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## The relationship between rural community type and attachment to place for older people living in North Wales, UK

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**Abstract** This paper explores the relationship between rural community type and attachment to place for 387 older people aged 70 and over. Six rural settlements in North Wales are characterised according to certain statistics (e.g. age structure, in-migration, strength of local culture, and multiple deprivation) to provide distinct community profiles. It is hypothesised that community type is characterised by particular types of attachment, which are dependent on life course trajectories and changes or stability in the environment. Using a sevenfold classification of attachment to place, the paper tests seven hypotheses. The results support four of the seven hypotheses. Older people living in a retirement destination are more likely to report aesthetic qualities and the appropriateness of the environment. People living in native areas with a strong culture and local language are more likely to note the importance of historical attachment and social integration into the community. Three hypotheses are rejected: older people living in a retirement destination are *not* less likely to report social support, or a historical perspective in attachment to place, and older people living in areas with high levels of multiple deprivation are *not* more likely to encounter relocation restraints than are others. Overall, the findings suggest that the taxonomy of attachment to place provides a flexible framework for differentiation by community. The paper concludes that communities are not merely settings—they play a significant role in self-identity and are a vital source of emotional and experiential meaning for the inhabitant.

**Keywords** Place attachment · Retirement · Deprived neighbourhoods · Welsh culture · Social integration

### Introduction

The emotional bond between people and places has been termed place attachment (Shumaker and Taylor 1983). It “is a set of feelings about a geographic location that emotionally binds a person to that place as a function of its role as a setting for experience” (Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992, p. 139). Thus, people desire to maintain a close bond to the place to which they are emotionally and affectionately attached (Hidalgo and Hernández 2001). It has been noted that one would expect to find associations between the nature of a community and the type of attachment to place (Rowles 1988). For example, communities can be differentiated by population stability, and one would expect to find differences in the subjective reasons for place attachment given by in-migrant retirees versus lifelong residents (Rowles 1988; Hay 1998). Indeed, some research has shown that strength of attachment to place is positively correlated with length of residence and intensity of use of neighbourhood facilities (Ahlbrandt 1984; Lalli 1992; Brown et al. 2003). However, to date there has been little empirical research on how *types* of attachment to place can be affected by an individual’s circumstances and the community type people are living in.

This paper explores the relationship between rural community type and attachment. We start from the premise that community type can be characterised according to certain key statistics (i.e. age structure, in-migration, strength of local culture, and multiple deprivation) to provide distinct community profiles. We postulate that each community type is also typified by particular types of attachment. Place attachment has different dimensions, and studies most frequently refer to physical and social components (Hidalgo and Hernández 2001). Our own research has identified seven types of place attachment which can be subsumed under a four-domain conceptual scheme which takes into account the interrelationship between physical, social, temporal and psychological aspects of place attachment.

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The seven types of attachment can be classified as general locational satisfaction; historical perspective; social integration; social support; appropriateness of the environment; aesthetic and emotional components of location; and relocation constraints (Burholt 2006).

A historical perspective on place attachment encompasses the experiential dimension of location. The evolving social construction of relationships between people and places is a key element in quality of life and well-being (Rowles 1993). A historical attachment to the locality suggests that life course events have been played out in the community and have contributed to the development of a deep attachment to place (Burholt 2006). This phenomenon has been illustrated by others (Rowles 1983b; Gurney and Means 1993). In this context, the community may play a vital role as a place for social validation—in other words, remembering one's life in a community can be shared and negotiated with others, reinforcing a sense of membership in the community and inclusion in an identifiable social group, which in turn contributes to a profound sense of attachment to place. Given that a historical attachment to place has a temporal dimension which requires people to develop an affiliation or bond with a location and its residents, this type of attachment to place is most likely to be cited by those people who have lived in stable communities, that is, with low levels of in- and out-migration. Thus, our first two hypotheses state that:

- *H<sub>1</sub>*. Older people living in areas with low levels of in-migration and a high proportion of native speakers (representing stable native communities with a strong culture) are more likely than respondents living elsewhere to note the importance of historical attachment to community.
- *H<sub>2</sub>*. Older people living in a retirement destination with high levels of in-migration are less likely than others living elsewhere to use a historical perspective in explaining attachment to place.

