

University of Groningen

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Published in:
Environment and Planning A

DOI:
[10.1177/0308518X16643962](https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X16643962)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Lager, D., van Hoven, B., & Huigen, P. P. P. (2016). Rhythms, ageing and neighbourhoods. *Environment and Planning A*, 48(8), 1565-1580. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X16643962>

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Rhythms, ageing and neighbourhoods

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Environment and Planning A

2016, Vol. 48(8) 1565–1580

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DOI: 10.1177/0308518X16643962

epn.sagepub.com



Abstract

To demonstrate the potential of time in understanding older adults' experiences of place, this paper draws attention to the everyday temporal dimensions of ageing in urban neighbourhoods. In this qualitative research, we utilise Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* to illustrate how the rhythmic orderings of people and place come into being and inform their experiences. Rhythmanalysis proved to be a useful tool in eliciting how the social construction of ageing in social policy, with its focus on activity and work, becomes embodied in older adults' everyday lives in terms of how they value their own rhythms. The findings reveal how the contrasting daily rhythms of the older respondents and younger residents emphasise the slowness of the rhythms of later life. To counteract the negative connotations of these slowed rhythms, respondents sought temporal anchors that would enable them to experience daily life in their neighbourhood as eventful. That the rhythms of older and younger residents were not synchronised in time and space resulted in experiencing a 'generational divide' that emphasised respondents' stasis in the neighbourhood. Our findings suggest that the everyday rhythms linked to urban ageing can evoke a sense of 'otherness' within a neighbourhood. In the future, a challenge for societies will be to prevent neighbourhoods from becoming ensembles in which older adults feel 'out of sync' and out of place.

Keywords

Ageing-in-place, rhythm, rhythmanalysis, qualitative methods, urban neighbourhoods

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Introduction

In geographical research, little explicit attention has generally been paid to the temporal dimensions of sociospatial phenomena (Kwan, 2013; Schwanen and Kwan, 2012). However, more ‘temporally integrated geographies’ could, as Kwan (2013: 1078) contends, yield new insights into many issues, such as ethnic segregation and accessibility, that have been examined by geographers for decades. In this vein, Schwanen et al. (2012b), in their call for geographers to have a more sustained engagement with ageing and old age, argued for systematically including ‘time’ in order to enhance understandings of older adults’ engagement with place. To demonstrate the potential of ‘time’ in understanding older adults’ experiences of place, this paper draws attention to the temporal dimensions of ageing in urban neighbourhoods.

Time has been regarded as a component of older adults’ attachment to place, in which familiarity with a place establishes itself through length of residence in the community (e.g. Cutchin, 2001; Rowles, 1978, 1983). As a result, the relationship between older adults and place is not understood as ‘merely contextual snapshots or temporally static episodes’ but as ‘frames of an ongoing environmental movie’ (Golant, 2003: 639). Research in this field has highlighted how familiarity with the physical and social structure of their neighbourhood is important for older adults’ wellbeing as it confers a sense of belonging and independence (e.g. Gardner, 2011; Rowles and Watkins, 2003; Wiles et al., 2012). Such work has gained currency as a result of Western governments’ ageing-in-place policies, which are aimed at enabling the older population to live independently for as long as possible. These policies stress that it is in the best interest of older adults, if they can, to remain in their own home and neighbourhood, as these places are familiar and predictable to them (Milligan, 2009). However, some recent studies have drawn attention to the roles that other dimensions of time play in the ageing and place relationship, such as timing (i.e. synchronisation of activities) and sense of time (see Bildtgaard and Oberg, 2015; Lager et al., 2015; Lee, 2014; Stjernborg et al., 2014). For instance, in some earlier work, we found that the differences in the daily time geographies of our older respondents and their younger neighbours were an obstacle to developing social capital in the neighbourhood (Lager et al., 2015). The ways in which people value their time and places are captured in the habitual routines and behaviours that make up the everyday (see Highmore, 2002). Hence, greater knowledge of these everyday temporalities could enhance the understanding of how older adults experience daily life in their neighbourhood.

In this paper, we focus on rhythm in understanding the experiential dimension of ageing in urban neighbourhoods. We draw on Henri Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) to gain insight into the role of multiple rhythms – social, non-human, corporeal, mobile and institutionally inscribed – in older adults’ experiences of daily life in their neighbourhood. Rhythmanalysis highlights the entwined and dynamism of time and space: ‘everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 15). Lefebvre’s work has been influential in a small, but growing, body of geographical research (see Cronin, 2006; Edensor, 2010; Edensor and Holloway, 2008; McCormack, 2002; Mels, 2004b; Middleton, 2009; Mulícek et al., 2015; Schwanen et al., 2012a; Simpson, 2008). Research in this vein has highlighted how rhythm is ‘an important constituent of the experience and organisation of social time’ (Edensor, 2010: 1). Middleton (2009), for instance, found how ‘being out of sync’ with the normative walking rhythms of a locality can give insight into how people position themselves in relation to place. Considering old age, Schwanen and Kwan contended that it is likely that the ‘tempo of everyday life is lower, everyday activities are sequenced and timed in different ways’ (2012: 2044). Relative to the fast pace of people rushing to work, these slower ‘rhythms of later life’

may have implications for older adults' sense of belonging to the neighbourhood and experiences of social exclusion and inclusion.

