories, however, are not only located in the past but are maintained and carried forward into the present through practices in the here and now, e.g., through meeting these people on her daily walks in the neighbourhood. Memories of past life stages possess a spatial dimension insofar as they are tied to places and are expressed in everyday routines, fixed rhythms and local routes. Through their enactment and embodiment in daily practices, respondents connect these past experiences and events to their deep feelings of place attachment situated in the present, thereby forging connections with what constitutes the neighbourhood for them.

This means, the focus on the transformation of spaces also includes the perspective of the transformation of personal trajectories and respective memories. In other words, it is both the ageing individual and the changing dwelling space. This entanglement and reciprocal constitution of the *temporality of age* and the *temporality of space* emphasises how individual histories and remembrances of the past are mediated and inscribed through space and how the perception of spatial change relates to the individual course of life. This mutual connection between individual life stories and places in the light of a double sense of temporality is what I call the *biographical internalisation of space*. With the concept of biographical internalisation of space, I aim to shed light on the constitutive character of urban change for old age; hence, old age is co-produced through the recognition of changes in the social and material fabric of a neighbourhood and beyond.

6.3.1. Between Spatial Belonging and Disidentification amid Urban Change

The idea of *biographical internalisation of space* sheds light on feelings of belonging and identification with dwelling spaces. Place attachment, in the sense of one's bond with a place, including inscribed meanings and emotional ties (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992), is a central issue and key concept within space-related ageing research, whereby it is generally assumed that people in old age feel more attached to their homes and neighbourhoods (see e.g., Kolland et al., 2022, p. 133, ref. to De Donder et al., 2012; Walsh, 2024, p. 71; Wiles et al., 2012; see also *Chapter 2.3*). Hence, the longer time older people have lived in their homes (assuming they have not moved frequently) is considered

a major reason for their greater attachment and sense of familiarity with their dwelling space. This resonates with other research on familiarity and spatial belonging outside the field of gerontology, highlighting temporality as a crucial factor of how and whether familiarity is produced, insofar as familiarity is an embodied practice that is enacted over time through repetitive actions, habits, movements and routines (Margot-Cattin, Kühne, Öhman, Brorsson, & Nygard, 2021).

The conducted interviews indeed show that people who have lived in the same neighbourhood for a long time seem to have a strong(er) sense of place attachment and familiarity with the area in which they live. Their spatial belonging is particularly fuelled by memories and persists despite structural changes, as illustrated by the introductory case of Mr and Ms Weber. At the same time, memories are situated, emplaced, continually reproduced and carried into the present through everyday dwelling practices. Hence, it is not just about the residential duration, but also about the current doings and how memories are transferred and made sense of in the present, as exemplified by the case of Ms Stetter.

However, what the study also reveals is that familiarity and attachment through spatialised memories do not necessarily imply a long and stable period of residence. When Irina Huber talks about where she lives and how it has changed, she does not only refer to her current residential address but also to where she used to live. This means reference point is not only her current neighbourhood, but rather, throughout the interview, she intermingles different places from different stages of her life. She moved several times within Vienna and spent longer periods of her early years of retirement abroad in Australia. For about ten years now, she has been living in the 15th district again, and explains that after the breakup with her then-partner, she "really wanted to go back" (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 225-226) framing it as

> that's […] my home district, because […] it's the area, where I always used to go to the market with my mom. I mean, yeah, everything looks different now, but it still feels the same (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 118-121).

At first sight, she does not show that stable and continuous housing biography like, for instance, Mr and Ms Weber or Ms Stetter. Furthermore, unlike them, she does not live in her own property full of cherished old furniture and possessions but in a very small, subsidised apartment equipped quite simply and in a practical way. Nevertheless, she has a strong sense of place attachment and belonging to her residential area, connecting

certain places in her neighbourhood with memories of previous times – especially of her childhood. Her case illustrates how memories can sustain a sense of familiarity, even after a long absence and despite structural changes. In this light, the length of residence seems to be only one part of the story of attachment to place.

Individual biographies are inscribed in spaces through memories, leading to strong feelings of familiarity even though the spatial setting has changed. This observation can be linked with Rowles' idea of 'autobiographical insideness' (e.g., Rowles, 1980) by which he emphasises the importance of personal historical investments in places alongside social and physical aspects (see also *Chapter 3.2*). Rowles' conception of 'autobiographical insideness' is particularly driven by the attempt to understand the growing feelings of familiarity and place attachment of older people. His idea of autobiographically 'being inside' explains the "implacable reluctance to leave despite the deteriorating contemporary physical setting" (Rowles, 1980, p. 157) or "the desire to return" (Rowles, 1980, p. 158) – both aspects have also been thematised by the respondents of this study.

Rowles' main interest is in how a perception of a place stays in one's memory and how it continues to endure through remembering it, even though, on a material level, it might no longer exist. As individual biographies are inscribed in spaces through memories, this can support strong feelings of familiarity even though the spatial setting has changed. However, such a focus on the biographical investment and personal memories attached to places can also bring with it a certain romanticising bias and can overshadow the objective existence of urban changes. Cutchin (2001, p. 35, original emphasis) has criticised Rowles' focus on memories and past experiences in older people's sense of place and place attachment arguing that it "needs to be extended to include the sense of *what person and place can become* in the face of current affairs and problems." In a later jointly published work, they suggest bringing both together: Rowles' idea of 'being in place' and Cutchin's model of 'place integration' (see Cutchin & Rowles, 2024a). In a similar vein, I argue that it is important to note that a discrepancy between memorised experiences from the past and real circumstances in the present can also create feelings of alienation and disidentification.

Although relatively scarce, some research has examined how older adults are affected by rapid transformations in their neighbourhoods, addressing how processes such as urban

regeneration can disrupt the sense of place or belonging developed over the lifecourse (see further *Chapter 2.3.5*). However, space-related ageing research has yet to fully integrate this focus on urban transformation, thereby leaving important gaps in understanding how older people age in place within evolving urban environments (for a similar argument, see Buffel & Phillipson, 2023; Lewis et al., 2022).

> ***Fritz Paschner***
>
> Mr Paschner is 63 years old, married and lives together with his wife in an 84m2 privately rented apartment in the 5th district – the same apartment where he grew up. He moved there at the age of five from a small town in Lower Austria located at the northern border to Vienna. His family – he has three children and several grand-children – seems to be an important anchor. Additionally, since retiring several years ago, visiting the pensioners' club every weekday has become a key part of his social life. He retired at the age of 53 due to a stroke, with the illness and resulting early retirement marking a major disruption and a significant negative turning point in his life. He had previously run a construction business with his wife and son, who have since continued operating it without him.
>
> Compared to the other respondents, he receives a significantly higher pension – over 3,500 in net income. Nevertheless, he did not experience his early retirement as something positive but rather as an externally imposed constraint that took away the self-determination he once felt in his working life. His active involvement in the pensioners' club now serves as a substitute for his former work, providing him with a sense of duty, responsibility and purpose, keeps him engaged and prevents boredom. He appears as a very open, talkative and active person.

Urban transformations can significantly disrupt the bonds of older people to their dwelling spaces *precisely because of their strong place attachment*, which can lead to multifaceted forms of alienation and feelings of disidentification. For Fritz Paschner, who has been living in his flat for almost his entire life, the changes undergoing in his neighbourhood represent a dominant aspect of his current dwelling experiences, linking it with a feeling of loss of familiarity. He refers to the changing commercial environment, saying that

> these small shops and so on are missing […] the small butcher's shop that used to be there. Or the little restaurant where you could go for a meal or the patisserie, none of that exists any more (Fritz Paschner, 20PI, Pos. 224-229).

He is clearly and unambiguously critical of these new urban developments, associating them with a decline in his sense of spatial belonging while referring at the same time to memories of the past. He talks about how it used to be to do daily errands; there were small, familiar stores where he knew the staff and they knew him. Shopping was related to aspects of social interaction, exchange and familiarity. For him, the replacement of these small local shops by large corporations and supermarket chains represents a significant deterioration: "This familiarity is missing" (Fritz Paschner, 20PI, Pos. 236). Additionally, these developments include the emergence of new, 'other' stores with foreign products and the absence of familiar goods. In this context, he recounts an experience in a newly opened shop that did not carry a particular type of bread that he would like to have:

> I remember when a Kurdish shop opened. And we went in, I'm always curious. And, and I said, 'It's all good, what you have. But you don't have *Handsemmel*.' 'What are *Handsemmel*?' I explained it to him. Next time I came round, he ran over to me and said 'I've bought *Handsemmel*, they really do taste better than the others' (Fritz Paschner, 20PI, Pos. 241-249).[79]

The case of Mr Paschner illustrates that it is not only about the construction of new business premises larger in size, but also about the related socio-cultural changes in the social fabric of the neighbourhood. This is expressed through the experience of a loss of familiarity in multiple ways. On the one hand, he refers to the loss of familiarity due to big supermarket chains 'where nobody knows you'. On the other hand, he refers to the emergence of new, 'foreign' businesses, like the mentioned Kurdish shop. The quality of the sensed alienation is different. The Kurdish shop seems to be a small grocery where the range of products is adapted to the customers' needs, as Mr Paschner's recount suggests. The shop owner/operator appears to be responsive to Mr Paschner's desire for recognition. Nevertheless, Mr Paschner portrays the Kurdish shop as something culturally and/or ethnically 'other' in contrast to 'the familiar'. On one side, he indeed shows curiosity towards 'the new' and 'the different', expressing appreciation that the shop owner accommodated his stated needs. On the other side, however, he presents it in his narration as something that diminishes his sense of belonging to the neighbourhood.

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[79] *Handsemmel* refers to a traditional Austrian bread roll, occasionally translated with 'Vienna roll'.

Fritz Paschner's perspective on the current shape of his neighbourhood and his spatial practices are influenced by memories of experiences from earlier stages of his life, formed by nostalgic recollections. This suggests that the changed socio-material environment evokes a personal history. This personal history is co-produced not only or primarily by the place itself but *by the perceived transformation of the place in relation to oneself and one's biography*. Hence, the prominence of his memories intersects with the strongly felt transformation. For the constitution of old age, this means that recognising the change of a specific place is entangled with – to use Rowles' (1980) terminology – a robust sense of 'autobiographical insideness'. Thus, the constitution of old age through recognising change is reinforced by the deep level of personal involvement in a place, in respect of both a contemporary and historical level.

What we can see in the example of Mr Paschner is that the general finding suggested by many studies on ageing and space, that the length of residence positively influences belonging and attachment to place, is not simply true, but can easily be challenged by other factors. A long period of residence in a neighbourhood can also lead to disidentification, especially in areas undergoing rapid transformation. I argue that precisely because of the overload of memories inscribed in places, changes can be even more devastating or personally upsetting. At the same time, too much of a focus on the past may also encourage patterns of reluctance or a general rejection of the new while exerting power to exclude others. This finding resonates with other studies on local identities along ethnicity (for an overview, see Blokland et al., 2023, p. 1952). Linked to this are nostalgic memories of 'how it used to be' and forms of what Watt (2009) calls 'selective belonging', which means that people choose only certain aspects of their dwelling environment based on which they form a particular image of 'what it is about'. In order to contribute to an understanding of ageing-in-place, an intersectional perspective is required that expands the category of age to include other (overlapping) identity positions and belongings. This approach enables consideration of older people not only as 'the elderly' within a neighbourhood but also highlights their ambivalent role as 'locals' who have lived there for decades. However, the identity of being a local is complex and not solely defined by length of residence; it is interwoven with other affiliations, such as belonging to the autochthonous majority society. At the same time, not all older residents, even those with long-term residence, are necessarily regarded as locals due to their migration histories.

Critical discussions in the context of neighbourhood belonging and ageing predominantly focus on older people as the marginalised. Indeed, older people are strongly affected by what I have termed *spatialised othering* (see *Chapter 6.2*). However, as also illustrated above, this should not imply a narrow perspective that overlooks that older people are not only and exclusively 'the othered' but that they are also actively othering. They exclude others and take up the right to define what the neighbourhood is about and who is considered the 'majority' or 'truly local' group. In this respect, neighbourhood life and transformations thereof are linked to the question of who has the power to define the normalcy of a neighbourhood, what behaviour is appropriate or what kind of socio-spatial practices are 'outside the norm' (see Blokland et al., 2023). Indeed, as previously discussed, older people frequently experience marginalisation, such as not being part of many of the rhythms and routines of urban life, which are largely shaped by middle-aged labour market participants. Nevertheless, they also discriminate against others and precisely because of their strong place attachment – fuelled by personal memories of how the neighbourhood used to be interlinked with a long duration of residence – they feel entitled to define, in Blokland et al.'s (2023, p. 1953) words, "the rules of the game called neighbourhood norms for appropriate behaviour."