Allied to social validation of memories, through historical attachment to the community, is the community as the setting for social interactions. Two types of social interaction which impact on place attachment are considered: social support and social integration. Established relationships with people living nearby or in the same community provide a potential source of both emotional and functional support. For older people, the proximity of social support from family and friends may be important in retaining independence in the community.

Rural areas are perceived to have more supportive social networks than do urban areas (Amato and Zuo 1992). However, some rural communities have experienced high levels of inward migration, and may be characterised by changes in community structure such as fewer relationships with local kin. For example, Litwak and Longino (1987) propose that the long-distance retirement move is most frequently undertaken by rela-

tively financially secure, healthy, married couples. The retirement move does not need to be a move to the proximity of the family, as the migrators do not require the physical support from relatives (Litwak and Kulis 1987; Litwak and Longino 1987). Thus, the social support networks of older people living in popular retirement destinations are characterised by active long-distance relationships with family members (Wenger and St Leger 1992; Wenger 1994). Consequently, our third hypothesis proposes that:

- *H<sub>3</sub>*. Older people living in retirement communities are less likely than others living elsewhere to declare that they are attached to the community because of the availability of social support.

The community is important as the location for the formation and continuation of associations and relationships with others (Gustafson 2001). Hay (1998) has shown that relationships between people across the life course played out in a particular setting strengthens attachment to place. Therefore, time is an important dimension in social integration. It has been well documented that social integration, in terms of relationships between family, friends and neighbours, is important for well-being and quality of life (for a meta-analysis of the literature, see Pinguart and Sørensen 2000). With few exceptions (cf. Krout 1988), research has generally not linked 'belonging' (in terms of the attachment between people and place) to regional or national identity (Cloke and Milbourne 1992; Moore 2000; cf. Devine-Wright and Lyons 1997) or to a socio-political milieu (cf. Dixon and Durrheim 2000). On the regional level, the construction and generation of the meaning of *rural* may impact on social interaction (Cloke and Milbourne 1992). Rural settings have often been portrayed as fostering a particular kind of social integration which is supportive, friendly and neighbourly (Tonnie 1957; Rowles 1988). The supportive rural community is substantiated with evidence from rural studies (Salber 1983; Krout 1986), which suggests that for some people there may be a set of rural social norms to which they adhere (Cloke and Milbourne 1992). In addition, analysis suggests that social integration may be linked to the strong native culture of a community which may represent feelings of citizenship and identity and contribute to the overall meaning of place for some of the respondents (Burholt 2006). Thus, it is hypothesised that a sense of local and regional identity is particularly important for place attachment in native rural communities. We postulate that:

- *H<sub>4</sub>*. Older people living in rural native communities are more likely than others living elsewhere to state that social integration is an integral part of attachment to place.

Contrary to theories which emphasise the social aspects of place attachment, environmental psychology stresses functional aspects of the location, specifically with regard to the provision of an environment in which

people may perform everyday tasks within a familiar setting (Kahana 1982; Lawton 1988; Oswald et al. 2003). In addition, human geography and environmental gerontology draw on ‘competence theory’ by placing the emotional relationship between an older person and the environment in the context of an intimate familiarity with location (Rowles 1983a; Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992). Studies have shown that considerable time is given to the consideration of the moves which are made during pre-retirement or in the early retirement years (Law and Warnes 1980; Wiseman 1980) whereas those 75 years and older rarely think about a change in environment (Filion et al. 1992). The pre-retirement or early retirement move is often associated with a desire to move close to recreational facilities (Wiseman 1980; Litwak and Longino 1987). Therefore, it may be postulated that older people who are living in a popular retirement destination have contemplated the appropriateness of the environment to which they are moving. This may include considering the convenience to facilities (such as shops and health facilities), and the accessibility of the terrain. Thus, we hypothesise that:

- *H<sub>5</sub>*. Older people living in retirement communities are more likely than others living elsewhere to mention the appropriateness of the surrounding community environment when discussing attachment to place.