This paper investigates rhythm in older (aged 65 and above) adults' accounts of daily life in their neighbourhood. For this purpose, we draw on qualitative fieldwork conducted in the city of Groningen in the north of the Netherlands. To demonstrate the use of rhythm analysis in understanding experiences of ageing in urban neighbourhoods, we first briefly discuss prevailing theories regarding the experiential dimensions of the relationship between older adults and place. We then consider how rhythm analysis can contribute to understanding experiences of ageing in urban neighbourhoods. Following this, we introduce the research context and methodology. The analysis focuses on how the rhythmic orderings of the respondents' daily lives come into being and how these affect their experience of ageing in an urban neighbourhood.

Ageing in place and time

In the past four decades, an extensive body of work on the relationships linking ageing, old age and place has emerged under the headings of 'geographies of ageing' and 'geographical gerontology' (see Andrews et al., 2007; 2009; Harper and Laws, 1995; Skinner et al., 2014 for comprehensive reviews of the scholarship in these disciplines). One strand of this research has adopted a phenomenological perspective to study the person–environment relationship, and has highlighted older adults' affective and experiential connections with their places of residence (Golant, 2003). Rowles' research (1978, 1983) has been highly influential in the theoretical development of this person–environment relationship. He developed the notion of physical, social and autobiographical 'insideness' in order to gain insight into how older people's attachment to place may be constituted. This insideness, or sense of familiarity, is developed over time through spatial routines and habits, through social integration in the community and through the accumulation of memorable events within a place (Rowles, 1983). Rowles deemed autobiographical insideness particularly important for the way in which older adults deal with neighbourhood transitions. The remembrance of events and one's life in the community can induce a sense of belonging and continuity in times of change.

Rowles' research suggests that older adults' attachment to place develops over time and that this process involves experiences of continuity and discontinuity. This is made explicit in the 'experience-based life course model of being in place', in which Rowles and Watkins (2003) stress the accumulation of experiences over the life course that result in the older individual becoming attuned to their environment. They hypothesise that environmental changes, such as a move to a care home, can disrupt the continuity of environmental experience. To again experience congruence with place requires the 'remaking of place' through transferring one's 'insideness' to the new or changed place. This could, as an example, include the transfer of personal possessions to a new home and the memories of past places. In a similar vein, Cutchin's (2001) model of place integration emphasises how people's interactions with places are in constant flux and require continuous negotiation in order to establish and maintain a sense of continuity and belonging (see also Wiles and Allen, 2010; Wiles et al., 2009). Cutchin, however, argued that Rowles' focus on memories and past experiences in older people's place attachment 'needs to be extended to include the sense of *what person and place can become* in the face of current affairs and problems' (2001: 35, original emphasis). For instance, when faced with decreasing health and mobility, the expectations as to whether one can continue to live independently in the community may change the experience of place.

Andrews et al. (2007: 157) posited that place attachment and ageing-in-place are ‘closely related, even overlapping concepts which have a strong development in policy and in the literature’. Recently, however, several authors have advocated moving beyond such ‘traditional’ perspectives towards more relational and non-representational perspectives in examining the person-environment relationship (see Andrews et al., 2013, Schwanen et al., 2012b; Skinner et al., 2014). Skinner et al. (2014: 13) noted that ‘NRT [non-representational theory] presents the ‘on-flow’ of life – the moving frontier of existence – as it rolls out in a processional manner, introducing new space time with certain speeds and momentums’ (see also McHugh, 2009). This ‘new space time’ allows space for thinking and for using multiple dimensions of time. However, no specific mention is made of the potential of rhythmanalysis in understanding the experiential dimension of older adults’ relationship with place. We believe that including rhythmanalysis – with its focus on the ‘taking place’ of everyday life, as manifested in multiple intersecting rhythms – in these considerations could expand these relational and non-representational agendas.

Rhythmic ensembles, orderings and qualities

In this section, we will elaborate on why we believe rhythm to be important in understanding experiences of ageing in urban neighbourhoods. As Elden in his introduction to *Rhythmanalysis* noted, rhythm is ‘a *tool* of analysis rather than just an *object* of it’ (2004: xii, original emphasis). Below, we discuss how the rhythmic ensembles of neighbourhoods are constituted and how the temporal orderings of these places come into being. To understand how older adults’ experience time, we, furthermore, address how rhythms acquire their quality.