Mr Paschner[80] is a notable example of someone actively exercising agency in his neighbourhood. Rather than responding to perceived changes with withdrawal, he emphasises his curiosity and willingness to explore new and unfamiliar shops, for example. In the case of the previously mentioned Kurdish store, he took initiative by requesting the addition of a specific item to the product range. Notably, this request is not framed as a personal favour but rather comes across as an instructive – perhaps even admonishing – reminder of an important Austro-Viennese product that he perceived as unjustifiably missing.

Narrations about the influx of 'others', belonging to different socio-cultural groups, materialise in the urban landscape through new infrastructures and types of businesses. Among long-term residents, these changes can provoke feelings of disidentification. Such sentiments can easily shift into racist and other, often intersecting forms of discriminatory

[80] It should be noted that Mr Paschner's case demonstrates an intersection with a privileged socio-economic position.

resentment. Indeed, various forms of (everyday) racism were frequently expressed in the conducted interviews with older adults.

Policy-oriented research and urban development approaches advocating for ageing-in-place draw heavily on romanticised ideas of the neighbourhood and the local community for tackling complex social challenges – from segregation, marginalisation, poverty and social isolation to the uneven quality of life of urban dwellers. This means that the neighbourhood community is increasingly utilised by city authorities and policymakers as a strategic tool to address issues of coexistence, interaction and exchange among diverse social groups (Reutlinger et al., 2015; see also *Chapter 2.3.4*). However, these aspirations are tied to highly idealised notions of the neighbourhood and tend to neglect conflictual issues: The neighbourhood can also be a space of exclusion, shame and societal division. My attempt is not to generally argue against projects on the neighbourhood scale that seek, for example, to promote the social integration of older people. Rather, I call for the need to critically question the widespread assumption among urban development and planning professionals that 'neighbourhoods can fix everything'. Given the numerous funding schemes for neighbourhood-based community-building projects and socially integrative subsidised housing projects, which increasingly target older people as a specific focus group (both as volunteers and service/care recipients), there is growing and justified criticism. This criticism highlights the excessive responsibility placed on civil society and neighbourhood communities, pointing to forms of 'community capitalism' (van Dyk & Haubner, 2021).[81]

Moreover, as my research shows, forms of disintegration and even alienation and disidentification often occur at the neighbourhood level in later life. This suggests that the idealised notion of ageing-in-place and growing old 'in the community' does not always align with reality. Relatedly, I advocate for a more critical examination of the often-romanticised emphasis in neighbourhood and community research on social encounters – including those with 'familiar' strangers – as a means of fostering a sense of belonging (see e.g., Kusenbach, 2003a, 2003b; Lofland, 1998; Valentine, 2008). While I do not wish to downplay the importance of 'public familiarity' for attachment to and identification with place, I argue that for example Kusenbach's (2003a) concept of 'friendly

[81] This ambivalence is widely discussed in care research (see e.g., Laufenberg, 2018; also Gabauer & Lebuhn, 2022) and is also evident in practice-oriented events and among involved actors, as observed through my participation in various settings.

recognition' can also easily turn into 'unfriendly recognition' and that senses of 'public familiarity' are heavily shaped by power relations and structural inequalities (see also Blokland & Nast, 2014; Blokland et al., 2023). In this sense, a more nuanced analysis of experiences of ageing-in-place is necessary – an analysis that not only links critical neighbourhood research and social exclusion, but also incorporates 'geographies of encounter' (Valentine, 2008) in a way that acknowledges the complexity of everyday interactions. Rather than assuming that spatial proximity or incidental contact automatically fosters inclusion, such an approach must critically examine spatial conditions that shape encounters, including their potential for both connection and exclusion. In particular, more recent approaches focusing on issues of 'urban care' highlight the importance of structured, supportive spaces in which mutual recognition and caring relationships can genuinely emerge (e.g., Davis, 2022; Hübl, 2024; Saltiel & Strüver, 2022).

Biographical internalisation of space underscores, on the one hand, the intricate interplay between changes in the neighbourhood, its socio-material structure and the evolving dynamics of personal lifecourses. On the other hand, it highlights the overlap between generation-specific change and individual life trajectories. When, for example, Mr and Ms Weber talk about their neighbourhood, it becomes clear that their retirement and the subsequent closure of their local small grocery store coincided with a decline in their social integration within the community. This also affects their social encounters and the experience of recognising and being recognised when walking through their residential area. As Mr Weber recalls, in the past, they knew many people in the neighbourhood, but now not that many anymore "because there's already the next generation" (Hubert Weber, 05PI, Pos. 812). His wife interjects, "They greet us, and we don't even know who they are" (Edit Weber, 05PI, Pos. 814), adding that they would then tell them that they are the children who used to come to their grocery store with their mothers. While this may not constitute 'unfriendly recognition', it does reflect a one-sided form of recognition or *asymmetrical recognition*.

In this sense, neighbourhood spaces are "comprised of multiple routines and rhythms that may form a compatible or clashing whole, as different tempos, timings, and durations come together" (Crang, Crosbie, & Graham, 2007, p. 2419; Crang, 2001). The everyday rhythms of individuals stand in relation to others' rhythms and routines in the neighbourhood and are intertwined with generational change and personal lifecourse

trajectories, which do not always align harmoniously. Biographical internalisation of space, hence, illuminates the interplay between the course of an individual's life, with its immanent references to the past and its reach into the present and the meanings of places, taking into account their transformations. To better understand older people's experiences and their responses to urban changes, I argue for extending a lifecourse perspective on old age with the lens of generation – which the following section is dedicated to. This link becomes particularly apparent when we understand urban changes in terms of wider structural changes, i.e. as processes of urbanisation.

6.3.2. The 'Generation Issue' and Urbanisation

Many of the reported changes in the socio-material fabric can be considered as part of broader processes of urban transformation. The example of the recognition of structural changes in the neighbourhood discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter section with reference to the couple Weber, allows conclusions to be drawn about general trends in urban development. Mr and Ms Weber experience in their dwelling environment increasing densification through brown-field development and the demolition of suburban structures, which are being replaced by high-rise buildings. Such developments become visible in population growth and the influx of 'newcomers' – be they students, young families or so-framed 'foreigners'.

However, urbanisation is not merely the outward expansion of cities, of population growth, expansion of infrastructure or housing, but a deeply socio-political and cultural transformation of everyday life and urban space (Knierbein, 2023). Urbanisation today is inextricably linked to capitalism, which does not only shape new developments but also restructures older urban fabrics, integrating them into the capitalist logic and thus transforming 'the urban condition' itself (Viderman et al., 2022, ref. to Dear, 2001; Brenner & Theodore, 2005). Urban studies trace the inherent instability of cities to capitalism's drive for expansion and competition, which continuously produces "uneven urban development at different scales, from global to local" (Viderman et al., 2022, p. 6; Amin , 1994). Viewed this way, the city is not a settled entity, but a contested space where capitalist dynamics and divergent everyday practices collide (Knierbein, 2023). This highlights urbanisation as "inherently […] conflictual process, [which] not only manifests various forms of injustice, but actually produces *and* reproduces them (thereby

maintaining established social relations of domination and oppression)" (Dikec, 2001, p. 1788, original emphasis).

The closing of small shops is a frequent theme of the interviewed older people, where urbanisation is materialised in the form of the extinction of local, small-structured food supply. Related to these developments are processes of gentrification and transformations of consumer and lifestyle cultures, which are accompanied by changes in gastronomy, shopping facilities and other leisure infrastructures. Gentrification processes can have extensive and fundamental effects on neighbourhoods, which for longtime residents (who are often older people) are not only associated with higher rental costs but also with the loss of familiar and unique social and material infrastructure and facilities. This can lead to forms of delineation and exclusion. I propose to analyse such described experiences not only on the basis of individual lifecourse trajectories but also in light of *generation-related experiences of urban life*. This becomes visible in the following part of the interview with Fritz Paschner:

> The point is, they've now built a bike path here at our place, and people are being drawn In, Ih I'd say is a bit mysterious. […] Well, how should I put it, there have been a lot of burglaries happening around here, for example, our apartment has been broken into three times. […] Yeah, there are some shady people involved in all this. […] I don't want to say there are too many foreigners, because I'm actually not a racist. I'm truly not. […] But there are a lot of drug addicts, unemployed people, uh, folks who just go around begging and damaging cars or things like that, and so on and so forth. I also don't like parking in that dead-end street near us anymore, even though there are spaces there, because often someone will kick the mirror or something like that. […] that never used to happen. When I moved there as a kid, my father's was the only car on the entire street, and back there, where the cobblestones are, grass had grown, and we used to play football and everything. It was hard to imagine that so much traffic would eventually come in. […] So, yeah, a lot's changed (Fritz Paschner, 20PI, Pos. 196-223).

This quote vividly illustrates how Mr Paschner, in demonstrating his experienced changes in his neighbourhood, bundles together various aspects of personal and societal changes over his lifecourse, culminating in the materialisation of his residential street. As already discussed above, he links changes in the socio-material fabric to feelings of disidentification with his dwelling environment and discriminatory resentment mediated through the act of 'recognising strangers' – drawing on Ahmed's (2000, p. 21) concept of strangers as "being out of place" and not belonging (see also *Chapter 6.2.1*). This is also

expressed here. He begins by talking about transformations he has noticed in urban transport planning by referring to the construction of a cycling path in his neighbourhood, while establishing linkages to demographic changes in a highly discriminatory narrative. He criticises the increase in bicycle traffic, which he associates with 'mysterious people' and burglaries in his house. At the same time, he refers to the rise in car traffic, which he connects with congestion, noise and pollution and what he indicates as a reason why he does not use his balcony, as he states elsewhere: "You'll probably get lead poisoning or CO2 poisoning or something like that" (Fritz Paschner, 20PI, Pos. 172-173). Criticising the construction of a cycle path while simultaneously lamenting the increase in car traffic may appear as an obvious contradiction – particularly given that he is an avid, self-proclaimed car user who depends on his vehicle for all longer journeys, including his daily visits to the pensioners' club. However, to understand why he finds the changes in his street so unsettling, including these obvious ambivalences, it is essential to situate them within wider urban transformations. These changes extend beyond individual lifecourses but rather should be understood as spatial manifestations of generational differences.

The reorganisation of urban transport systems reflects wider changes in mobility policies, notably the reduction of parking spaces and the prioritisation of cycling infrastructure, which emerged as a recurring theme in several interviews. Predominantly, male respondents articulate these changes as a significant source of frustration and a perceived disruption within their residential environments. I propose interpreting this discontent as a manifestation of a shifting urban mobility regime, which reveals a profound generational conflict. Interviewees frequently distinguish themselves from younger generations, contrasting contemporary habits and norms with nostalgic references to 'how things used to be'. Cyclists and e-scooter users often emerged as a symbolic 'generational enemy' in their narrations.

Specific urban planning measures exacerbate these tensions. For example, as the conducted interviews reveal, the opening up of one-way streets to cyclists in both directions introduces potential hazards, particularly for older adults who struggle with reduced visibility or reaction times. Similarly, shared pedestrian-cycle paths pose challenges, as older respondents report difficulties detecting cyclists – especially those who do not signal their approach by ringing the bell – due to age-related limitations in hearing or vision. These experiences highlight a dual dynamic: On one hand, older people feel overwhelmed by unfamiliar traffic patterns compounded by physical limitations; on

the other, there is a broader and more general rejection of these urban planning interventions. This resistance can be understood as a critique of an emerging mobility strategy that seeks to reduce motorised personal transport in cities, aligning with new socio-cultural values that challenge the car's historical dominance as a hegemonic ideal and symbol of status and autonomy.

Remarkably, criticism of so-called 'anti-car' policies is not limited to habitual drivers. Even respondents who rarely or never drive, having transitioned to public transport as they grew older, expressed similar objections. This suggests that the opposition transcends practical concerns and operates on a symbolic level, reflecting a deeply rooted conflict of (generational) values, which are equally reflected in urban planning frameworks. The persistence of these sentiments among non-drivers underscores the cultural significance of the car as an enduring ideal, now contested by mobility policies that prioritise cycling and shared mobility spaces. Thus, the narrations reveal not only practical challenges but also a profound resistance to the evolving socio-cultural landscape of urban mobility, positioning older adults at odds with both new generations and the planning paradigms they represent.

This raises the question of which generation-specific and age-specific attitudes and needs are embedded in contemporary planning approaches and how they are addressed. Planning concepts that prioritise flexibility, mixed-use development and environmentally sustainable transport over rigid zoning and car-based mobility reflect urbanisation processes shaped by new hegemonic social values and modes of production.