Although psychological theory has explored attachment to place with regard to functional aspects of the home and environment, less attention has been given to other psychological aspects of the phenomenon. Perhaps the least explored dimension of attachment to place (especially in the UK) concerns the emotional impact of the physical attributes of an environment. The lack of development in this area may be due to a British focus on urban sociology (Gurney and Means 1993). Elsewhere in Europe, research has focused on the desirable qualities of rural areas as attractive retirement destinations for older people (Voogd and van der Molen 1992). In the UK, rural sociology has tended to emphasise the mismatch between the rural idyll and the realities of living in the countryside (Fabes et al. 1983; Cloke et al. 1995). Despite pockets of deprivation which exist within rural areas, the aesthetic qualities of the countryside are appreciated by a substantial proportion of older people (Burholt 2006). Peace, quiet and solitude are also often seen as positive environmental factors (Herzog and Bosley 1992; Green 1999; Burholt 2006). Building on the studies which cite that considerable time is given to the consideration of the moves which are made during pre-retirement or in the early retirement years (Law and Warnes 1980; Wiseman 1980), it may be postulated that older people who are living in popular retirement destination have reflected upon the aesthetic qualities of the environment to which they are moving. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

- *H<sub>6</sub>*. Older people living in a retirement destination are more likely than others living elsewhere to consider

aesthetic qualities as elements of attachment to the community.

The introduction emphasises the meanings which individuals attach to place, and indicates why they chose to continue to live in a rural environment. Joseph and Chalmers (1995) note “residential choice is a behaviour that binds ageing individuals to their communities”. However, older people are not always free to make choices about their living environments (Burholt 2006). Structural forces and other influences play a part in attachment to place, due to the individual’s inability or perceived inability to move from the location.

A number of rural areas are substantially deprived in comparison to the rest of the country. The associated problems of unemployment, ill health and social disadvantage can be exacerbated by a lack of access to services, and a poor quality of service provision (National Assembly for Wales 2000a). On the neighbourhood level, Burkhauser et al. (1995) found that older people on low income in ‘distressed’ areas were even less likely to move than those with similar income in ‘secure’ areas. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

- *H<sub>7</sub>*. Older people living in a deprived area are more likely than those living elsewhere to experience relocation constraints and give these as reasons for attachment to place.

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## Methods

### The research setting

The article is based on data collected in the county of Gwynedd, North Wales between September 2001 and February 2002 as part of the HAPPI (*Housing for an Ageing Population: Planning Implications*) project. Gwynedd is a rural area with a population of 45.8 people per square kilometre (National Assembly for Wales 2002).<sup>1</sup> Although Gwynedd is defined as rural, within the county there are areas of higher population density.

### The research sample

The sample was selected to provide representation from a diverse range of areas in Gwynedd: a dispersed farming community; a retirement destination; a community in socio-economic decline; a semi-urban area (population: 11,187 of which approximately 5,000 are seasonal students); a small town with a concentration of supported housing for older people; and a small market town. A door-to-door census (using 8,098 addresses from the electoral role) of occupied households in the chosen communities was conducted to identify potential respondents. Information was obtained on the occu-

<sup>1</sup>Using the OECD definition for rural populations, i.e. less than 150 residents per square kilometre.

**Table 1** Age structure, in-migration, native language communication abilities, and deprivation by community

Community name	Community classification type(s)	Age structure	Age structure	In-migration	Native language (reading, writing and speaking)	Rank in index of multiple deprivation
		% 60–74	% 75+	+ %	(%)	
Talysarn	Native and deprived	16	8	8	62	65
Criccieth	Retirement	20	16	12	56	450
Bala	Native	16	12	10	68	400
Penrhyndeudraeth	Native	16	9	10	67	443
Bangor	Other	5	5	58	23	752
Abersoch	Native	17	8	9	66	228
County		16	9	12	59	

pants' age, gender and preferred language of interview (English or Welsh). A database was created for potential respondents. Random sampling procedures were used to draw a proportional sample of people aged 70 years and over from each community. Of 783 older people approached for interview, 423 were successfully interviewed, yielding a response rate of 54%. Response rates dropped during the course of the study, after a brutal murder of a local older woman. Subsequently, potential respondents were concerned about allowing interviewers into their homes. Interviews were halted to avoid causing unnecessary anxiety to potential respondents. The non-response consisted of 11.6% refusal due to frailty or ill health, 8.1% not contacted after three or more attempts, 18.7% refusals, and 7.6% other reasons (such as the address being a holiday home and inhabitants not being permanent residents in the area).

The sub-sample used in this paper includes only respondents who did not want to move from their present community ( $n = 406$ ). This selection was made as it could not be assumed that those who wanted to move from their present community were attached to the place of residence. List-wise deletion was used to remove all cases with missing values for any variables used in the analysis. This reduced the analytic sample size by 19 cases, which was not likely to be problematic (Musil et al. 2002). This paper is based on the responses of 387 interviews.