In *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre (2004) stressed the multiplicity and intersection of rhythms that form the polyrhythmic ensembles of urban street life through observing a Parisian road junction from his apartment’s window. May and Thrift (2001) noted that these ‘timespaces’ are practiced (see also Crang, 2001), or as Mels put it: “human beings have always been rhythm-makers as much as place-makers” (2004a: 3). Thus, places are not static pre-existing entities but are continually (re)made through the intersection of multiple rhythms (Edensor, 2010). Crang highlighted the making of neighbourhood timespace through rhythms:

Neighbourhoods are comprised of multiple routines and rhythms that may form a compatible or clashing whole, as the different, remediating, tempos, timings, and durations come together. (Crang et al., 2007: 2419)

As this quote further shows, the polyrhythmic ensembles of a neighbourhood can, on the one hand, be configured as a compatible whole, in which different routines and rhythms are aligned with each other, but can, on the other hand, be in discord. This is what Lefebvre refers to as eurhythmia (rhythms being associated) and arrhythmia (in which rhythms ‘break apart, alter and bypass *synchronisation*’) (2004: 67, original emphasis). Everyday life usually involves eurhythmic ordering, in which activities are carried out in a habitual and routine manner in familiar places of work, shopping, commuting, leisure and so on. These places each have their own ‘place-ballets’ that are constituted by the time-space routines of people, and present opportunities for face-to-face encounter (see Jacobs, 1961; Seamon, 1980). The nature of place-ballets can vary over the course of the day depending on the area’s functions (e.g. residential, commercial, retail) (Temelová and Novák, 2011). In the early morning, the streets of a commercial district may be crowded with people rushing to work, whereas in the evenings they are deserted. According to Lefebvre and Régulier, all these moments have ‘a strong significance’ (2004: 102): they

show which rhythms are, and can be, synchronised in place (see also Hagerstrand, 1970). Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005) observe that the socio-spatial separation of age groups in Western societies, for instance in places of education, work and leisure, influence when and where age groups' activities can co-occur.

The everyday relies upon the 'synchronisation of practices that become part of how 'we' get things done', thereby conferring 'an ontological predictability and security' (Edensor, 2010: 8). Given its normality, the everyday does not easily reveal the mechanisms through which rhythms are ordered. In aiming to understand the ordering of places' everyday rhythms, rhythm analysts need to ask themselves whether there is 'a determining rhythm? A primordial and coordinating aspect?' (Lefebvre, 2004: 33). Here, Lefebvre placed great emphasis on how work became the time of everydayness: 'subordinating to the organization of work in space other aspects of the everyday' (2004: 73) such as times of sleeping, eating, leisure and time to be at home. Edensor (2006) further contended that everyday local rhythms are, to a great extent, managed by the state, from diurnal rhythms (i.e. when during the day people can carry out certain actions) to the life-course (e.g. retirement age). These rhythms, which to a certain extent set the pace of urban life, are referred to as 'pacemakers' by Parkes and Thrift (1979). However, rhythmic orderings vary between social groups: 'we can describe daytime and the uses of time in accordance with social categories, sex and age' (Lefebvre, 2004: 73). For instance, Schwanen et al. (2012a) showed that spatiotemporal inequalities in visitor presence in the night-time economy can, in part, be explained by gender. They found that women's participation in the night-time economy was higher during busy hours, whereas men's participation was determined less by the collective rhythms of visitor presence.

Everyday temporal orderings 'reinforce normative ways of understanding and experiencing the world' (Edensor and Holloway, 2008: 484). For instance, in his research into everyday cycling practices in London, Spinney noted that the rhythms of cyclists were not 'deemed equally desirable' (2010: 116) as those of motorised vehicles for which the city's roads were designed. As this example indicates, rhythms acquire a quality in relation to other rhythms. In this vein, Lefebvre stressed that 'we know that a rhythm is slow or lively only in relation to other rhythms (often our own: those of our walking, our breathing, our heart)' (2004: 10; see also May and Thrift, 2001). In recent years, mobility scholars have emphasised this relational character of rhythm by stressing that mobility practices are also imbued with moments of stillness and waiting (Cresswell, 2012). Bissell and Fuller (2011: 3) argued that, in an 'epoch that privileges the mobilization of mobility', these still moments are seen as an aberration and hold negative connotations of inactivity and emptiness. However, as May and Thrift (2001) argued, as individuals and groups hold different rhythms, they also hold different senses of time depending on where they are and on their social position. With regard to air travel, Cresswell (2010) noted how mobility and the relative speed of the passing of time can be experienced in different ways, depending on which class (and its accompanying comfort) one is able to afford.