The Viennese *Smart City Strategy* (City of Vienna, 2019b, 2022a) seeks to integrate digital innovation with sustainable, climate-friendly development in order to enhance quality of life. Related to that is the idea of building 'superblocks': Superblock, in Vienna coined as *Supergrätzl*,[82] refers to a model of urban traffic planning that reorganises and calms movement within existing neighbourhoods. The aim is to transform residential building blocks by giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists over cars, thereby reducing traffic volumes and noise pollution, promoting sustainable mobility and enhancing climate-friendly city spaces (see City of Vienna, 2022b). Yet it must be noted that urban

[82] For more information on Vienna based strategies for implementation, see City of Vienna (n.d.-a) and City of Vienna (2022b).

development projects that strictly ban private cars and rely on car-sharing as an alternative tend to overlook the everyday needs of many older people (and others with physical impairments) who depend on private motorised transport – needs that cannot easily be met by digitalised car-sharing models.[83] At the same time, it is notable that there are also others who vehemently oppose such planning projects that, at first glance, seem to impose no restrictions on their daily lives and even appear to address their own concerns (e.g., rising traffic congestion and pollution).

This research does not oppose socio-ecological approaches to urban development. Rather, it argues for a critical engagement with these transformation processes, particularly in light of the equally proclaimed objective of creating age-friendly environments. In order to understand why older people – as evidenced by this study – express strong opposition to certain planning agendas, it is essential to complement the analysis with an examination of generational shifts in ways of living, as well as to assess the extent to which planning strategies introduce specific constraints that especially affect older adults. Tensions between ecological transformation and social inclusivity have been widely discussed and are also reflected in Viennese urban policy, for instance in the Smart City strategy or in the city's large-scale municipal housing initiatives, which explicitly aim to reconcile environmental sustainability with social affordability (Friesenecker & Litschauer, 2021; Mocca et al., 2020; see also *Chapter 5*). Yet the dimension of 'social inclusion' has so far rarely extended to encompass age-specific and generation-specific experiences and perspectives on urban life. In the Smart City strategy, for example, the category of age remains marginalised and is addressed solely within the framework of health promotion, with the stated aim of supporting "healthy and active ageing" and an emphasis on home-based care (City of Vienna, 2022a, p. 44).

The increasing reliance on digital technologies to develop 'smart' solutions extends beyond mobility and increasingly permeates various aspects of daily life, such as grocery shopping, healthcare and public services. Indeed, this trend risks exacerbating the marginalisation of older people from urban life due to barriers such as lack of access, insufficient resources and limited knowledge or familiarity with digital tools (see also

[83] This was also confirmed by expert interviews, particularly by a person engaged in a neighbourhood initiative, who has been involved in developing a superblock strategy at a district level (07EI).

Gabauer, 2022).[84] In this context, it can support tendencies in urban planning to mainly cater to the interests, values and lifestyles of younger generations while neglecting the specific needs of older adults (see also May & Muir, 2015). Similarly, the growing closure of bank branches and post offices, where personal contact is replaced by machines, disproportionately affects older people. These trends of 'digital transformation', which further include the digitisation of public services such as train timetables, medical services and supporting e-governance tools, can have a negative impact on the everyday lives of older adults.

Even without explicitly asking about it, issues related to digital technologies and their connection to everyday experiences of ageing emerged with striking frequency in the interviews. Respondents elaborated extensively on the perceived constraints posed by the increasing technologisation of urban services – and more broadly – on their daily lives. These far-reaching developments clearly reveal the overlap between two interrelated layers: a generational shift in forms of living and the exclusion of old age-related spatial needs. To adequately understand these developments, they must not only be analysed through the lens of age and individual lifecourses, but equally as a generational issue. What emerges is a *dual neglect* of older people and their lived realities: on the level of age-based discrimination and on the level of generational disparities.

> ***Otto Meier***
>
> Mr Meier is 80 years old and widowed. His wife passed away seven years ago, marking a pivotal turning point in his life. Since then, he has lived alone in their 80m2 apartment in Vienna's 15th district, on the same street and directly across from Mr and Ms Weber. The apartment originally belonged to his wife, who had already transferred ownership to their only child. Their daughter also lives in the building, with a flat on the same floor. Since his wife's death, Mr Meier's daughter appears to be his only close and emotionally significant social connection. For example, as part of his daily morning routine, he buys a chocolate croissant for her at the local bakery and leaves it at her door – carefully placing it in specifically designed, handmade bags. In addition to his regular exchanges with his daughter, he maintains occasional contact with former travel companions from organised bus tours, which he still takes from time to time. Otherwise, he spends much of his time alone, engaging in his hobbies of wood carving

[84] As emphasised also in particular in the expert interview 07EI.

> and gardening at his second home in the *Weinviertel*, a rural region near Vienna.
>
> He appears to be in very good health, quite energetic and talkative, yet also he also comes across as reserved and somewhat withdrawn. For example, he was the only person from the sample who was reluctant to share details about his income – which is presumably relatively high – or to show me his apartment.
>
> The interviews with him were marked by a strong focus on the past: memories of his childhood and growing up in Vienna, his relationship with his wife, their early retirement years together and ultimately, her long illness.

A lack of technical skills is frequently equated with belonging to an older generation. Many respondents reproduce this association in their narrations: 'having problems with computers' functions as a key marker of generational belonging. In this way, categorisation does not only occur through external attributions; rather, difficulties with 'computer stuff' often become a significant self-identifier of old age. Even when problematising one's own rejection – as in the case of Isolde Richter, who describes herself as 'stubborn' in her reluctance to adopt online banking – resistance to the increasing technologisation of urban services is commonly framed as opposition to the digital urban lifestyles embraced by younger generations. This underscores a generational divide in the adaptation to new socio-technical norms.

In the case of Mr Meier, this rejection and devaluation are even more pronounced. He characterises himself as a "mobile phone refuser" (Otto Meier, 12PI, Pos. 437) and views younger generations as highly dependent on their phones. In a derogatory tone, he claims that, unlike 'the young', he could navigate the city without such a device. In doing so, he presents himself as more independent and self-reliant and does this not only on an individual level but also by clearly drawing a connection to the dimension of generation. In this sense, also supported by narrations from many other interview participants, expressed rejections of digital services provided by state authorities, public transport booking systems, or online banking can likewise be understood as a generational distinguishing feature. They thus function as markers of belonging to a particular generation.

Accordingly, trends in digitalisation and technologisation within urban development and planning not only lead to potential disadvantages and exclusions for older people. The approach to new technologies must also be understood as embedded in generation-specific value systems and ways of life. In this vein, urban changes manifest in the conceiving of new ordering systems, lifestyles and norms. Another example that comes up with regard to changing values and ways of dwelling refers to community life in the neighbourhood. Ms Huber illustrates how personal experiences of living together in an apartment block have changed since her childhood while drawing connections to broader societal changes and transformations of housing conditions. She tells me how it was when she moved into her new apartment eleven years ago. Her attempts to actively introduce herself to her new neighbours, even in the form of an invitation to a welcome party, went unnoticed: "I don't think that's common anymore. You don't do that [anymore]" (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 681-682). Her depiction reveals a perceived increase in anonymity and the disintegration of a sense of neighbourly community, which she links to a generational shift and a change in housing patterns and related norms.

Ms Huber, furthermore, attributes the loss of everyday encounters and exchanges in the staircase to the fact that "most people take the lift and no one walks anymore" (Irina Huber, 04PI, Pos. 658-659). In contrast, in previous times – in her childhood – neighbourly exchange used to take place somehow organically due to the structural features of a *Bassena* or the toilet on the corridor. *Bassena*, a Viennese dialectical term, refers to a communal water tap or sink located in the hallway of older apartment buildings. These fixtures were historically common in apartment buildings where individual apartments did not have their own water supply. Multiple tenants would use the same tap or sink for fetching water, washing dishes, or cleaning. Besides its function as a source of water, the *Bassena* was a central gathering spot for socialising, chatting and gossiping.[85] The gaze on the small-scale architectural structure of the *Bassena* shows how neighbourly relationships are in a mutually formative interplay with the built space, and it demonstrates vividly the spatial manifestation of changing urban everyday life.
It becomes clear that the social production of space is historically contingent, whereby always embedded in power relations, which are also expressed in generational conflicts. In this sense, I argue that the changing individual lifecourse and the intermingling with the lifecourses of other individuals and their institutionalisations and socio-spatial

[85] There is even the term *Bassenatratsch* – meaning 'Bassena gossip'.

orderings are intertwined in generational changes, which in turn appear through processes of urbanisation. Hence, generations and generational differences are co-produced by changing urban space. Ms Huber's old age is thus constituted in relation to a generation (with its related specific generational values in terms of neighbourly coexistence) and through the changing place of the hallway in the apartment building – with the demolition of the structural feature of the *Bassena* and hence the loss of the social meeting point for the neighbours of the building.

6.3.3. Summing Up

The approach of *biographical internalisation of space* synthesises the reciprocal constitution of the *temporality of age* and the *temporality of space*. Hence, it grasps the mutual connection between individual life stories and places in the light of a double sense of temporality. A central foundation is that old age is produced through a temporal experience of space, whereby this spatial materialisation of age arises through embodied practices with references to the past. Thus, on the one hand, it is about the interplay between ageing and urban change. On the other hand, it is essential to recognise that experiences of urban change are intertwined with personal histories and memories, which are, in turn, inscribed in and bound up with places, materialising through experiences and practices in the here and now. Biographical internalisation of space thus draws on the interest in how individual biographies are 'emplaced' and expressed in places, and how spatial arrangements are central components of self-identification. It builds on Rowels' (1980) idea of 'autobiographical insideness', but with a particular focus on the discrepancies between the mnemonic dimensions of space and real circumstances in the present. To understand older people's experiences and their responses to urban changes, I have advocated for extending a lifecourse perspective on old age with the lens of generation. This link becomes particularly apparent when we understand urban changes in terms of wider structural changes and as processes of urbanisation.

Urban change can significantly disrupt older people's attachment to their living environments – precisely because of their sense of 'autobiographical insideness'. A deep personal connection to place can evoke complex forms of alienation and feelings of disidentification among older adults – especially in the face of far-reaching urban transformation processes. In response, some may retreat into private spaces or attempt to actively intervene in neighbourhood change. However, such enactments of agency can

also result in discrimination and the exclusion of others – often along lines of ethnicity or origin.

Many older people feel excluded and overlooked in contemporary city life, in urban development and policymaking. Despite growing awareness of the specific needs of older urban residents – evidenced by initiatives like age-friendly cities – urban development and planning frequently appear to prioritise the needs of younger, middle-aged populations, primarily designing and planning cities around the normative standards of middle adulthood. My research, however, reveals that the common narrative of older adults as solely excluded or marginalised represents only one facet of age–space relationships. Through long-term residence and belonging to the autochthonous majority population, older individuals may perceive themselves as 'the locals', asserting their right to define what constitutes a neighbourhood's normalcy. They actively exclude others and 'recognise them as strangers' (Ahmed, 2000) who do not belong. In the broader study of ageing and space, particularly in the context of ageing-in-place, this 'dark side of place attachment', where strong ties to place can lead to exclusionary practices, remains largely underexplored. To truly understand place attachment in later life, it is essential to move beyond a one-dimensional focus on age and to consider its intersections with other identity markers, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status or other forms of belonging. Equally important is the integration of a generational dimension into the analysis.

Complementing a lifecourse perspective on old age with a generational lens on urban life highlights the complex interplay between, on the one hand, transformations in the neighbourhood and shifts in personal life trajectories. On the other hand, it helps to conceptualise the overlap between generational change and individual lifecourse developments. Thus, the reciprocal constitution of the temporality of age and the temporality of space must be disentangled more thoroughly: The interplay of how space changes and how individuals change occurs on two levels: first, in terms of ageing and personal lifecourse transitions and second, in terms of generational positioning and experience.

In the context of urban planning – such as the conversion of one-way streets into cycle lanes, a common intervention in Vienna – a *dual neglect* of older people can be observed. On the one hand, the specific needs of older individuals, due to their advanced age and associated limitations – particularly hearing and mobility impairments (which, of course,

are not limited to those of higher chronological age) – are insufficiently considered. On the other hand, such planning measures are shaped by generation-specific conceptions of urban life. Regardless of whether the promotion of cycling is desirable for climate or public health reasons, understanding the often strong opposition among older people to cycling and related planning interventions requires a generational perspective. From this perspective, it becomes apparent that generation-specific ways of life of older individuals are misrepresented and ignored. [86]

This double exclusion of older people becomes particularly evident in the broader trends of digitalisation and technologisation, which are being for example advanced under the banner of 'smart cities'. This not only concerns the use of new technologies but also touches on the deeper level of how urban space is fundamentally experienced, navigated and appropriated differently, as well as the expectations and desires people have regarding the city. Exclusion and alienation arise not merely because certain social infrastructures are inaccessible due to a lack of access or skills, but also because new ways of thinking and altered value systems are taking hold. This connection becomes clear when we understand urban change as part of broader socio-structural transformations – as shifts in urban regimes. It is not simply about one bank branch that has closed, but rather about far-reaching structural changes. Linked to this is the critique of an urban planning practice that orients itself around the seemingly age-less, middle-aged, healthy body, with specific values, lifestyles and forms of mobility. The generational dimension then allows older people to actively and consciously distinguish themselves from new ways of life, forming their identity precisely through this act of differentiation. Hence, it is not just a matter of age but also one of generational belonging.