### Data collection

Interviewers were trained by the research team. Guidelines for professional conduct and ethical considerations were circulated to the interviewers prior to the meeting and were reiterated at the training sessions. After training, interviewers understood the necessity of obtaining consent from interviewees, issues regarding confidentiality, contact with respondents, and the confounding effect from the presence of other family members or friends during the interview session. English and Welsh versions of the questionnaire were administered in the respondents own home in the form of a structured face-to-face interview.

### Measures

#### *Community type*

For the purpose of this paper the community types were defined as a retirement area, native areas and a deprived area. Our definitions of each area were pragmatic and they were characterised according to certain key statistics to provide distinct community profiles (Table 1).

The pragmatic definitions were operationalised thus:

- A retirement area would have levels of in-migration which were greater or equal to those in the county (Gwynedd<sup>2</sup>), and an older age structure than that of the county. Using this definition, one community (Criccieth) was identified as a retirement destination.
- A native community would have a greater proportion of residents than did the county as a whole who could read, write and speak the native language (Welsh). In addition, the area would have a lower rate of in-migration than did the county. Using this definition, four communities (Talysarn, Bala, Penrhyndeudraeth and Aberdaron) were identified as native areas.
- A deprived area would have a low rank on the Welsh index of multiple deprivation.<sup>3</sup> Using this definition, one community (Talysarn) was identified as a deprived area.

#### *Place attachment*

In designing the questionnaire, no distinctions were made between concepts such as 'sense of place', 'attachment to place', 'place dependence' or 'place

<sup>2</sup>The overall rate of in-migration to the county takes into account 58% in-migration in a university town, which is mainly accounted for by students.

<sup>3</sup>In the Welsh index of multiple deprivation, deprivation is comprised of distinct domains: income, employment, health, education, housing, and geographical access to services. The domains can be combined to form the overall index of multiple deprivation. A score has been calculated for every electoral division for the overall index (higher scores mean more deprivation). These scores are ranked for the 865 electoral divisions in Wales. Thus, a deprived area in Wales ranks lower than others on this index (National Assembly for Wales 2000b).



**Table 2** Typical examples of classification of facets of attachment to community

Historical perspective	Social integration	General location satisfaction	Social support	Aesthetic components of location	Appropriateness of the environment	Relocation constraints
<i>n</i> = 121	<i>n</i> = 116	<i>n</i> = 71	<i>n</i> = 52	<i>n</i> = 34	<i>n</i> = 30	<i>n</i> = 20
Born and bred here...	Very close community...	Really happy here...	Everybody helps each other...	Peaceful and quiet...	Very handy for the health centre and the shops...	Too old to move...
Lived here all my life...	Got real friends here...	I like it here...	We've got a daughter who lives here, so that I can lean on her...	I like seclusion...	Everything here is on the flat...	Cant' be bothered...
Got used to being here...	Good neighbours around...		100% support from social services department...	Space—the feeling of space...	Convenient for transport...	Financially not really a possibility...
My memories are here...	Charity concerts, committees... Members of the church... Our cultural activities... It's Welsh, I'm Welsh...			Beautiful views... Scenically satisfying...	Council is very good with old people...	Ill health makes it difficult to consider...

identity' (for an overview of the concepts, see Manzo 2003). In order to establish which facets of their communities were considered to be important to responding, the following question was asked:

Would you *like* to move to a different town/village/community? If no, what is the one main reason for wanting to stay in your present town/village/community?

Responses were recorded verbatim, the elicited qualitative data were transcribed and seven key themes were identified (Table 2; Burholt 2006). For the purpose of this paper, aesthetic qualities were separated from other emotional components of location (such as the avoidance of crime and personal feelings of safety), so that this category contains statements which refer only to solitude, beauty and quietness.

### Education

Level of education was assessed using a 'background information' question from the EuroQol instrument which was included in the HAPPI questionnaire (Brooks 1996). The EuroQol instrument was designed as a standardised non-disease-specific instrument for describing and valuing health-related quality of life. The question relating to education asks if respondents continued education after the minimum school-leaving age. Responses are coded yes or no.