The above discussion outlines how everyday places are imbued with rhythm. The habitual and routine use of these places confers a sense of familiarity and security or, in Rowles' words, 'insideness'. Where Rowles' and Cutchin's theories focus on how this 'insideness' can be challenged by discontinuities in the relationship between the older person and place, a rhythm analyst digs beneath the surface of the everyday. As this section shows, focusing on the everyday reveals how the rhythms of both places and people are ordered, and how these orderings may vary by social group and/or by age group. Essentially, the rhythmic orderings of the everyday contribute to how people experience daily life and how they value their own rhythms in relation to those of others.

Research context, methodology and positionality

In the Netherlands, as in many other Western countries, the government is implementing rules and regulations to encourage ageing-in-place. Plans that promote ageing-in-place put great emphasis on the neighbourhood as the site for realising the independent living of current and future generations of older adults (Milligan, 2009; and for the Dutch context see Blok and Van Rijn, 2014). Given this trend, the aim of the research on which this article draws is to understand older adults' experiences of everyday life in their neighbourhood (see Lager et al., 2013; Lager et al., 2015). In this paper, we draw on in-depth interviews with 53 older adults in three neighbourhoods of the city of Groningen in 2010, 2012 and 2013.¹ For purposes of clarity, we would, however, emphasise that this research is not comparative in nature, and that we explored different topics in the various neighbourhoods (see Lager et al., 2013; Lager et al., 2015). Potential respondents were recruited through activities in community centres, senior sounding-board groups,² door-to-door recruitment, the help of an employee from social services committed to the empowerment and participation of vulnerable people in Groningen and snowball sampling. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the respondents in their own homes. Twelve of the respondents were also willing to participate in a follow-up walking interview in which the principal researcher (Debbie Lager) joined each of them on one of their routine walks.

All the respondents were white and of Western origin (see Table 1 for their main characteristics). There was a higher prevalence of mobility impairments and the use of mobility devices amongst the respondents belonging to the 'old-old' category (75+) compared to the 'young-old' (65–74) group. One of the interview questions – whether the respondents could describe a 'normal' day and week of their lives – turned out to yield rich insights into the respondents' everyday rhythms and their experiences of time.

The respondents' everyday rhythms were grounded in and intertwined with the spatialities of ageing in Groningen neighbourhoods. Groningen is a city in the north of the Netherlands with 200,459 inhabitants (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2015) and can be considered a typical European city in terms of its high population density and its radio-concentric spatial

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents.

	53 respondents
	<i>Frequencies %</i>
Sex	
Men	36%
Women	64%
Age	
65–74	30%
75–84	49%
85+	21%
Marital status	
Widowed	45%
Married	40%
Single/divorced	15%
Type of housing	
Apartment	40%
Senior apartment	43%
Single-family home	17%

structure. Groningen houses two institutes of higher education and attracts many students from the region, giving it a relatively young population compared to other Dutch cities (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2014). Around 12% of the municipality's population are aged 65 or above (Onderzoek en Statistiek Groningen, 2015). In general, all three neighbourhoods in which the interviews were carried out – Selwerd (2010), the Oosterpark (2012) and Corpus den Hoorn (2013) – are level terrain with good access to public transport, well maintained pavements and parks, supermarkets, a community centre and other indoor meeting places (e.g. buildings of playground associations, churches and care homes). As they all have a predominantly residential function, the polyrhythmic ensembles of these places are largely determined by the everyday activities of their residents. Although the age structure of the three neighbourhoods varies – with both Selwerd and the Oosterpark popular with students, as they are close to the city centre and the Zernike Campus, and Corpus den Hoorn having a relatively large proportion of older residents – this did not lead to differentiation in terms of how the respondents experienced their daily lives and valued their own rhythms. Since our research was not comparative in nature, there may still be differences in ageing between these neighbourhoods that our analysis failed to bring out.

Before we discuss the findings, it is important to address the interviewer's positionality in relation to the interviewees. As Lefebvre noted, the starting point of a rhythmanalysis is the body, and this acts as a metronome: 'each must appreciate rhythms by referring them to oneself' (2004: 10). Simonsen (2005) emphasised this aspect: that, for Lefebvre, the body is central to social understanding. In our research, this relates to the social construction of ageing. Here, we address how differences in the rhythms of the principal researcher (Debbie Lager, in her late-twenties during the interviews) and of the older respondents may have affected the knowledge produced about the rhythms of ageing in urban neighbourhoods. The principal researcher's daily rhythms were preoccupied with carrying out research for her dissertation. This is in sharp contrast to the daily rhythms of the respondents who were not part of the working population. From the interviewer's perspective, this difference in rhythms led to preconceptions about how older respondents would organise their time, as is reflected in the following excerpt from the principal researcher's research diary:

Whilst making phone calls to arrange appointments with older adults for the in-depth interviews, I was surprised that, in contrast to my ageist assumption that older people would have all the time of the world, the respondents indicated they were busy and it could take several weeks before I could be fitted into their tight schedules.

