

The Importance of Everyday Walking Routines for Ageing Well in Place

Hannah Grove

Leisured Walking for Older Adult Health and Wellbeing

Walking is a highly valued activity (Franke et al., 2013; Graham et al., 2020; Lager et al., 2013) and a popular leisure-based activity for many older people (Liu et al., 2020). Walking can be a therapeutic activity (Gatrell, 2013) and beneficial to health and wellbeing through a range of pathways (Alves & Sugiyama, 2006; Sugiyama & Ward-Thompson, 2007). These pathways include health and wellbeing benefits associated with physical activity and exercise (Graham et al., 2020); enacting independence (Graham et al., 2020; Schwanen et al., 2012; Schwanen & Ziegler, 2011); restorative engagement with blue, green, or even white spaces such as snow and ice (Day, 2008; Finlay, 2018; Finlay et al., 2015; Gatrell, 2013; Roe & McCay, 2021); and socialising with others (Day, 2008; Franke et al., 2013; Lager et al., 2013; van Eck & Pijpers, 2017; van Cauwenberg, 2012; Walsh, 2014). Walking as an activity is important for providing opportunities to socialise with others and can be a “place-making practice”, helping older people to feel connected to their neighbourhoods and a sense of belonging (Day, 2008; Franke et al., 2013; Lager et al., 2021, p. 1093; van Eck & Pijpers, 2017; van Cauwenberg, 2012; Walsh, 2014). Being able to move through community environments, particularly whilst walking, is important to older people not only as a mode of travel but as a valuable and “meaningful, lived space” in and of itself which can contribute to wellbeing (Metz, 2000; van Hoven & Meijering, 2019, p. 8).

Whilst leaving the home has the potential for a variety of wellbeing benefits and is a vital component of ageing well in place, depending on the interaction between an individual’s personal and environmental context (Lawton & Nahemow, 1973), it can present challenges, fear, and risk. When an individual deems these to be too great, it may be altogether avoided (Peace et al., 2011). Existing research has shown that as people age, their activity space or life world can shrink, greater amounts of time can be spent at home, and the immediate local environment becomes more important (Buffel et al., 2012; Lager et al., 2013; Milton et al., 2015; Moeyersons et al., 2022; Schwanen

& Páez, 2010; Yen et al., 2009). The health and wellbeing benefits that can potentially be obtained by walking, particularly in more immediate local environments, are largely determined by the quality and accessibility of the environment and how easy and safe it is (perceived) to engage with, particularly for individuals with health challenges and reduced mobility. The context in which walking occurs can influence the overall quality of this experience Curl and Mason (2019). For example, in areas less well served by public transport, individuals may *have* to walk rather than *choose* to walk as an enjoyable leisure activity. There is a wealth of existing literature that has identified features or characteristics of the local environment which can support or hinder older people in engaging with their local neighbourhoods and communities, particularly those older people whose mobility may be constrained (see Gardner, 2014; Gilroy, 2006; Lavery et al., 1996; Newton et al., 2010; World Health Organization, 2007). Built environment characteristics that can support older adults to walk more include well-maintained, firm, flat, and wide pavements (including steps and ramps); safe pedestrian crossings; adequate seating to provide places to rest between home and local facilities; well-maintained greenery to improve the walking experience; bus shelters with seating; public toilets; and simple, easily visible, and understandable signage (Newton et al., 2010, pp. 26–28).

Existing research has shown that low-density suburban environments, particularly those characterised by urban sprawl, are considered less “healthy” or “restorative”, owing to a lack of amenities, car dependency, less walkable neighbourhoods, and limited public transport and infrastructure (Frumkin et al., 2004; Roe & McCay, 2021). The mental health impacts of urban sprawl can be significant and can influence the ability to develop social capital (see Leyden, 2003; Melis et al., 2015), particularly if these environments are stressful and lacking in aesthetically pleasing design. Furthermore, the consequences of these health impacts may not be felt equally across the population, with certain population groups more vulnerable to the negative effects (Frumkin et al., 2004). Of those, older people, as well as those living in more disadvantaged communities, are notable because they may be less able to compensate for poor urban design, as they may be less mobile and therefore more dependent on their immediate local environments (Buffel et al., 2012; Milton et al., 2015; Yen et al., 2009).

A combination of demographic, urban, and health trends means that increasing numbers of older people with a variety of health and mobility needs will be ageing in place within predominantly suburban and car-dependent neighbourhoods in Ireland (Sheehan & O’Sullivan, 2020; Nedovic-Budic et al., 2016). Recognising the important role of mobility and *being able* to engage in walking as a leasured practice to obtain health and wellbeing benefits, the walkability of local neighbourhoods is an important consideration when designing age-friendly environments. As a result, there is value in better understanding the everyday walking routines of older people and

how environmental contexts can shape their social and leisure experiences. Existing literature has highlighted the importance of paying attention to the daily rhythms and routines of older people, as this can strongly influence the overall experience of ageing in place (Franke et al., 2013; Lager et al., 2016). What might appear as more “mundane” or “everyday” forms of mobility can play an important role in the overall wellbeing of older adults, contributing to place attachment and a sense of belonging over time (van Hoven & Meijering, 2019, p. 1).