### Social class

Social class was defined using the NS-SEC five-class code (National Statistics 2002). NS-SEC was derived from occupation and employment status information, occupation being coded to the minor group classification (three digits) of the Standard Occupational Classification 2000. The five-class version of NS-SEC has the following classes:

1. Managerial and professional occupations
2. Intermediate occupations
3. Small employees and own account workers
4. Lower supervisory and technical occupations
5. Semi-routine and routine occupations

A sixth category including older people who had never worked and the long-term unemployed was also included.

### Physical and mental health

The health of the sample was assessed using one of the most widely used measures of health status: the physical and mental component scores from the SF36 (Ware and Gandek 1998). Data from the SF36 can be used to present a profile of health in eight dimensions. Factor analysis has shown that the SF36 may be reduced to two dimensions—a physical component and a mental component summary score (PCS and MCS). This analysis followed the recommended steps in scoring. After scor-

ing the eight scales according to the standard SF36 scoring algorithms, each SF36 subscale was standardised using z-score transformations and SF36 scale means and standard deviations. Subsequently, aggregate scores for the physical and mental components were computed. Each SF36 scale z-score was multiplied by its respective physical factor score coefficient (summarised in the handbook) and the eight products were summed to compute the PCS score. For the MCS score, each SF36 scale z-score was multiplied by its respective mental factor score coefficient (summarised in the handbook) and the eight products were summed. Finally, each component score was transformed to norm-based scoring (Ware et al. 1994).

### Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 11.5. The description of the study sample cross-tabulated each community type separately by key categorical variables (e.g. retirement area versus areas not defined as retirement area). Statistical significance was assessed using the Pearson chi-square statistic. Analysis of the variance of the mean (ANOVA) was used to compare ordinal variables in the same manner (e.g. native areas versus areas not defined as native). For both tests, statistical significance was assumed at the 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Binary logistic regression was used to determine to what extent attachment to place was determined by other variables. This is an appropriate statistical technique, given that the dependent variable was whether or not the older person gave a particular reason for

attachment to place (e.g. historical perspective). A set of two models was analysed separately for each hypotheses. Model 1 examined to what extent the defined community type influenced the dependent variable. Results are expressed in terms of odds ratios (ORs) where applicable (i.e. the predictor has a statistically significant effect on the model, goodness of fit being assessed using the model chi-square significant at the 5% level,  $p < 0.05$ ). An odds ratio of greater than one indicates that respondents in the community type in question have a higher risk of giving the response described by the outcome variable, compared with respondents living in the other communities. Model 2 examined to what extent different factors influenced attachment to place and whether they could account for the variations in attachment to place between community types. Thus, in the second model the OR for community type is adjusted for the effects of age, gender, marital status, education, social class, and physical and mental health.

## Results

### Profile of the sample

The total sample comprised of 58% men and 42% women with a mean age of 78.0 years (SD 5.5; Table 3). The native communities had a significantly greater proportion of men (46%) than did other areas (35%; chi square 4.48, DF 1,  $p < 0.05$ ). Respondents living in native areas were significantly older than those living elsewhere ( $F(1/386) = 7.09$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Just over half (51%) of the sample were married or had a live-in

**Table 3** Characteristics of respondents in each of the community types and total sample (\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.005$ )

	Retirement area (%) <i>n</i> = 99	Native areas (%) <i>n</i> = 238	Deprived area (%) <i>n</i> = 39	Total (%) <i>n</i> = 387
Gender		*		
Female	63	54	56	58
Male	37	46	44	42
Marital status				
Never married	3	6	10	7
Married	56	56	41	51
Widowed	40	35	44	39
Divorced/separated	1	4	5	3
Further education (yes)	35	24*	33	28
Social class (NS-SEC)		*		
1	36	36	31	38
2	11	6	10	9
3	7	6	8	7
4	1	3	8	2
5	16	29	26	24
6	28	20	18	21
Tenure	**			
Home owner	87	73	72	76
Social housing	4	19	21	16
Privately rented/other	9	9	8	8
Age (mean, SD)	78.0 (5.7)	77.4 (5.2)*	78.1 (5.4)	78.0 (5.5)
Physical score (mean, SD)	41.3 (11.2)	41.7 (12.4)	36.5 (15.4)*	41.8 (12.0)
Mental score (mean, SD)	58.2 (6.9)*	57.2 (7.0)	58.2 (6.8)	56.7 (7.3)



declare that they were attached to the community because of the availability of social support. Consequently, our second and third hypotheses were rejected.