The respondents may well have been aware that younger people held these misconceptions about older people's daily rhythms since, in the interviews with a young researcher, they would elaborate in great detail on their organisation of time in the neighbourhood. Maybe, with an older interviewer, they might not have considered this explanation necessary. This illustration shows how the intergenerational research encounter proved to be a means of eliciting information on older adults' everyday rhythms. In a somewhat similar vein, the reluctance of some respondents to participate in a walking interview also elicited information about their everyday rhythms. They indicated that they were not very mobile, or fast, and that the researcher should find more mobile participants, even though the researcher assured them she would adjust to their pace. The difference between the more mobile and 'faster' body of the principal researcher and the respondents' 'slower' bodies may have fostered insecurities and led to the decision not to participate in a walking interview. As will be shown in the following section, the above-mentioned examples of positionality informed our understanding of older respondents' experiences of ageing in urban neighbourhoods.

Rhythms of ageing in the neighbourhood

The analysis is structured around three key themes that emerged from the data: the slowing of everyday rhythms, the punctuation of time, and the meaning of generational discontinuities and rhythms in experiencing neighbourhood space. Together the three sections below highlight how the rhythmic orderings of the respondents' daily lives in the neighbourhood are constituted and how these orderings inform their experiences of ageing in an urban neighbourhood.

The rhythms of the everyday: Slowing down

This section focuses on how the everyday rhythms of older adults may slow down and how these 'slowed' rhythms affect their sense of time and use of neighbourhood space. As with all human beings, the rhythms of our respondents' days are structured by the bodily needs of sleeping, eating and personal care (see Hagerstrand, 1970). The process of ageing, which is often accompanied by bodily changes, affected our respondents' energy levels. This resulted in a rhythm that included daytime sleep (see also Venn and Arber, 2011). Johanna (female, 73) explains:

Interviewer: So you rest in the afternoon and rest again after dinner?

Johanna: Yes, I have to rest, otherwise I won't last. Because I have an underactive thyroid, I get tired quickly, so I have to moderate my energy. Then I'm at my best.

Further, medicines that have to be taken at fixed times and at regular intervals (such as on an empty stomach) in order to avoid arrhythmic situations, can structure the day and fix mealtimes. Such medicine regimes can constrain the body to the home (the place of eating for our respondents), limiting the opportunities to synchronise available 'outdoor' time with activities taking place in the neighbourhood. 'Timing and synchronisation are integral aspects of interactions' (Adam, 2000: 136) and, in the following quote, Gerda (female, 73) explains how the combination of her medicine regime and the timing of the church service prevents her from attending church:

I would have to be in the church at 08:45. I'm not going to make it. I have to take my medicines at 08:00, half an hour before breakfast. If I don't do that, I have to take them half an hour after a mealtime. Well... I'm retired. That means that I would have to start the day at 06:30! No way, I'm not going to do that. If the church service started at 09:30, then I would go, but not for 08:45.

While the rhythms of rest and medicine intake affect the body's motility in the home and neighbourhood, the pace of doing things may also slow down in old age (see also Schwanen and Kwan, 2012; Stjernborg et al., 2014). The slower pace of bodily movement, resulting from decreasing energy levels and/or mobility, affects the time available in a day to go places. This can result in experiencing a shrinking life world, an aspect that becomes clear in the following excerpt in which Gerrit (male, 79) and his wife Anne discuss the effects of their decreasing mobility:

Gerrit: Your world gets smaller as you get older. Isn't that so?

Anne: Yes, in the past we went away more often.

Gerrit: We went everywhere. And now... time is going so fast. You experience less and you're not going to get anywhere that quickly.

Anne: Everything slows down a bit. You hear that from other people as well. Things don't go so fast anymore. That includes getting somewhere.

The sense that everyday rhythms are slowing also relates to the increased waiting in the everyday lives of the respondents (Droogleever Fortuijn et al., 2006). Bissell posited that waiting is ‘*a specific relation-to-the-world*’ (2007: 284, original emphasis) and, for our respondents, waiting seemed to be an intrinsic and inevitable part of old age. Waiting evoked a sense of dependence. For example, there is an increased dependence on the weather when snow and ice ‘force’ respondents to stay indoors because they are afraid of falling (see also Wennberg et al., 2009). The municipality’s snow removal and ice prevention policy prioritises thoroughfares for cars and bicycles, while residents are considered responsible for the accessibility of neighbourhood streets and pavements. While such measures mitigate impacts on the working population’s everyday rhythms, thereby securing eurhythmia for this group and ensuring economic activities take place, they leave older adults reliant on the willingness of other residents to make time available to make the neighbourhood accessible to them (see also Lager et al., 2015). The respondents dreaded winter as this passed slowly while they waited to be able to go outdoors again. Frustration over waiting may be embodied, as becomes clear in this quote by Aaltje (female, 66): ‘Last year, I had to stay indoors for a week; it made me feel like climbing the wall’.