[86] Climate policy debates are frequently framed as a fundamental generational conflict, a perspective that has become particularly evident since the emergence of the *Fridays for Future* movements.

7. Ageing-in-Place Revisited: Resumé and Outlook

In academic and policy discourses on dwelling in old age, the term 'ageing-in-place' emerges as a pivotal concept. It refers to staying put and living independently for as long as possible, perhaps with some help or assistance (Oswald et al., 2024, p. 38; Wiles & Coleman, 2024, p. 184; Callahan, 1992). Yet there is no clear-cut meaning: It ranges from staying in one's longstanding house or home to, more broadly, remaining within one's familiar neighbourhood or area (see Wiles & Coleman, 2024, p. 184, ref. to Bigonnesse & Chaudhury, 2020; McCallion, 2014). Some scholarships also include residing in assisted living arrangements – such as retirement villages or senior co-housing – that mitigate the need for relocation to institutional care facilities as support demands rise (Campbell, 2015).

The wish to stay put also emerged as a central dimension in my interviews. The home is linked with autonomy, freedom and independence, even when facing increasing health restrictions. This present chapter draws on the analysis and findings presented in the previous chapter (*Chapter 6*) and bundles together key aspects with the aim of drawing conclusions for a 'revisited' concept of ageing-in-place. I argue for a critical revision due to the identification of some pitfalls in how it is debated in academia and, most importantly, applied in planning and policy agendas. A key discrepancy in its use is that it refers both to the widespread empirical reality of older adults remaining in their homes – often by preference – and an aspirational policy objective laden with social, spatial and economic implications. Departing from that and across four sections, I address identified shortcomings, weaving empirical insights into a reformulated concept that challenges ageing-in-place's dominance in discourses around dwelling in old age. This synthesis distils key findings, thus representing a resumé of my work as well as pointing out avenues for future research.

Before *revisiting* ageing-in-place, it is pertinent at this juncture to briefly restate the three central dimensions developed in the previous chapter as a three-fold framework for theorising the relationship between ageing and space: *embodied spatialities*, *spatialised othering* and *biographical internalisation of space*.

- The concept of *biographical internalisation of space* represents, in the tradition and terminology of grounded theory (see also *Chapter 4.2*), the 'core category' of the theoretical development, encapsulating the reciprocal and co-constitutive relationship between ageing and space through a lens of dual temporality: the *interconnected temporality of age (the individual ageing) and the temporality of space (urban change)*. This approach underscores how personal histories, memories and lived experiences are mediated and inscribed in spatial contexts, while the perception of spatial transformations is intrinsically tied to an individual's lifecourse. In this sense, it sheds light on how old age is materialised in space through embodied practice and with reference to the past. It furthermore implies expanding the analytical scope of age to include generational dynamics. The link between age/lifecourse and generation becomes particularly evident when urban changes are framed as broader structural processes of urbanisation that reshape hegemonic socio-material landscapes and thus fundamentally inform dwelling experiences in old age.

- To (empirically) explore older adults' relationships with space, I propose starting off from the body, conceptualised with the idea of *embodied spatialities of old age*. The body serves as a pivotal anchor for analysis, *functioning dually as a marker of ageing*, reflecting the embodied process of growing older, *and as an interface for experiencing space*, where space is understood as perceived and lived through the body. Through this interface, the body reveals how individuals come to understand themselves as old or ageing through social practices, relationships and encounters with places. Old age, in this sense, emerges as a dynamic, spatially enacted phenomenon, shaped by bodily experiences and interactions with the material and social world. Crucially, the body is not just a biological entity, but equally discursively constituted. Societal narratives of ageing shape how older adults perceive their bodies, abilities and place in the world, and how they are perceived by others.

- In this regard, the body is crucial for how people are perceived and labelled as old by others. Old age, as a category of difference, is thus produced through processes of *spatialised othering*, where forms of exclusion or differentiation are situated within and dependent upon specific spatial arrangements. The concept of spatialised othering bridges multiple scales, enabling a conceptual integration of individual experiences of ageing with broader structural conditions and

discourses, such as urban policies and planning frameworks surrounding ageing-in-place. By capturing how old age-based attributions are spatially enacted, the idea of spatialised othering aims at illuminating the complex interplay between personal agency, societal expectations and the socio-material environment. It highlights that *identities of old age are spatially contingent*, and individuals are shaped by divergent modes of subjectivation – from the 'active' to the 'frail ager' – depending on the very specific spatial arrangements.

Departing from this theoretical development grounded in empirical research in Vienna, the following pages are dedicated to the question of what this means for ageing-in-place in the context of urban development and planning interventions.

Ageing-in-Place: Between a Normative Goal and a Lived Reality

Central to my analysis is the dual nature of ageing-in-place as both a *descriptive term* – capturing the common practice of older adults remaining in their homes – and a *prescriptive goal* embedded in policy frameworks. Scholarship often interfuses these roles, presenting ageing-in-place simultaneously as an empirical reality and an idealised, policy-driven vision. However, this conflation remains largely unexamined in academic research, which rarely distinguishes between the term's observational and normative dimensions. I contend that this oversight masks a critical tension: Statistical data from Austria confirm that most older adults age at home rather than in institutions and also articulate a strong wish to stay put (see Kolland et al., 2022, pp. 119, 151), yet this lived reality is subsumed within a dominant discourse that casts ageing-in-place as the hegemonic standard for how and where ageing ought to unfold. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse people's demands for staying put – which is also what my research reveals – within dominant housing and care discourses.

People's ideas and emotions about their homes are socially constructed (as discussed in *Chapter 3.2*). Hence, individually preferred forms of dwelling are shaped by societal norms and are entangled with hegemonic ideas of desirable and appropriate forms of living (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 597, ref. to Duyvendak, 2011; Paulsen, 2013). Building on this, the preference and practice of ageing-in-place are not simply an individual choice but rather are deeply embedded in normative expectations of ageing within society. Looking at its development – as a concept, ageing-in-place emerged in the

1990s (Müller et al., 2022, p. 52) – reveals that it can be interpreted as a response to a 'relocation paradigm'. Scholars note that the rise of care homes and special housing for 'the elderly' in the 1960s and 1970s fostered a paternalistic view that relocation was a natural ageing step, overshadowing the value of lifelong residence:

> There was an implicit assumption that elders were willing to relocate – or at least accepted the wisdom of relocating – as they became increasingly frail. These trends generated an erroneous public image that relocation was a normative and expected attendant of growing old (Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, pp. 90–91, with ref. to Rowles, 1993).

As these scholars suggest, the normative push for relocation ignored older adults' ties to place, much like today's research overlooks how ageing-in-place's policy framing might overlook that not for all older people the home is the ideal place to age.[87]

In this light, the political and academic shift towards ageing-in-place can be seen as a reclamation of a lost norm: growing old within one's community rather than in age-segregated institutions. Yet, closer scrutiny reveals that this revival has been re-normativised into a prescriptive policy goal. This tension is particularly evident in its alignment with the World Health Organisation's 'active ageing' (WHO, 2002) and later 'healthy ageing' framework (WHO, 2015), which have culminated in WHO's initiatives around 'age-friendly' cities and communities (WHO, 2007, 2018) – of which Vienna is also a part since 2023 (City of Vienna, 2023a; WHO, n.d.-a) – or the development of Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) technologies. Together, these embed ageing-in-place within a broader normative vision of how ageing should unfold.

Therefore, I advocate for a critical reframing of the ageing-in-place discourse – one that interrogates its operationalisation as both a policy construct and a lived experience, exposing how institutional applications may (unintentionally) neglect the everyday realities of older people.

[87] There are also a few more critical voices in research towards ageing-in-place, e.g., Hobbs and Pasch (2024); Milligan (2009); see further *Chapter 2.3*.

Ageing-in-Place at the Intersection of the Active/Frail Binary

While idealising ageing-in-place as the appropriate mode of ageing – connoted with activity, health, autonomy and productivity – this framing casts retirement and nursing homes as its antithesis: a last resort reserved for those in absolute frailty and dependence. As explored in the previous analysis (see *Chapter 6.2.2*), the elevation of ageing-in-place coincides with a degradation of care homes, positioning their residents as 'the other'. Consequently, the dichotomy between the active, 'valued' ager and the frail, 'disparaged' ager (van Dyk, 2016) becomes materially entrenched in the built environment.[88]

My analysis further reveals that these othering processes are spatially contingent. Extending van Dyk's (2016) twofold othering of the 'young-old' – linked to vitality and activity – and the 'old-old' – marked by frailty and care needs – I propose the concept of *spatialised othering* to highlight how these identities shift across spatial settings (see *Chapter 6.2*). This framing shows that the valuation or disparagement of older people is not fixed but produced through specific spatial contexts. The categorisations are inscribed onto subjects through their respective spatial situatedness, meaning that it results in the simultaneous manifestation of both 'young-old' and 'old-old' positionings within their everyday practices and experiences of dwelling.

Ageing-in-place, as a policy goal, ostensibly targets the 'young-old' by promoting active and healthy ageing. Yet, as my research demonstrates, it simultaneously situates older people across this binary divide, depending on the spatial arrangements. Hence, this binary is perpetually destabilised through spatial practices that 'other' older adults across both categories. The tension also becomes visible in urban policy programs and initiatives, revealing that older adults who 'age in place' are addressed as both active young-old and frail old-old. For instance, the service of the Viennese *Kontaktbesuchsdienst* ('Contact Visiting Service')[89] conducts needs-assessment visits identifying frail, care-dependent 'old-old' seniors with the aim of providing health prevention and arranging care services,

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[88] As outlined in *Chapter 2.3.4*, the WHO (2015, 2018) has recently introduced healthy ageing as a replacement for active ageing, though active ageing remains in use and a closer examination reveals that the two concepts are closely intertwined. The City of Vienna predominantly adopts healthy ageing, strongly linking it to health promotion while maintaining close ties to activation goals that focus on the resources of older people.

[89] I conducted expert interviews with coordinators of the *Kontaktbesuchsdienst* (09EI, 10EI); a short introduction of the service can be found on the website of the *Wiener Sozialdienste* (WISO, 2023).

while recruiting ‘younger’ retirees as volunteers for conducting these visits, mobilising them through active ageing discourses that tie civic participation with health promotion.

Further research could investigate in greater depth how dwelling practices and discursive narratives converge to shape subject positions and systematically illuminate the points of overlap and divergence between ‘active’ and ‘frail’ ageing identities. It might suggest a need for a third conceptualisation of old age beyond the active/frail binary, that better reflects the dynamics of spatialised othering within ageing-in-place. Specifically, such inquiry could probe how homecare services transform the home into a quasi-nursing space, particularly when divergent meanings arise, for example, because cohabitants, such as spouses, have different needs and demands on the home. The shared domestic place of the home offers a compelling lens to explore how a care-dependent spouse’s experience of place intersects with or departs from that of their ‘still-active’ partner, illuminating the fluidity of these categorical boundaries in the context of ageing-in-place.

The Spatial Production of Old Age and the Power of Planning

Urban development increasingly targets older adults as a distinct group, aiming to design cities that sustain their residence in familiar dwelling environments for as long as possible. Yet, as my research and broader scholarship suggest, cities remain predominantly shaped by the needs of a middle-adulthood norm, casting ‘age-friendliness’ as a deviation rather than an integral element. This reflects the rhythms of urban life prioritising the temporalties (Lager et al., 2016) and specific needs of younger, middle-aged dwellers (May & Muir, 2015), while age-friendly features – often reduced to accessibility add-ons like wheelchair ramps – appear as secondary adjustments (Kajita, 2020). Mobility and access are undeniably critical; however, such solutions can inadvertently reinforce discrimination, framing older people as a disabled ‘other’ distinct from the able-bodied norm (see also Gabauer, 2022).

Applied approaches promoting ageing-in-place need to shift to a way of scrutinising how old age is powerfully shaped and constructed through forms of space production. In this sense, ageing-in-place policies and planning interventions must move beyond adapting socio-material environments to support mobility and independence – e.g., through barrier-free spaces or enabling infrastructure – and interrogate how spatial production actively shapes old age. Planning, as a tool of regulation and control (Yiftachel, 1998), not only

enables or disables but constructs societal perceptions of ageing, often reflecting cultural stereotypes. Old age-specific spaces, such as pensioners' clubs or other curated activity places, can foster integration and health but risk alienating those who reject their connotations (e.g., associating them with a negative picture of old age). Similarly, spaces tied to 'active ageing' – spatially co-produced through older adults' practices – may empower individuals by affirming valued identities and challenging frailty stereotypes. However, such spaces also draw exclusionary boundaries, privileging those who conform to the 'active' ideal while rendering others invisible or inadequate (see *Chapter 6.2*).