Compared to those living elsewhere, older people living in native communities had greater odds (1.8) of stating social integration as the reason for attachment to the community. There were no statistically significant confounding effects from other variables. Hence, our fourth hypothesis was supported: older people living in native communities were more likely than others living elsewhere to state that social integration was an integral part of attachment to place.

Our fifth and sixth hypotheses were supported: older people living in a retirement community were more likely than others living elsewhere to mention the appropriateness of the environment (OR 2.4) or to talk about the aesthetic qualities of the environment (OR 2.2), such as the beauty of the surroundings or the peace, quietness and solitude, as reasons for attachment to the community. The effect of community type on attachment to place in both models remained significant after controlling for age, gender, marital status, education, social class, and physical and mental health, none of which statistically predicted the dependent variables.

Our seventh hypothesis was rejected: older people living in a deprived area were not more likely than those living elsewhere to experience relocation constraints and give these as reasons for attachment to place. The second model demonstrated that marital status significantly predicted the dependent variable. Those who were divorced had much greater odds of reporting relocation constraints than those who were married or those who were widowed.

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## Discussion

As noted in the introduction, to date there has been little empirical research on how *types* of attachment to place can be affected by an individual's circumstances and the community type he/she is living in. Responding to this gap in knowledge, this paper has tested seven hypotheses which relate community type to reasons for place attachment. The findings suggest that both retirement communities (with high levels of in-migration) and native communities (with low levels of in-migration and a strong local culture) are characterised by particular types of place attachment.

Older people living in native communities in this study were more likely than others to have a historical attachment to the community or to note that they were attached to the community through strong social relationships with friends, neighbours, community groups or religious organisations. These findings do not necessarily suggest that those people living in native rural communities do not appreciate the scenic beauty of their surroundings, but other factors more strongly influence attachment to place. Elsewhere in Europe, in certain rural locations the local population views the landscape

not in terms of the scenery but as a social and political unit based on territory (Olwig 2002; Claval 2005). In addition to territorial identity, in this study the Welsh language serves as a symbol of Welsh identity (Bourhis et al. 1973; Jones and Desforges 2003). Given that statements referring to social interaction often made explicit reference to the Welsh nature of a community and engagement with others, we suggest that the findings illustrate that in those areas with a high level of Welsh communication, and low levels of in-migration, feelings of citizenship and regional identity are fostered which contribute to the overall meaning of place. This type of attachment to place might also occur in other rural areas with a minority language which is considered an inherent part of the national culture. Historical and socially integrated attachment to place occurs over time, and requires a degree of population stability. Although the sense of place through the blending of "physical and autobiographical experiences" in one's own home have been referred to elsewhere (Shenk et al. 2004), to date the community as a setting for older adults' memories and life stories has been given less emphasis in gerontology.

The historical and social attachment to place for the established resident in native communities includes the dimension of time, which is not necessarily an element required in developing an attachment to place for retirement migrants. Harper (1987) notes that recent incomers tend to view place aesthetically. This paper concurs with Harper's assertion and shows that older people living in retirement communities are acutely aware of the aesthetic qualities of the surrounding environment. The retirement community in this study has two particularly endearing features: mountains (landscape) and water (seascape). Research has concluded that the degree of wilderness, water and colour contrast are important components in the assessment of the visual quality of a rural scene (Ulrich 1983; Pitt 1989; Wherrett 2000; Arriaza et al. 2004). It has been suggested that localities with mountainous areas or a spectacular coastline hold a fascination for incomers as they epitomise the rural idyll or paradise within the Romantic tradition (Chawla 1992; Claval 2005). However, other evidence suggests that a natural environment provides a vehicle for reinvigoration and reducing mental fatigue and stress (Ulrich 1983; Kaplan and Kaplan 1989; Ulrich et al. 1991; Kaplan 1995; Hartig et al. 1997). On the whole, these theories have not been applied specifically to older people, but here it is suggested that these may be some of the reasons why rural environments are chosen as retirement destinations. In addition to providing a tranquil setting to reduce stress (Ulrich 1983; Ulrich et al. 1991) and to reflect on one's achievement during the life course (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989), perhaps for older people they also provide an environment which helps to restore some vitality during retirement which may have been slowly eroded during years of engagement in the work force.

