



Editorial

Community and Space in Social Exclusion in Later Life

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Older adults, especially those aged 80 years and above, are indeed at high risk of social exclusion due to physical, mental, social and economic age-related changes. This exclusion can have a direct impact on their quality of life and wellbeing, can affect also their relatives, and the sustainability of public welfare and care systems. However, despite this observation, knowledge about the social exclusion of older people is limited, mainly empirical, with conceptual frameworks and theoretical explanations neglected (Walsh, Scharf, and Keating 2016). It is with the intention of promoting a conceptual framework of spatially related social exclusion that articles in this current issue make use of theoretical and methodological approaches from rural and urban sociology and geography to contribute to ongoing debates in this field and to suggest how to link it to broader sociological theories.

In their article entitled “The Social Production of Age, Space and Exclusion: Towards a More Theory-driven Understanding of Spatial Exclusion Mechanisms in Later Life”, *Moulaert, Wanka, and Drilling* offer a theoretical approach to the spatial aspect of old-age social exclusion by providing a heuristic model of an “ageing, space and exclusion” triangle. This model offers a theory-based framework to look at age and spatial exclusion, and the authors apply their model to interpret the concept of “Age Friendly Cities and Communities” (AFCC) as promoted by the World Health Organization.

Age Friendly Cities and Communities are also addressed in *Vidovičová’s* article, “Age-friendly Rural Areas: The Challenges of Measurement and Evaluation in Czech Older Adults”. This contribution presents a study of the application of the age-friendly index measurement in the context of rural areas in Czech Republic and reveals that high scores on the index are not automatically associated with more satisfaction. The author advocates in favour of more qualitative investigations of age-friendliness characteristics in rural places.

The quality of social relationships appears to be a main aspect of the subjective quality of life in both rural and urban places. In an article entitled “How Ageing and Quality of Life is Influenced by Social Relationships: An Exploration of Rural Midlife Women in Ireland”, *Herbert* relates findings based on qualitative interviews with 25 women in rural Ireland aged 45–65 years of age. The results show various influencing factors contributing to perceived

quality of life, with a predominance of the presence (or not) and quality of social relationships experienced with family, friends, and other members of the community.

Černič Istenič and Knežević Hočevar in their article discuss services for older adults by looking at the organization of community care for older people in two rural municipalities in Slovenia. In their study, “The Organisation of Care for Older People in Rural Communities: Two Cases from Slovenia”, they reveal disparities in how municipalities respond to the legally introduced uniform standards regarding social care. Despite the presence of institutional forms of care, informal care, often provided by the family, and activities practiced by officially unacknowledged local providers (e.g. local volunteers, pensioners’ associations, and charity organizations) is also vital in the daily life of older adults.

In their preliminary report, Emirhafizović and Šadić present an exploratory study of quality of life in urban areas of Sarajevo. In their “Aging in the Urban Context – Evidence from Sarajevo” article, the authors conducted semi-structured surveys and interviews of older adults. The results reveal high levels of life-satisfaction despite the city facing material deprivation in the post-conflict period. Again, the quality of bonds with family and friends appears to be a strong determinant of satisfaction, and advocates in favour of the development of infrastructures and the service sector for older adults.

This monothematic issue in part originated with the ROSEnet: “Reducing Old-age Social Exclusion through Collaborations in Research and Policy” (CA 15122) COST Action¹, supported by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union.² The picture ROSEnet draws shows how interconnected the various aspects of social exclusion may be and how subtle the networks of support are. Their embeddedness in the community and space give an opportunity to develop measures to rebuild, reframe, reinforce, and strengthen the socio-physical space and therefore provide hope for improved outcomes in terms of increased well-being and life quality as we age.

References

- WALSH, Kieran, Thomas SCHARF and Norah KEATING. 2016. “Social Exclusion of Older Persons: A Scoping Review and Conceptual Framework.” *European Journal of Ageing* 14(1): 81–98.

¹ COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. The Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation. For further information please see: www.cost.eu.

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