Thus, beyond enabling or obstructing, spaces co-constitute ageing subjects. Therefore, I consider it necessary to include a power analysis in order to grasp how planning and design reproduce images of old age and individual experiences of ageing. Uncovering power dynamics in processes of space production aligns with Davoudi's (2018) observation that planning often treats space as a container – a fixed, bounded/territorial quasi-natural giving (see also *Chapter 3.1*). Yet this must be seen as a temporary sedimentation. Hence, its boundedness, as Davoudi (2018, p. 20) notes, is contingent and temporary, but it nevertheless "produces powerful spatial imaginaries" that significantly shape the way relationships are enacted. In this sense, planning and policy-making have to be understood as both relational and bounded/territorial because they precisely operate at this tension of spaces between being in flux and simultaneously fixed. Cochrane and Ward (2012, p. 7) argue in this context that, rather than viewing this as contradictory, the key is to explore how this tension generates policies and places in tandem. In this sense, conventional distinctions between the two overlook their mutual definition: Territories emerge from overlapping social, political and economic relations across space, while identifiable boundedness constrains and shapes those relations (Cochrane & Ward, 2012, ref. to Massey, 2005). Ageing-in-place policies often assume static spaces, neglecting how urban transformation and relational dynamics co-produce old age. My conceptual approach of *embodied spatialities of old age* (see *Chapter 6.1*) addresses this gap by foregrounding the body as a lens to capture the constitutive interplay of ageing and space, moving beyond mere adaptation to reveal how old age is spatially enacted and experienced.

The concept of embodied spatialities of old age positions the body as central to analysing ageing-in-place, viewing it as both a marker of ageing – in the sense of ageing as an embodied process – and an interface for experiencing space – drawing on 'embodied

space' conceptions (see e.g., Low, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]). As the nexus between the ageing self and the socio-material environment, the body reveals how people perceive themselves as ageing through spatial practices and relationships. Old age thus emerges from bodily experiences and dynamic interactions with place, where physical changes, like reduced mobility, manifest through specific spatial conditions. The perspective underscores a dual temporality: the ageing body as a process and space as ever-changing. This mutual conditioning reveals that bodily transformations entail newly and differently experienced temporalties of spaces: paths lengthen, places expand. Such a framing challenges gerontology's 'shrinking space' coupled with 'shrinking social worlds' narrative that equates ageing with decline. While mobility may wane, lived spatial experience remains subjective, relational and multifaceted – not a mere dwindling radius. Yet, planning agendas, anchored in able-bodied norms, fixate on mobility loss and social disconnection, framing ageing as a problem to be solved through accessibility measures rather than a dynamic spatial process. My research, however, shows this linear assumption misrepresents many older adults' dwelling experiences, highlighting a richer interplay of space and lifecourse trajectories. By overemphasising bodily limits and equating reduced mobility with loss of social relationships, such approaches reinforce a reductive view of 'ageing as decline'. These perspectives overlook the reality that reduced mobility does not necessarily precipitate a 'forced retreat' into the domestic home, thereby undermining older adults' agency in forging new connections to and within urban space, despite and beyond bodily constraints.

Moreover, framing reduced mobility solely as a consequence of bodily limitations obscures the diverse lived realities of old age, particularly the highly gendered constraints imposed by caregiving responsibilities. For instance, many older women experience a significant contraction of their spatial radius and a retreat to the domestic sphere, not due to their own bodily limitations but as a result of kin care, often for an ageing spouse whose declining health demands their attention. These caregiving practices – despite their high frequency in female biographies – remain underexplored in space-related ageing research. However, they profoundly shape older women's geographical worlds, highlighting how spatial restrictions can stem from diverse living realities in later life rather than experienced bodily 'decline'. It, furthermore, exemplarily illustrates the relationality of ageing by showing how old age also emerges through shifting social dynamics, such as the shared experience of spousal relationships transforming due to a partner's health and care needs.

Focusing narrowly on disability or bodily impairment, such reductive approaches take away older people's agency and, as scholars like Twigg (2004, p. 64, emphasis A.G.) have aptly pointed out, diminish old age "to be not just about the body, *but nothing but the body*." It profoundly dominates subjective experience, overshadowing all other dimensions of dwelling in old age:

> The 'problems' of old age are seen to center around bodily difficulties like mobility, continence, ADL scores, to the degree that policymakers construct the old in terms of these bodily deficits and their consequences for public expenditure (Twigg, 2004, p. 64).

Ageing and Urban Change: The Missing Generational Lens

Ageing-in-place rests on an idealised view of the home as a site of identity and self-expression, imbued with belonging, familiarity, trust and security. Particular significance in this context is assigned to the neighbourhood as a hub of activity, social engagement and supportive infrastructure (see also *Chapter 2.3*). This narrative is based on a central gerontological assumption that ageing deepens place attachment, positioning ageing-in-place as the optimal mode of growing old. However, this dominant emphasis on spatial belonging overlooks the reality of urban transformation. As I have argued, understanding the relationship between ageing and space demands a dual temporality: the ageing individual's evolving lifecourse and the continuous remaking of space. This is crucial for gaining a fuller picture of what ageing-in-place means.

To understand experiences of ageing-in-place, a specific focus should be equally on how places older people inhabit change over time, a dimension still underestimated in academic and policy discourses (for a similar argument, see Lewis & Buffel, 2020; Lewis et al., 2022). This means that individual experiences of growing older precisely become apparent through the recognition of different manifestations of urban transformation: Old age is constituted through urban change. Urban transformation, such as gentrification, changes in infrastructure and the social fabric, migration patterns and climate change impact, profoundly influence how ageing is experienced and lived. Aligning with Phillipson (2004) and Buffel and Phillipson (2023), I advocate for a systematic integration of space-focused gerontology with urban studies scholarship, embedding ageing-in-place within the broader context of urbanisation.

Early space-related gerontology frames place attachment as a lifecourse phenomenon developing over time and, therefore, rooted in memories of the past (see e.g., Rowles, 1983c). Deep feelings of spatial belonging are nurtured from memories of biographical stories, past relationships and life events that are inscribed in and bound up with places and carried on into the present. This attachment can persist even as places undergo significant change, a pattern my research confirms. Yet, this perspective risks idealising ageing-in-place by overlooking 'the dark side of place attachment': Precisely because of strong place attachment, urbanisation can be experienced even more disruptively and unsettlingly. As my interviews suggest, the resulting disconnect between past experiences ('how it used to be') and current realities can foster alienation and disidentification rather than belonging.

This tension underscores a broader limitation in how ageing-in-place is operationalised within urban policy. Planning agendas promoting ageing-in-place (and age-friendly cities and communities in general) typically prioritise adapting environments to 'old age-specific' needs, such as creating senior housing, providing social infrastructure and care arrangements or designing accessible public spaces. However, these efforts often fail to account for the lived disruptions caused by urban transformations and overlook a *generational lens*: how urban development and the organisation of urban life are driven by a generation-specific focus. Beyond the critique that cities remain designed around a middle-adulthood norm (as argued above), a deeper issue lies in how urban development reflects generation-specific lifestyles and perceptions, implicitly tied to that norm. This 'dual neglect' marginalises older people in intersecting ways: through age discrimination, disregarding their *age-specific* needs, and through generational bias, ignoring their *generation-distinctive* experiences and expectations of urban living.

What I have termed as *biographical internalisation of space* (see *Chapter 6.3*) precisely addresses the interplay between personal memories/the self and space – in the sense that individual biographies are imprinted in places through memories and are critical for the "contemporary being-in-the-world" (Cutchin & Rowles, 2024b, p. 8) – as well as urban change and generational belonging. This entanglement and reciprocal constitution of the temporality of age and the temporality of space emphasises, firstly, how individual histories and remembrances of the past are mediated and inscribed in space and how the perception of spatial change relates to the individual course of life. Secondly, it illuminates how urban changes are entangled with generational perspectives and,

therefore, indicates that the relationship between space and age is not only a matter of how individuals relate to space in the course of their lives but also of how they relate to space due to their belonging to a certain generation. This provokes the question: What are generation-specific relationships to space?

One of my key arguments is that strategies of ageing-in-places and age-friendly urban development need to include a generation perspective in order to succeed. My research, for example, highlights how the increased use of technology in urban life leads to feelings of disidentification and alienation of older people – not only due to gaps in knowledge or access to digital tools but also due to a value-based mismatch of contemporary lifestyles. The shift to online banking and replacing familiar in-person branch visits may not only feel overwhelming due to a lack of skills but also represent a fundamental change to the 'norm of banking' – *how it used to be done* – requiring a shift in habits and routines. Similar applies to transport planning, favouring cycling traffic over the once-hegemonic ideal of the car. E-scooters on pedestrian paths or shared pedestrian/cycle lanes are experienced as both hazardous to use and an expression of alienated city life. These tensions suggest that integrating ageing-in-place with 'smart cities' or 'superblocks' approaches demands deeper scrutiny of such generational frictions, a fruitful avenue for future research.

Relatedly, the study's findings challenge dominant views in gerontological research of older people as mainly marginalised urban dwellers. My research shows that older people who have lived in the same neighbourhood for many years and are considered 'locals' often exhibit exclusionary attitudes towards newcomers – attitudes that frequently intersect with racist resentments. A generational perspective sharpens our understanding of these dynamics. However, gerontological research rarely explores older adults as potential agents of discrimination, or how such behaviour might be related to their own experiences of exclusion based on age and intersectional experiences of discrimination. This gap calls for greater cross-pollination with community studies and critical neighbourhood research (e.g., Blokland et al., 2023), which offer a valuable lens for unpacking how ageing intersects with exclusionary practices in urban contexts.

This analysis should not suggest that perceived generational discrepancies in urban life inevitably manifest in a deterministic opposition, nor that they consistently coalesce into exclusionary or discriminatory forms of agency. Belonging to and identifying with a

particular generation does not inherently entail the rejection of other generations' values or lifestyles. Many of the respondents define themselves as active participants in digital technologies precisely *despite their older age*. They present themselves as 'tech-savvy despite being old', emphasising their engagement by sharing photos of visits to *Schönbrunn*[90] with their grandchildren via smartphones, or by pointing out that they no longer rely on buying traditional stamps at the local post office due to their frequent email use. Yet, paradoxically, the same woman who emphasises her regular use of a smartphone and computer still highlights 'issues around technology' as one of the most important markers of her old age, considering this a defining feature that makes her part of the *other* generation.

Similarly, older adults' responses to urban regeneration reveal ambivalences. Many welcome improvements like expanded public transportation or greener urban centres, viewing their neighbourhoods as improved compared to the past. Yet, they also express frustration over construction disruptions and the demolition of historic buildings for high-rise housing. These contradictions become even sharper in simultaneous complaints about rising environmental pollution and car traffic, alongside criticism of the reduction of car parking spaces and the construction of bike lanes. For older adults, these 'resistant subjectivities' (J. Butler, 2006 [1999]) manifest in navigating urban transformations – both embracing modernising policies and resisting them to hold onto historical and generational ties to place, complicating their adaptation to change.

Therefore, the study's findings do challenge the notion of an inherent backwardness among older adults or that their attachment to place is predominantly rooted in (nostalgic) memories, as often implied in studies on place attachment in older age.[91] Instead, the research underscores the need to understand how multiple temporalities converge within the subject, creating tensions that shape the experiences of dwelling in old age. These temporal dissonances reflect the inherently ambivalent nature of the subject, where identities are in a constant state of performative becoming while simultaneously anchored by biographically shaped dispositions formed through socialisation (J. Butler, 1993; see

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[90] *Schloss Schönbrunn*, 'Schönbrunn Palace', with its large garden, is one of Vienna's main tourist attractions and an open-space oasis for many Viennese. It was the main summer residence of the Habsburg rulers, located in the 13th district of Vienna.

[91] For example, Rowles' (1983a, 1983c) widely cited concept of 'insideness' has precisely been critiqued in this regard by Cutchin (Cutchin, 2001, 2003; see also e.g., Lovatt, 2018).

Bourdieu, 1977; also *Chapter 3.1*). Such contradictions are evident in older adults' responses to urban changes. Research on socio-ecological and socio-technical transformations that bases its analyses solely on a structural level risks overlooking the complex agency of individuals. To address this, I advocate for stronger integration of subjectivation research into urbanisation scholarship and the emerging field of transformation research to better understand how individuals navigate urban development and urbanisation processes, often in ambivalent, contradictory or resistant ways. Particularly in relation to ageing-related issues, further exploration would offer significant potential to deepen our understanding of how older adults shape their socio-material worlds amid evolving urban environments. I have advocated for a systematic integration of age and generation in this context, but I see significant potential for further research, particularly through a deeper intersectional analysis that examines diverse vulnerabilities and identities, such as the role of migration biographies and socio-economic resources in shaping older adults' experiences in urban transformations.