Living in a retirement area not only predicts an attachment to place characterised by aesthetic qualities



but also an attachment which focuses on the appropriateness of the environment. The countryside has been likened to 'a playground' where retirees can pursue outdoor activities such as hiking, climbing or golf (Claval 2005). However, the types of environmental factors which respondents living in this retirement area talked about were allied to the availability of more mundane facilities, such as health centres and shops, in combination with the relatively gentle undulating terrain (compared to steeper hills in the surrounding areas). This is more in line with an environmental psychological approach which stresses functional aspects of the location (Lawton 1988).

The accessibility of the community may be particularly important as over nine-tenths (91%) of single pensioners and over half (53%) of pensioner couples do not own a car (DETR 2001). Therefore, a majority of older people are reliant on public transport or walking to access necessary facilities. Uneven pavements, a steep terrain, lack of public transport or inaccessible transport all provide barriers to accessing community facilities (Lavery et al. 1996). This study suggests that older people's expressions of attachment to place in retirement areas are affected by the role which the community has in providing a place where everyday tasks can be carried out competently, providing few obstacles and barriers. Although the original reasons for moving to a retirement destination may have included partaking in local leisure facilities, in old age adjustments may be made, shifting the focus from engagement in leisure activities to the maintenance of activities of daily living, for example, by continuing to do one's own shopping. As Katz (2000) notes, the "key to the management of old age through activity is the reinvention of activity itself."

There are three limitations to this study which affect the generalisability of results elsewhere. These relate to the location of the study area, the level of deprivation of the 'deprived' community, and the heterogeneity of older people in various settlements. Firstly, Gwynedd is located in the Welsh 'heart land' of the country (Bowen 1959), and in certain areas within the county there are sharp distinctions made between English- and Welsh-speaking inhabitants (Thompson and Day 1999). Thus, the historical and socially integrated forms of attachment to place which foster a sense of national identity may not be as relevant elsewhere in Wales or, indeed, across the UK where language differences between neighbours do not exist. On the other hand, there are likely to be other rural areas within Europe where a minority language and strong local culture foster these particular types of place attachment. Secondly, this paper showed that living in a deprived community did not predict impediments to moving. We believe that this finding is not necessarily generalisable to other deprived neighbourhoods, and would also suggest that other (more deprived) communities may face barriers to relocation which are on a par or greater than those experienced by older divorcees. Thirdly, although this paper differentiates attachment to place by settlement type, there is considerable variability within settlements. For

example, our analysis indicates that the characteristics of older people living in the retirement destination cannot be solely distinguished by the typical features of long-distance retirement migrants (e.g. Litwak and Longino 1987; Burholt 1999). Retirement destinations include some older people who have lived in the community for longer periods of their lives and have developed a strong historical attachment, and also have kin living in the same neighbourhood providing social support.

In conclusion, this paper has taken a phenomenological approach inasmuch as it has asked older people about their experiences of attachment to place from the first-person point of view. The paper has also taken a reductionist angle to place attachment, that is, delimiting it by community type. Blumer (1969) argues that "The nature of this environment is set by the meaning that the objects comprising it have for those human beings. Individuals or groups occupying or living in the same spatial location may have accordingly very different environments" (Blumer 1969, p. 11). However, this paper demonstrates that similar experiences have a spatial (community) dimension (see also Cohen 1982). An individual resides in a particular community because of particular opportunities, life course decisions and the consequences of those decisions (Riley 1998; Moen 2001). Many older people living in a particular area are likely to have similar life experiences (a temporal dimension), and thus similar reasons for place attachment. As such, unlike the personal meaning of home, attachment to the community can have a collective meaning which is salient in a specific location, or locations with similar characteristics (see also Devine-Wright and Lyons 1997; Dixon and Durrheim 2000). For native communities, local places play a key part in the representation of meaningful national and self-identities (Agnew 1987; Gruffudd 1994; Jones and Desforges 2003). For older people living in retirement communities, the choice of location has been made taking into account the desirability of local features, both in terms of accessibility and beautiful surroundings. Thus, communities are not just settings; they play a significant role in self-identity and are a vital source of emotional and experiential meaning for the inhabitant and, as such, the aforementioned elements should be taken seriously as components required for the well-being of older people.

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