For most respondents, it was difficult to adjust to having to wait more than they were used to when they were not as dependent on seasonal rhythms or the rhythms of other people. In the following excerpt, Hendrika (female, 86, and user of a walking frame), expresses her frustrations with waiting:

When you get older you are not able to do as many things, and you have a lot of time. When it rains you just have to wait [before you can leave the shops to get home], you’re not in a hurry to get home on time. It’s the same as with ordering a shared cab.³ When you order a cab for 14:00, they could arrive a quarter of an hour earlier or later. You have to make sure that you are ready at 13:45 and then you have to wait patiently, it is what it is. It doesn’t always work, but you have to try to wait patiently.

The trouble that Hendrika has with waiting patiently is a reflection on prevailing negative connotations that sees waiting as a non-productive activity (Bissell, 2007). Here, Bissell argued that work on (im)mobilities posited ‘productivist notions of waiting and subjectivity as examples of slowed and even deadened rhythms moving alongside faster events and practices’ (2007: 278). As we discuss in the following section, our respondents, with the energy available, tried to counteract the negative connotations of these slowed rhythms.

Punctuating time and making it eventful

To counteract the slowed rhythms of later life, respondents actively sought ways to make everyday time eventful by giving it structure (see also Marhánková, 2011). Whereas, for those employed, the time of work constitutes the time of everydayness (Lefebvre, 2004), after retirement, and/or raising children, older adults have to seek ways to structure their “post-(re)productive free time” (Bildtgaard and Oberg, 2015: 1). For the male, and some of our female, respondents, retirement marked a tipping point in their lives where they had to remake timespace by seeking new everyday rhythms and places. Claire (female, 81), discussing the transition from work to retirement, for example, noted:

You have to think ahead. At work, I was always surrounded by people. A lot of people, crazy situations, sad situations – you can experience a lot in a hospital. And suddenly [after retirement] you end up sitting in a room [at home]. You have to make sure you get some anchors in your week.

These anchors, for the majority of respondents, involved daily or weekly reoccurring activities such as walking, grocery shopping, cleaning and neighbourhood association and club activities. Lefebvre noted that ‘... rites and ritualisations interven[e] in everyday time, punctuating it’ (2004: 94). In later life, when time is not dictated by work, punctuating or anchoring time through activities is a means of making everyday time go fast and experiencing it as eventful (see also Lee, 2014). This is exemplified in the following quote by Sophie (female, 84) who summed up all the things that she does during a week:

Sophie: Monday evening for card games, Tuesday morning for shuffleboard, on Wednesday the help is here, Wednesday afternoon grocery shopping, if I am able to. Thursday singing, Friday... well you [the interviewers] are really lucky. Friday morning: have to get up early because these students want to know things. That’s the way it is.

Interviewer: So your programme is...

Sophie: Completely full

Interviewer: How is that working for you?

Sophie: It’s excellent.

Although an aged source of reference, the French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau’s (1854–1888) work on time provides an interesting insight into why respondents seem to be concerned with filling time with activities. Guyau argued that older adults lack the new, intense and vivid experiences of children and youths, making ‘the weeks resemble each other, the months resemble each other, that constitute the monotonous rut of life’ (Guyau, 1988: 137). Guyau further compared old age to an ‘unchanging décor of the classical theatre, a simple, unassuming setting. Sometimes [it creates] a veritable unity of time, place and action which focuses everything on one dominant action to the exclusion of all others, at other times [it only leads to] a nullity of action, place, and time’ (page 137). Respondents seemed to be wary of this notion of nullity of action, place, and time, and repeatedly stated that they were ‘never bored’ (Roel, male, 86). The sense of time as eventful (i.e. busy) had a positive connotation for many respondents. Keeping busy seemed to be a sign of active ageing (Katz, 2000; Marhánková, 2011), a preferred rhythm for the majority of our respondents. As Maria (female, 72) explained in the context of her voluntary work with socially isolated older adults:

She [the client] says: ‘you are here again?’, that’s the way the conversation starts. ‘The week is over already’, that kind of stuff. ‘The week is already over, that went fast!’. It’s a sign that they are doing well. It’s not a good thing when time goes slowly, it has to go fast. It’s a sign that they are busy.