In conclusion, ageing is contingent not only as a social category in terms of lifecourse but also in terms of generational affiliation and associated values and expectations. How ageing-in-place is experienced and the demands placed upon it will continuously evolve and change, co-constituted with transforming cities and societies. Supporting ageing-in-place, then, hinges on recognising this relational process, where individual, generational and urban contingencies interplay. These stakes underscore the need for ongoing re-evaluation to ensure that strategies remain attuned to the diverse and dynamic realities of dwelling in old age, especially in light of emerging facets of urbanisation.

8. Concluding Remarks

I started this book by emphasising two widely recognised demographic forces shaping the 21st century: urbanisation and ageing populations. The concept of ageing-in-place seeks to address the intersection of these trends by advocating for urban environments that support people to remain in their familiar homes, assuming this to be the preferred and ideal way of growing older. Ageing-in-place is a central notion in both academic research and policy debates, closely tied to broader discussions on age-friendly cities and societal imaginaries of what it means to 'age well' in urban contexts. Building on this, my research examined how urban spaces shape and mediate everyday experiences of ageing. It is grounded in a well-established cross-disciplinary body of work that highlights the reciprocal relationship between ageing and space, particularly within the framework of ageing-in-place. While focusing on the lived experiences of growing older, this study was guided by the overarching question of *what role urban spaces play and what effects they have on the constitution of ageing subjects*.

My research aimed to advance the theoretical framework for understanding the relational dynamics of ageing and space. It explored how older people sustain daily life and a sense of belonging within transforming urban environments, while also attending to the complex and layered character of ageing. Ageing is approached here as a dual relational process – shaped by changes experienced both in relation to one's lifecourse and in relation to the social surroundings (see van Dyk, 2015a). This concluding chapter offers a reflection on the research process and highlights key findings developed over the preceding chapters. Directions for future research have already been discussed in the previous *Chapter 7*, while a more detailed reflection on the empirical work – including its limitations – was provided in *Chapter 4.3*.

In a nutshell, this chapter concludes as follows:

- combining a practice-theoretical understanding of doing age with a dialectical understanding of relational space allows for theorising the constitutive reciprocal relationship between ageing and space, highlighting both as in a state of continuous becoming;
- the concept of dwelling serves as a productive analytical and empirical dimension for exploring the everyday experiences of growing older and their inherent geographies;

- forms of othering in old age are spatially contingent and manifest themselves in two ways: as valorisation and disparagement, which materialise in both seemingly 'age-less' spaces of everyday life and institutionalised 'spaces of old age' explicitly connotated with old age;
- the body is the mediating instance between experiences of ageing and experiences of space, enabling scrutiny of how people reconfigure their relationships with space throughout their lifecourse;
- incorporating theorisations of subject formation into studies on urbanisation can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how older adults, as subjects of urban transformation, actively and ambivalently respond to structural shifts;
- strong feelings of spatial belonging rooted in biographical trajectories and embedded in places can also fundamentally provoke disidentification and alienation from dwelling spaces, culminating in facets of the 'dark side of place attachment';
- expanding a lifecourse perspective on the relationship between ageing and space with the dimension of generation illuminates that older adults often experience a dual form of neglect in processes of urban space production: through age discrimination that overlooks their old age-specific needs and through generational bias that disregards their generation-distinctive experiences and expectations of urban life;
- older adults are not passive recipients of urban transformation; they adapt, resist, negotiate and redefine their place in the city in diverse ways, thereby challenging reductive ideas about old age as inherently backwards;
- acknowledging older people's agency in evolving relationships to space complicates dominant narratives in space-related ageing research that portray older adults exclusively as vulnerable or marginalised; instead, they also act in discriminatory ways, often intertwined with stories of 'how it used to be'.

A review of the respective research landscape (see *Chapter 2*) reveals that scholarship on ageing and space frequently falls short of embracing the relational constitution of both space and age. Scholarly work often reduces relationality to a theoretical assertion rather than a methodological practice. Geographical studies tend to overlook sociological theories of ageing, thereby neglecting literature that systematically integrates individual experiences with societal discourses and normative expectations around growing older. Likewise, empirical work inspired by 'more-than-representational theories' frequently

treats age as an individualised, sensory phenomenon without situating it within structural conditions, perpetuating structure–agency dualisms. New materialism-inspired approaches within 'material gerontology' offer fresh insights into the ageing–space relationship. However, their post-humanist emphasis on the agency of materialities risks promoting environmental determinism and reviving a biomedical perspective in ageing research. My work responds to these gaps in qualitative research concerned with the constitutive interrelation of ageing and space (see *Chapter 2.4*). I propose combining a practice-theoretical approach to 'doing age', inspired by J. Butler's (e.g., 1997b) view of the subject as performatively constituted through constant repetition, with a relational theory of space (see *Chapter 3.1*). Drawing on Massey (2005), space is understood dialectically, with its social and material dimensions seen as intricately interwoven and mutually constitutive. Like the subject, it is in a continuous process of becoming and emergence. I argue that integrating practice theory with a relational understanding of space provides a nuanced analytical framework for exploring how ageing is co-constituted within the urban fabric. This approach acknowledges the dual temporality at play: ageing as a process of 'living in time' (Baars, 2009) and space as 'always in becoming' (Massey, 2005). It posits that the relationship between ageing and space emerges through a dynamic mutual interdependence between the ageing (i.e., changing) subject and the ever-evolving socio-material environment.

Vienna served as the empirical site of the study to explore everyday practices of older people and the role of space in shaping experiences of ageing within accustomed home environments. The research combined a qualitative interview study with mobile ethnography, involving 35 ethnographic-narrative, problem-centred and go-along interviews with individuals aged between 63 and 92. This rich dataset of biographical narratives was triangulated with expert interviews and policy analysis (see *Chapter 5*). Employing a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), the initial fieldwork was open and exploratory, becoming progressively more focused over three iterative phases of data collection (see *Chapter 4.2*). Each phase built on the insights of the previous one, with research questions, sampling strategies and methodological decisions continually refined throughout the research process. Drawing on a grounded theory coding paradigm (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 190–223) complemented by narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), I developed a threefold analytical framework comprising: (1) *embodied spatialities of old age*, (2) *spatialised othering*, and (3) *biographical internalisation of space* (see *Chapter 6*).

The study started *from an empirical groundedness* in the lived realities of older people, aiming to enrich theoretical debates through empirical findings rooted in the embodied experience of ageing. Space was approached first and foremost through the perspective of the ageing subject – that is, through the analysis of older adults' spatial practices, negotiations and place-making within transforming urban contexts. In this respect, the work is anchored in everyday-theory-based approaches in urban studies, which advocate for centring everyday life as an analytical frame where micro, meso and macro dimensions intersect (see Knierbein, 2021). Accordingly, geographies of everyday life served as a methodological lens through which to analyse the subjectivation processes of ageing and their spatial entanglements (see *Chapter 4.1*). In this way, the research aligns with recent developments in ageing studies that call for a systematic integration with everyday life research (see Katz, 2018c).

I extended this approach by introducing *dwelling* as an analytical framework for empirically investigating the spatialised everyday lives of older adults (see *Chapter 3.2*). Dwelling moves beyond an understanding of home as mere shelter. The perspective on dwelling developed in this work rests on practice-theoretical approaches of 'doing home', conceptualising "home as an ongoing process" (Dowling & Mee, 2007, p. 161). Hence, dwelling encompasses the notion of home perceived not as a static entity but as continuously (re)produced through social practices shaped by normative ideas and hegemonic imaginaries of 'appropriate' ways of living and ideal forms of housing. Crucially, dwelling refers not merely to an accumulation of social actions manifested in material settings, but rather to a spatial expression of 'being-in-the-world' (an understanding inspired by Heidegger; for further development, see Hasse, 2009). In this sense, I drew on conceptualising dwelling as a spatialisation of subjectivation practices (see Hasse, 2009), an understanding that provided two key insights into ageing-in-place:

First, on a methodological level, the concept of dwelling provided an empirically grounded way to access the otherwise abstract and less tangible concept of everyday life. In contrast to asking respondents about 'their everyday life', questions about their home and housing biographies are more accessible and more closely aligned with participants' own language and lived experience. At the same time, this approach retains analytical richness by incorporating theoretical accounts of everyday life. Therefore, dwelling serves as a vital lens for analysing individual biographies and their spatial expressions with drawing conclusions about wider social arrangements, norms and patterns of social

structure that shape the conditions and experiences of ageing. In this sense, home is not treated merely as an empirical fragment, as much gerontological research does, but rather leveraged as an analytical tool to explore broader questions of ageing in urban contexts, yielding theoretical insights into how spatial arrangements shape the ageing subject. With this, I also addressed a sociological perspective often overlooked: Approaching home as a 'microcosm of society' (see Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020).

Building on this, the *second* key insight offered by a dwelling perspective lies in exposing a conceptual ambiguity of ageing-in-place. Ageing-in-place carries a twofold meaning, operating on two distinct levels: It describes the empirical reality of older adults remaining in their homes, often by choice, while also representing a normative vision endorsed by a broad coalition of policymakers, planners and scholars. This study critiqued the term for being analytically imprecise and politically charged, a concept that blurs lived experience with prescriptive intent. In contrast, the concept of *dwelling in old age* serves as a heuristic approach for exploring how spatial arrangements shape ageing identities, without presupposing or reproducing normative expectations about how and where growing older should unfold (see *Chapter 7*).

In this sense, dwelling as I conceptualised it in this work, means contextualising articulated preferences of individuals within socio-structural frameworks and in relation to societal expectations. The widespread desire to 'stay put' cannot be viewed as purely individual or autonomous; it must be understood as shaped by dominant discourses and normative ideas. When remaining at home is framed as the 'normal' or 'right' way to grow old – while moving to age-specific housing is seen as a deviation from that norm – it is no surprise that relocation in late life is often rejected. A dwelling perspective thus reveals how subjective preferences are socially embedded and calls for a more critical interrogation of what is presented as 'natural' or 'normal' in ageing and housing discourses.

The historically contingent nature of the 'ideal' place to grow old becomes evident when examining the recent past. Prior to the emergence of the concept of ageing-in-place in the 1990s (Müller et al., 2022, p. 52), ageing was predominantly shaped by a relocation paradigm, reflected in the rise of institutional care facilities (see e.g., Rowles & Ravdal, 2002, pp. 90–91, with ref. to Rowles, 1993). This shift is also empirically observable in Vienna, where recent decades have seen a strategic orientation towards home-based care

infrastructures, accompanied by stricter regulations governing access to institutional care – most notably through eligibility thresholds based on formally assessed care needs. It is widely acknowledged that these developments are (also) largely driven by a paradigm of cost-efficiency (see e.g., Milligan, 2009).

To be clear, my argument is not a call to return to age-segregated housing arrangements. Rather, this research seeks to contribute to a critical examination of the interplay between individually articulated preferences and the institutional and discursive frameworks within which such preferences are shaped. This, in turn, provides a more robust foundation for drawing normative conclusions for planning and policy – conclusions grounded not in prescriptive assumptions about ageing, but in a critical engagement with the lived spaces of older adults.

This connects to the study's finding that ageing-in-place (implicitly) positions institutional care homes as its antithesis. In this sense, the research reveals that the concept of ageing-in-place reinforces the discursive distinction between the 'active-old' and the 'frail-old', thereby perpetuating processes of othering in a twofold manner: the 'active' young-old are valorised, while the 'frail' old-old are disparaged (van Dyk, 2016). Ageing-in-place is embedded in the 'dispositif of active ageing' (see van Dyk, Lessenich, Denninger, & Richter, 2013), which becomes particularly apparent in its alignment with the broader strategies of age-friendly cities, aimed at promoting 'active' and 'healthy' ageing – a focus that also shapes urban development strategies in Vienna (see *Chapter 7*). In contrast, retirement and nursing homes are constructed as spaces of extreme frailty and dependency, clearly positioning their residents on the 'devalued side' of the binary logic of young-old–old-old and active–frail.

As argued by a broad tradition of sociological ageing research (see *Chapter 2.1*), older people are marked as the 'other' due to middle adulthood being framed as the societal norm. Our worlds are built around the middle-aged adult as a template, with the result that, like the life phases of childhood and youth, later life is construed as a deviation and thus as the 'other'. This is exemplified by the very need for the label 'age-friendly cities and communities'. There is no equivalent term such as 'middle-age-friendly', as such a designation is unnecessary because middle-age-friendliness is already the unmarked norm that requires no special signifier (Freutel-Funke & Wanka, 2025b, p. 4). The concept of *spatialised othering* developed in this study builds on these insights but goes further by

focusing on the spatial situatedness of othering (see *Chapter 6.2*). The findings show that experiences of othering are spatially contingent and that older people can be positioned in varying ways within the binary logic of young–old or active–frail through their everyday practices.

An example from the empirical data is the case of a woman who, in her dance class – a space which is otherwise populated by 'only young' people, as she described it – was celebrated for her agility and dancing skills, and thus perceived as a model of active ageing. However, on her way there, on the metro, she was repeatedly offered a seat by a chorus of fellow passengers, despite her firm refusals. She did not interpret this gesture as care or courtesy, but rather as an inappropriate attribution of neediness. In both places, she was marked as 'old' – yet with differing meanings: In the dance studio, her participation was framed positively precisely *because of* her older age; in public transit, by contrast, it was read as an indicator of frailty. These divergent forms of spatialised othering illustrate how the same individual can be simultaneously perceived as a valued 'young-old' and a disdained 'old-old', depending on the spatial context.

This perpetually contradictory labelling within the framework of ageing-in-place is also reflected on the institutional level, particularly in policy programmes and services where older adults are simultaneously addressed as both 'active, productive agers' and 'passive, frail agers'. A vivid example is a contact visiting service programme run by the City of Vienna: Older adults are recruited as volunteers, mobilised through discourses of active and healthy ageing that link civic engagement with health promotion, to conduct needs-assessment visits for identifying health-impaired and socially isolated older people, and provide them with information about care and support services. The categorisation of older people is thus negotiated through specific spatial contexts, while these sites are shaped by concrete programmes and (policy) discourses. Older people are addressed and positioned through this binary divide within their daily practices and lived experiences of inhabiting space.

The conducted analysis indicates that this two-fold othering plays out both in seemingly 'age-less' spaces and those explicitly tied to old age. Hence, I showed that labelling older individuals as 'other' manifests in ostensibly age-neutral urban settings, where age-related norms are subtly embedded (reflecting cities designed primarily for middle-adulthood standards). Conversely, other places are overtly marked as 'spaces of old age',

institutionally designated for specific age cohorts through formal categorisation and spatial organisation. This aligns with sociological perspectives on how societies are structured around the 'institutionalised lifecourse' (Kohli, 1985), defined by distinct life stages and chrono-normative expectations, which materialise spatially. Such old age-related infrastructures embody institutionalised temporal norms, with access to these spaces often tied to formal age-group designation, reinforcing social segregations and shaping older adults' experiences within the urban fabric.

Experiences of spatialised othering are often linked to spaces designed for older demographics, such as pensioners' clubs or other curated activity spaces for seniors, due to the stigmatising associations attached to old age. As my research demonstrated, these spaces can evoke negative images of ageing, frequently tied to notions of passivity and decline. Crucially, however, this perception is not exclusively 'age-based', but is deeply entangled with other social positionings, including origin and social class. By avoiding these spaces, older adults resist reductive narratives of ageing and differentiate themselves from peers perceived as less independent, socially connected or educated. Their rejection is not solely about ageing per se, but about navigating identities shaped by class, ethnicity, gender or ability. Some, for instance, emphasised their physical vitality, strong social ties or perceived social standing to assert distinction. Others exhibit agency by selectively participating – taking on leadership roles or bypassing activities that reinforce ageist stereotypes – thereby actively reshaping their self-definition (for similar insights, see Pain et al., 2000).

Despite growing awareness and sensitivity towards designing and planning for older adults, urban environments continue to be shaped predominantly by the lifestyles, needs and preferences of middle-aged individuals. Planning agendas often proceed with an inherent bias towards able-bodiedness (Stafford et al., 2022). Closely tied to this is the widespread orientation of ageing-in-place and age-friendly planning around the notion of a 'shrinking space' as people age – a dwindling mobility radius predominantly attributed to physical limitations, while simultaneously often linked with a decrease in social connections. Yet this idea must be contextualised as being primarily shaped by middle-aged value systems, which frame older adults as occupying increasingly diminished worlds (Rowles, 1978). As I have argued, such conceptualisations not only treat midlife as the normative benchmark but also reveal a lack of relational thinking of space,

particularly in overlooking its temporal dimensions and the altered perceptions of time that emerge in later life.

The introduced concept of *embodied spatialities of old age* addresses this gap, positioning the body as a pivotal anchor for analysis (see *Chapter 6.1*). It sees the body as the interface between older individuals and their surroundings, playing a dual role: as a marker of ageing, reflecting the embodied process of growing older, and as a medium through which people experience and engage with space. Space, in this view, is not a fixed background – it is lived, navigated and felt. Such a perspective shows how changes in the body reshape how space is temporally experienced. For example, spatial distances are not just absolute – they are influenced by how we move through them. Even though physical mobility may decline with age, this does not necessarily entail a corresponding reduction in social space. A smaller movement radius does not equate to retreat – on the contrary, it can re-intensify local relationships and foster renewed forms of spatial intimacy.

This perspective prompts a critical re-evaluation of prevailing planning paradigms, which are often – explicitly and implicitly – shaped by the experiences and assumptions of middle adulthood and connoted ideas of able-bodiedness. It draws attention to how these frameworks may reinforce a reductive narrative of ageing, one that equates the process with inevitable decline across bodily, social and geographical dimensions. While such paradigms prioritise addressing challenges associated with restricted mobility or social isolation, they frequently apply standardised categories and normative assumptions that risk treating older adults as spatially passive. Crucially, this is not an attempt to paint a romanticised picture that overlooks real, experienced challenges associated with restricted mobility, inaccessible infrastructure or social isolation. Rather, it underscores the importance of recognising how older adults continue to negotiate, adapt to and sustain spatial connections. It moves beyond binaries of independence versus decline, instead emphasising the diverse, situated experiences of older adults. This does not deny material and infrastructural challenges, but insists that ageing involves more than physical limitations, and that bodily changes are not necessarily experienced subjectively as decline in relation to previous conditions. Hence, it acknowledges older people's agency in evolving relationships to space.

A central task, then, is to confront the ambivalences of everyday life. Connecting everyday life-informed accounts in urban studies with theories of subjectivation enables

a view of older people not as passive recipients of change but as ambivalent subjects, continuously negotiating their identities through habitual practices in conjunction with shifting urban conditions. Incorporating theorisations of subject formation into studies on urbanisation can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how older adults, as subjects of urban transformation, actively and ambivalently respond to structural shifts – rejecting, for instance, planning measures in seemingly paradoxical ways.

An empirical example from my research can illustrate this: Transport planning interventions, such as the construction of bike lanes and the removal of car parking spaces, often provoke resistance among older residents. Interviews revealed that these changes are repeatedly perceived as overly intrusive and negative, even when the simultaneous increase in traffic and deterioration of air quality were criticised just as vehemently. Notably, this rejection is voiced even among those who no longer drive a car. As I have shown, this can be traced back to a symbolic level, highlighting how perceived disruptions are deeply rooted in spatial perception, interwoven with people's biographical life histories.

To understand these contradictions and ambivalences, we need a deeper delving into the constitutive age–space relationship. This brings me to the concept of *biographical internalisation of space* – a framework to explore how spatial experiences are shaped by overlapping temporalities (see *Chapter 6.3*). It posits that ageing and urban space are co-constitutive: the temporality of age (the individual ageing) intersects with the temporality of space (urban change), embedding life histories and personal memory into specific spatial contexts. As such, older adults' perception of urban change is not merely reactive but deeply tied to their lifecourse and to the accumulated emotional geographies of past experiences. In other words, it emphasises how personal histories, memories and lived experiences are embedded and expressed within spatial contexts, while understanding individuals' perception of urban changes as closely linked to their biographies and personal life trajectories.

Central to this perspective, therefore, is the idea that old age is co-produced through a temporal experience of space, where the materialisation of age emerges through spatial practices and is shaped by references to the past and earlier stages of life. In this sense, the concept of biographical internalisation of space builds on well-established gerontological research showing that personal memories are closely tied to place. This

underscores how individual biographies are ‘emplaced’ – that is, how identities materialise through spatial arrangements, which play a key role in self-identification. Rowles’ (e.g., 1980) concept of ‘being in place’ remains foundational here and has significantly influenced subsequent work on growing place attachment in later life (for an overview, see *Chapter 2.3.1*). However, my findings also complicate this narrative. Long-term residents often report feelings of alienation as their neighbourhoods undergo profound change – what I referred to as the ‘dark side of place attachment’. Framing staying put as the ideal way of growing older can obscure the fact that strong spatial bonds may intensify the dislocating effects of urban transformation.

To better understand this tension, I argued for the coupling of a lifecourse perspective with a generational lens. Urban changes unfold not only within individual biographies but across generational experiences, each shaped by specific socio-historical contexts. This distinction is often blurred in age–space research, where ‘age’ is mistakenly used as a stand-in for ‘generation’. Yet both planners and scholars must recognise that older adults experience a dual form of neglect: on the one hand, through age discrimination that overlooks their *old age-specific* needs; on the other, through generational bias that disregards their *generation-distinctive* experiences and expectations of urban life. Therefore, the issue goes beyond the familiar critique that cities are predominantly designed around a midlife norm – it also concerns how that norm is shaped by generation-specific values and lifestyles. As a result, ageing-in-place policies often focus narrowly on infrastructural adaptation, such as accessible housing and services, while overlooking the broader generational disruptions produced by urban transformation.

This dynamic becomes especially clear in the aforementioned example of transport planning. Shared cycling and pedestrian paths or opening one-way streets to bike traffic often provoke anxiety among older adults. These designs can feel unsafe for older individuals managing slower reaction times or reduced visibility. Yet their discomfort goes beyond practical concern. It signals resistance to a broader mobility regime that privileges cycling over the once-dominant private car. E-scooters and fast-moving bikes on sidewalks are experienced not only as physical threats but as signs of a city that no longer reflects their way of life. This reaction blends age-related vulnerability with generational dislocation: a discomfort rooted as much in cultural memory as in bodily capacity. It dismisses both their current needs and their generationally shaped relationships to urban life.

Similar frictions emerged in discussions around the digitalisation of urban life. Participants often raised this issue unprompted, highlighting how the digitisation of infrastructure excludes those unfamiliar with app-based systems. These exclusions are frequently dismissed as technological illiteracy or resource scarcity. Yet such interpretations miss the point: Digitalisation fundamentally restructures urban living. A generational perspective reveals that many older adults reject digital tools not simply out of inability but because these tools clash with deeply held expectations of how urban life should unfold. In these cases, resistance to digital systems becomes a moment of identity formation – a refusal to cross into modes of living that feel alien.

Framing these preferences purely in terms of competence risks pathologising older adults, reducing them to deficient users in a world that has moved on. A generational lens provides a richer reading: It recognises that what is often portrayed as resistance or incompetence is in fact a coherent response to urban transformations that disregard alternative ways of knowing and inhabiting space. It highlights historical and social context – not just physiological decline – as key to understanding older adults' experiences. Indeed, emerging facets of evolving urbanisation can have profound effects on the socio-material fabric of cities, often signalling the erosion of long-standing socio-cultural norms, value systems and familiar ways of life. Yet, older adults are not passive recipients of urban transformation. They adapt, resist, negotiate and redefine their place in the city in diverse ways. Some (selectively) engage with digital technologies or participate in spaces typically associated with younger generations, challenging reductive views of old age as inherently backwards.

A systematic combination of lifecourse and generational analyses can offer valuable insights into the diverse forms of alienation, disconnection and discrimination experienced by older people. However, highlighting the 'dual neglect' older people are exposed to does not mean portraying them solely as marginalised figures in city life. As I have demonstrated in my analysis, they also engage in exclusionary or discriminatory practices towards others. Within their peer groups, they may critique alternative ways of ageing, framing frailty or dependence as self-inflicted failings while positioning their own active lifestyles as normative. They may assert authority as long-term residents, shaping neighbourhood norms and policing behaviours that deviate from their expectations or memories of 'how it used to be'. They may position others as outsiders, reinforcing binaries of 'locals' versus 'strangers'. These dynamics challenge the dominant narrative

in space-related ageing research, which casts older adults exclusively as vulnerable or excluded. Instead, they reveal a more complex picture – one in which power, identity and agency intersect.

Ageing is experienced across plural categories of difference, including class, gender, 'race', ethnicity or ability. The ways in which older adults respond to urbanisation – whether through resistance, withdrawal, adaptation or redefinition – are shaped by these overlapping axes of identity. Their everyday spatial practices illuminate how ageing is lived in the city, not as a static condition, but as an ongoing negotiation of place and self. The ageing subject is inherently ambivalent, relational and always in the process of becoming. As I have argued throughout this book, ageing unfolds at the intersection of multiple temporalities: biographically anchored in the past yet constantly performed and reshaped in the present. Rather than being confined by their biographical histories, older people engage with space as a site of ongoing becoming, where identities unfold over time, and as a space of emergence, where new forms of subjectivity arise through their interactions with shifting socio-material conditions. This book invites readers to reimagine the ageing subject as both grounded in biographical histories and perpetually reinventing itself. In doing so, it challenges the prevailing – often implicit – assumption that ageing and urban transformation are inherently at odds: that the old belongs to the past, while the city belongs to the future.