The emphasis the respondents placed on their activities and busyness can be seen in relation to public perceptions of the ideal of activity in old age (Katz, 2000). Lefebvre (2004) argued that, in a rhythm analysis, one should look for a hierarchy in rhythms. For the respondents, the rhythms of younger people and their younger selves seemed to be their preferred rhythms, the highest in their ranking. In the next section, we discuss how the rhythms of younger people influence older adults’ experiences of everyday life in their neighbourhood.

Generational discontinuities and rhythms

In this section, we highlight the relationality of older adults’ experiences of everyday life in their neighbourhood. Respondents’ accounts of their daily lives always contained a reference to the rhythms of younger residents and younger people in general. The time associated with work acts as a pacemaker of everyday urban life (Parkes and Thrift, 1979). However,

keeping up with this pace requires having the bodily capacities and energy to do so. To the respondents, the different rhythms of younger people, with their more mobile and fit bodies, seemed to signify a generational discontinuity within the neighbourhood. This generational discontinuity was most noticeable when respondents discussed the ageing of local clubs. Clubs in which they were involved were not attracting new members and, as a result, the group of people that would attend an activity was shrinking, thereby emphasising the finitude of local club life. Adam (2014), drawing on Heidegger, argued that finitude (i.e. that life inevitably leads to an end) may acquire a discomfoting meaning in later life as death is no longer something in the distant future. Similarly, finitude can relate to the discontinuity in the vibrant club life that respondents were familiar with. This is exemplified in the following quote by Rens (male, 86):

We [the choir] used to have thirty members but, nowadays, there are not more than twenty and the oldest has stopped now, he was 94. There are no new people coming in for the ones leaving. What's the reason for that? You [young people] are in the midst of your lives and don't feel like becoming a member of what we used to have in the past – a boys club. Also, the church service is different today: it has become a youth service, us old people don't count.

The reasons for this generational discontinuity in neighbourhood club life were attributed to the rhythms of younger residents. The majority of the respondents spent most of their time at home or in the neighbourhood, and would go outside during the day, whereas younger residents would be at places of work or study during the day (see also Lager et al., 2015). The different rhythms of older and younger residents, out of synchrony in time and space, seemed to result in a 'generational divide' within the neighbourhood. The rhythms of younger people, dictated by the time demands of student life, work and family, were described in great detail by many respondents. Elisabeth (female, 83), for instance, noted:

Men and women both work, and they have children which they have to take care of and they have pre-school day care and after school day care, they have to take the kids from school and have to cook, eat, shower and put the children to bed. Then father and mother are exhausted, and the next day it all starts again at 06.30. So they don't have time for volunteering. They also have to do things at their children's school, and when they get to around 65 they have a caravan [and go off on holiday] and they have older parents they have to take care of.

In addition to a diurnal character, the 'generational divide' in neighbourhood space also had a seasonal rhythm. Especially for respondents with impaired mobility, summer time emphasised their relative stasis in place compared to the younger and more mobile residents. This stasis in place was marked by the younger families who would go on holiday, whilst the older respondents stayed at home. Gerda (female, 73), for example, noted:

Young people do other stuff, they go away with their kids. In the apartment block where I used to live, I had the keys of four or five homes to collect the mail. Nobody was there in the summer. One would be camping, another on a boating holiday, another one was also on holiday somewhere. There were singles who were at home, but you never knew whether they were in or out. I was there all alone and if something had happened there would be no one to call upon. Here [in the senior apartment block], there are always people at home. If something were to happen I could always visit or call a neighbour.

Furthermore, as this quote shows, experiencing eurhythmia, as a consequence of living close to other older adults with similar daily rhythms, can confer a sense of safety and wellbeing. However, living next to other older adults does not ensure eurhythmia. 'Old-old'

respondents not only referred to young families, but also to the 'young-old' who would be away on holiday for several months during the summer, unconstrained by work and national school holidays. Some respondents experienced the time when their young-old neighbours were away on holiday as a lonely time. However, they also recognised that they would be doing the same thing if they were younger and had higher levels of energy. Referring to the time when she and her husband went on long caravan holidays, Hendrika (female, 86), with resignation in her voice, remarked: 'we did exactly the same in the past'. This quote suggests that the generational discontinuities that respondents experience also relate to a discontinuity in rhythms between themselves today and their younger selves.

In order to bridge the perceived gap between the slower rhythms of later life and their younger selves, and younger people in general, respondents sought ways to establish a sense of belonging to the polyrhythmic ensemble of neighbourhood life. Similar to Lefebvre, those whose window overlooked a busy road (or maybe a school playground), would observe and sense urban street life. Particularly for those respondents who were largely confined to their home, they could, in this way, still experience the vitality of street life and the energy of younger bodies (see also Lager et al., 2015). As Steventje (female, 78), for instance, noted: 'from that direction I can see cyclists and cars that drive the wrong way down the street, and I think to myself: 'oeee, how will that end, ha-ha!''