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10. Appendix

Interviews #ID Sit-in	#ID Go-along	Respondents #ID		Marital status and living situation	District and duration of residence		Second homeplace	Monthly income personal	Formal care services	Old age-specific activity/care space	Volunteering
01PI	01WI	Af	Dagmar Stetter	widowed, living alone	8	more than 50 years	no	1800 - 2500	no	no	yes
02PI	02WI	Bf	Birgit Weiss	divorced and in partnership, living alone	16	30-50 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
03PI	03WI	Cf	Isolde Richter	widowed, living alone	8	30-50 years	yes	1800 - 2500	no, previously	no	no
04PI	04WI	Df	Irina Huber	divorced and in partnership, living alone	15	5-15 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
05PI	05WI	Em	Hubert Weber	married, living with spouse	14	grown up	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
05PI	05WI	Ff	Edit Weber	married, living with spouse	14	more than 50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
06PI		Gm	Peter Dreyer	married, living with spouse	16	30-50 years	yes	2500 - 3500	no	no	no
07PI	07WI	Hf	Magdalena Winkler	divorced, living alone	16	15-30 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
08PI		If	Marina Neumann	widowed, living alone	14	less than five years	no	2500 - 3500	no	no	no
09PI	09WI	Jf	Adele Wimmer	widowed, living alone	14	30-50 years	yes	less than 1200	no, previously	no	yes
10PI	10WI	Kf	Tabea Horvat	married, living with spouse	15	30-50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
10PI	10WI	Lm	Harald Horvat	married, living with spouse	15	30-50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	no	no
11PI		Mm	Vinzent Wallner	married, living with spouse	13	30-50 years	no	more than 3500	no	no	yes
12PI	12WI	Nm	Otto Meier	widowed, living alone	14	more than 50 years	yes	n/a	no	no	no
13PI	13WI	Of	Jutta Ludwig	divorced, living alone	21	5-15 years	no	1200 - 1800	no	no	yes
14PI	14WI	Pf	Eleonore Rubinov	divorced, living alone	15	30-50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	yes	yes
15PI		Qm	Franz Oberndorfer	divorced and in partnership, living alone	19	15-30 years	yes	2500 - 3500	no	no	no
16PI		Rf	Lucija Milošević	widowed, living with son	15	5-15 years	no	less than 1200	no	no	no
17PI		Sm	Omar Ertürk	widowed, living alone	18	15-30 years	yes	less than 1200	no	yes	no
18PI		Tf	Gerda Obermüller	widowed, living alone	15	more than 50 years	yes	1200 - 1800	no	yes	no
19PI		Uf	Franziska Kranz	widowed, living alone	17	more than 50 years	no	1800 - 2500	no	yes	no
20PI [1]		Vm	Fritz Paschner	married, living with spouse	5	grown up	yes	more than 3500	no	yes	yes
21PI [2]		Wf	Beritan Çil	divorced, living alone, occasionally with son	5	5-15 years	yes	less than 1200	no	yes	no
24PI		Zf	Ivana Rogić	married, living alone, spouse in nursing home	15	more than 50 years	no	less than 1200	yes	yes	no
25PI		AAf	Cecilia Lorenz	widowed, living alone	12	more than 50 years	yes	2500 - 3500	yes	yes	no
26PI		BBf	Elisabeth Zajc	widowed, separated, living alone	15	30-50 years	no	less than 1200	yes	yes	no

[1] Interview conducted by Jakob Fechler

[2] Interview conducted by Vanessa Kobras

Figure 16: Corpus of Interviews with Older People. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Interviews #ID	Date	Person and position/institutional belonging
05EI	2021-12-02	Ursula Huebel, Public Health Advisor, Vienna Health Promotion (*Wiener Gesundheitsförderung WiG*)
06EI	2022-01-28	Irmgard Hubauer, District Management and Interim Use Coordination "Am Kempelenpark" in the 10th District
07EI	2022-02-18	Dani Martos, Initiator of the Neigbhourhood Project "Mindful 8th" (*Achtsamer 8.*) in the 8th District
08EI	2022-02-18	Elisabeth Kausek, Manager of the Neighbourhood Centre in the 15th District, Vienna Welfare Services (*Wiener Hilfswerke*)
09EI	2022-03-01	Staff of Vienna Social Fund (Fonds Soziales Wien), Co-ordination of the Contact Visiting Service (*Kontaktbesuchsdienst*)
10EI	2022-03-23	Ursula Dickbauer, Co-ordinator of the Contact Visiting Service (*Kontaktbesuchsdienst*), Vienna Social Services (*Wiener Sozialdienste*)
11EI	2022-02-10	Staff of Senior Citizens' Representative of the City of Vienna/Vienna for Seniors (*Senior:innenbeauftrage der Stadt Wien/Wien für Senior:innen*), Vienna Social Fund
12EI	2022-11-28	Anna Winklehner, Caritas, Coordinator of the Housing Project "New Living in Old Age 'WG Melange'" (*Neues Wohnen im Alter "WG Melange"*)
13EI	2022-11-16	Beatrix Eichinger, Member and Initiator of the Co-housing Project "Sargfabrik"
14EI	2022-11-21	Freya Brandl, Architect and Member of the Association "Kolokation", Initiator of Senior Co-housing Projects
15EI	2022-11-10	Volker Tomitsch, District Council of the 15th district and District Senior Representative (*Bezirksseniorenbeauftragter*)
16EI	2022-12-16	Lisa Rußmayer, Head of the Day Centre for Seniors in the 15th District
17EI	2022-11-25	Coordinator of a Pensioners' Club in Vienna
18EI	2025-05-16	Katharina Bierwolf, Head of Customer Administration of the Senior Care Provider *Häuser zum Leben* ("Homes for Life")

Figure 17: Overview of Expert Interviews. Illustration: Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

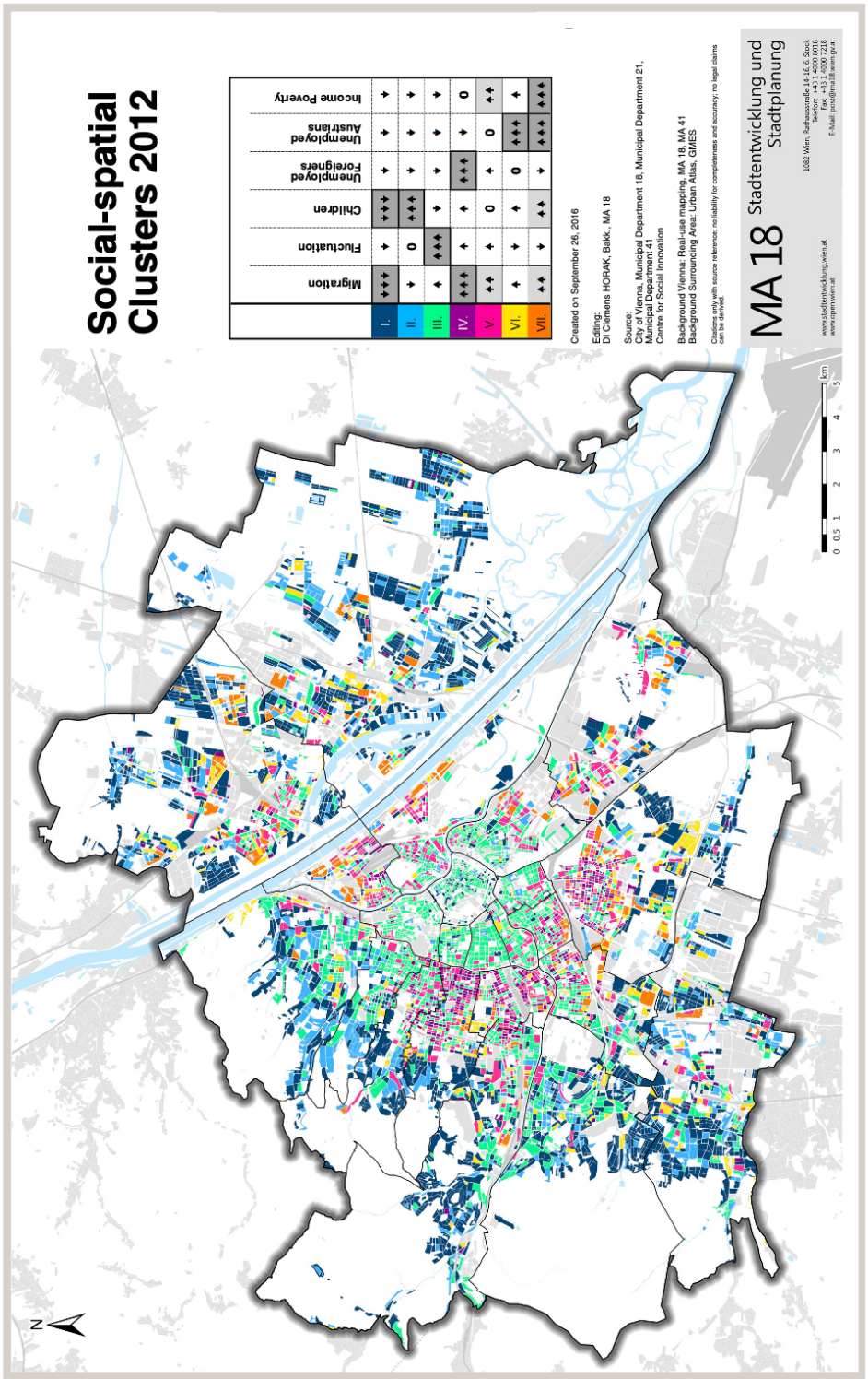
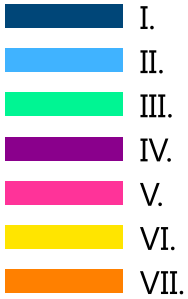


Figure 18: Social-spatial Cluster Analysis. Source: City of Vienna, Municipal Department 18 (MA 18), 2016, adaptation and translation with permission, Angelika Gabauer, 2025.



Cluster I (2,000 building blocks, 220,000 residents) is characterised by a general absence of social problems (unemployment, income poverty), as well as a low child population, low fluctuation and minimal migration influence. One can imagine stable, presumably relatively affluent neighbourhoods inhabited by tendentially older people. **Cluster II** (900 building blocks, 225,000 residents) is in general similar but distinguished by a high child population. Both clusters are primarily found in green or quiet areas with low-density construction.

In contrast to the first two clusters, **Cluster III** (1,900 building blocks, 460,000 residents) stands out due to the high fluctuation of the residential population. There are more migrants, children are relatively rare, and social problems are less prevalent. This cluster represents the urban, *Gründerzeit*-era (late 19th-century) centre of Vienna (with some "outposts").

Cluster IV (500 building blocks, 130,000 residents) and **Cluster V** (700 building blocks, 300,000 residents) are both strongly characterised by (international) immigration, with Cluster IV additionally showing high unemployment rates among third-country nationals. These clusters are mainly found in Gründerzeit areas along the *Gürtel* and in the 2nd and 20th districts, with Cluster V also appearing in areas like Simmering and Floridsdorf.

Cluster VI (450 building blocks, 130,000 residents) is marked by a high incidence of unemployment among Austrian nationals, with still moderate income poverty. The smaller **Cluster VII** (200 building blocks, 170,000 residents) shares significant similarities with Cluster VI but has more migrants, more children, and a relatively high incidence of income poverty. Both clusters are primarily located in peripheral (often older) new development areas and large housing estates (frequently municipal housing).

A combined view of all seven clusters reveals partly relatively homogeneous areas (e.g., Cluster III in the inner districts), in some places small-scale mixtures of a few similar clusters (e.g., Clusters I and II at the western city edge or Clusters IV and V along the western *Gürtel*), and finally – especially in post-war areas – a wide variety of mixed clusters. The latter shows that such areas tend to be diverse without large-scale concentrations of social problems (e.g., the central areas of Floridsdorf or Simmering).

Figure 18: Social-spatial Cluster Analysis. Social-spatial Cluster Analysis. Source: City of Vienna, Municipal Department 18 (MA 18), 2016, adaptation and translation with permission, Angelika Gabauer, 2025.

Erklärung nach

Statement according to

§ 4 Promotionsordnung der Fakultät für Sozial- und Verhaltenswissenschaften der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena

Hiermit erkläre ich,

I state that,

1. dass mir die geltende Promotionsordnung bekannt ist;

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2. dass ich die Dissertation selbst angefertigt, keine Textabschnitte eines/einer Dritten oder eigener Prüfungsarbeiten ohne Kennzeichnung übernommen und alle von mir benutzten Hilfsmittel, persönlichen Mitteilungen und Quellen in meiner Arbeit angegeben habe;

   I have composed and written the dissertation by myself, that no passages of text have been taken from third parties or own exam papers without having been identified as such and that all tools, personal notifications, and sources used have been indicated in the doctoral thesis;

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   I don't have submitted the same, a substantially similar or any different paper to another university or to another faculty as a dissertation.

_____

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