Conclusions and discussion

In this paper, we have demonstrated the potential of time in understanding older adults' experiences of ageing in urban neighbourhoods. We utilised Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004), as this perspective highlights how the everyday rhythmic orderings of people and place come into being and can affect their sense of time. Our findings show that, in later life, daily rhythms slow as decreasing energy levels and medication intake commitments reduce the time left in a day to go places. As their daily rhythms slow, older adults still seek ways to give structure to their post-(re)productive free time, which is no longer dictated by the timing of work or raising children. In respondents' accounts of daily life in the neighbourhood, a stark contrast emerged between the rhythms of later life and the busier rhythms of younger and working people. The temporal orderings of younger people's lives (and respondents' younger selves) seemed to be viewed as the preferred rhythm, which influenced how respondents' valued their own rhythms. The increased amount of time spent waiting in daily life evoked a sense of dependence and stressed that respondents 'were old'. Counteracting these more negative connotations of the rhythms of later life, the structuring of time through daily and weekly reoccurring neighbourhood activities provided a way to make time eventful, which was experienced as a positive thing.

The positive connotations of experiencing time as eventful seemed to be linked to the norm of active ageing, which implicitly contains reference to the young, able-bodied and working population – with a higher tempo of life, being constantly on the move, and busy in their careers and family lives. Biggs et al. (2006: 243) argued that, in the 21st century, international and national social policy on ageing, such as the World Health Organisation's (WHO) policy framework for active ageing (2002), has encouraged 'work and work-like activities' for older adults which will supposedly reduce age discrimination and is seen as the 'route to social inclusion'. However, as Biggs and Kimberley (2013) further argued, these work and work-like activities have effectively become the only means for older adults to legitimise their identity, and this impedes them in developing a positive age identity. The use of rhythmanalysis proved fruitful in this study in eliciting how such neoliberal-informed discourses on ageing affect older adults' experiences of everyday life in their

neighbourhood, and evoke negative connotations linked to the slower, ‘non-productive’ rhythms of the older body.

These negative connotations associated with the slower rhythms of later life should also be considered in relation to the context in which our respondents were leading their everyday lives, namely their home and their neighbourhood. As far back as 1956, the sociologist Lewis Mumford envisaged that ageing in their own home and neighbourhood (i.e. ageing-in-place) could ‘normalise old age’ for older adults. However, our results suggest that the contrasting rhythms of young and old can actually emphasise older adults’ relative stasis in the neighbourhood and, hence, their ‘slowness’ and ‘immobility’. As our rhythmanalysis revealed, these findings cannot be understood unless one also takes account of urban rhythmicity and the rhythms that are prioritised (i.e. are more highly valued) by the state. In our study, we saw how the snow and ice removal policy secured the everyday rhythms of the working population but resulted, each winter season, in older adults becoming ‘prisoners of space’ (Rowles, 1978). Knowledge on such determining rhythms can be useful in understanding and planning age-friendly neighbourhoods and cities. The ‘Global Age-friendly Cities’ guide (WHO, 2007) emphasises that making cities ‘age-friendly’ involves improving, among other things, the quality of and access to outdoor spaces, service provision, and the opportunities for civic and social participation (Buffel et al., 2012). In practice, this usually entails improving the built environment plus social welfare interventions targeted at the older population (Gilroy, 2008). Thinking through the institutional, seasonal and bodily rhythms that shape the everyday orderings of older adults’ everyday lives may open up new ways of thinking and expose opportunities for making age-friendly places.

Lefebvre and Régulier (2004) contended that a person’s relationship with a particular place could inform their relationship with society at large. Whilst our research focused on daily life within the neighbourhood, the respondents’ experiences also shed light on how they feel about their place in society as an older adult. In the forthcoming decades, a challenge for societies will be how to prevent neighbourhoods becoming ensembles in which older adults feel out of sync and out of place. A first useful step would be for social policy to replace the dichotomy of activity and inactivity with a more positive terminology that recognises the diversity of rhythms and paces at different life stages. Such a change in terminology could set a process in motion in which older people can start to embody the sense that their pace of life also contributes to the vitality and liveliness of the polyrhythmic ensembles of urban street life.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the respondents for sharing their stories with us. The authors would also like to thank Linden Douma, Dyon Hoekstra, Jinko Rots and Inge de Vries for the pleasant collaboration in collecting data in Selwerd in 2010.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Ubbo Emmius Fund.

Notes

1. Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen.
2. Senior sounding-board groups were initiated by the municipality of Groningen in urban renewal neighbourhoods in order to take account of the concerns and needs of older residents in the neighbourhood renewal process.
3. A subsidized travel scheme that can be used by those who are unable to use public transport because of mobility impairments.

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