Methodology

This study was part of a PhD research project carried out in the Greater Dublin Area in Ireland. The overall aim was to explore how older people define and enact ageing well in place (see Grove, 2022 for further details). The research examined what is of most importance to older people for a good quality of life; what places, routines, routes, and interactions beyond the home are most valued; and what personal and environmental factors influence the ease with which individuals can leave the home to engage in meaningful activities and interactions. The study design was a multi-staged and multi-method approach, which combined qualitative and spatial methods. These included four focus groups ($n = 31$), interviews and mapping exercises ($n = 34$) and go-along interviews or interviews on the move ($n = 20$) with older people in two contrasting study areas: *Baile na Cora* and *Áit na Mara*. To protect the identity of participants in this study, the names of the study areas are not disclosed, and fictional place names are referred to instead, reflecting their characteristics. *Baile na Cora* loosely translates from Irish to refer to a town that used to be a field, whilst *Áit na Mara* means a place by the sea.

Baile na Cora is a large working-class new town located in outer suburban Dublin. Originally a small village, surrounded by agricultural land, it has experienced rapid suburbanisation and population growth since the 1970s, when many people moved to the area from inner-city Dublin. Many of these individuals have now reached or are reaching retirement age. The centre of *Baile na Cora* includes the former village and a main high street. From here, there are good public transport links into the centre of Dublin, and this takes between 50 and 60 minutes. A variety of cultural and social assets and amenities have been built in recent years, including a shopping centre, a theatre, and a library. Moving away from the centre, the study area becomes much more suburban in nature. These areas are more residential with fewer amenities, although some do have smaller shopping parades, health centres, and community centres, including bus routes to the centre of *Baile na Cora*. The more recently built neighbourhoods in *Baile na Cora* are the most disadvantaged, geographically isolated, and furthest from the centre of *Baile na Cora*. The outer suburban areas are the most car-dependent, and from them, it would take at least 20–30 minutes to walk to the centre of *Baile na Cora*.

The second study area Áit na Mara includes a mix of inner-suburban and inner-city neighbourhoods within close proximity to the coast. It is an area that has a more established older adult population, with many older people who have lived in the area for several generations. This area has experienced significant urban change, gentrification, and high-rise office development in recent years. Compared to the more peripheral areas of Baile na Cora, it has better transport amenities, more walkable neighbourhoods, and fewer health challenges at a population level. There are very good public transport routes to Dublin city centre, which take between 10 and 20 minutes depending on the neighbourhood. It would be possible to walk to the city centre from between 10 and 50 minutes.

Go-along interviews are a type of in-depth qualitative interview carried out in context (Kusenbach, 2003) and “on the move” (Finlay & Bowman, 2017). Go-along or “mobile interviews” are in situ and immersive and can provide additional insight beyond the traditional interview as they provide insight into how a participant engages with their local environment and to identify “why and how older people walk” (Bell et al., 2015; Finlay & Bowman, 2017; Foley et al., 2020; Lager et al., 2021, p. 1095). Mobile interviews are increasingly used in research on ageing and environment to explore the everyday experiences of older people (see Finlay & Bowman, 2017; Gardner, 2011; Lager et al., 2013; van Cauwenberg et al., 2012). Go-along interviews in this research were optional, and participants were encouraged to only do what was within their ability, and the researcher kept pace (Foley et al., 2020). Participants chose where to go and what to show. There were no structured questions during the go-along interviews and participants acted like “tour guides”, being the experts in their local area and somewhat redressing the traditional power imbalances that exist between researcher and participant (Carpiano, 2009, p. 267; Finlay & Bowman, 2017). The format of the go-along interviews reflected the ways that participants typically travel in their neighbourhoods. Of the twenty go-along interviews conducted, seven were driving go-along interviews, one was a cycling interview, eight were walking interviews with no mobility assistance, one was conducted with a mobility scooter, two were conducted with a walker and one was a visualisation at home.

A purposive sample of older people aged 70+ living in their own homes was sought. Of this “maximum variation” was pursued where possible. This is a type of purposeful sampling where the aim is to find heterogeneity (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This form of sampling was sought to try to obtain a diverse perspective of what it meant to age well in place for older people with differing interests, as well as contrasting environmental and personal circumstances. Participants were recruited through local gatekeepers, and this was primarily through a range of local community centres and social groups. Of the thirty four participants who completed interviews, five used mobility assistance devices. Four used a walker and one used a mobility scooter. Participants

identified a range of health challenges that influenced their ability to walk in their neighbourhoods. Health challenges identified by participants included: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) (n = 3), Alzheimer's disease (n = 2), Parkinson's disease (n = 1), bowel conditions (n = 2), visual impairments (n = 2), vertigo or dizziness (n = 2), joint-related mobility challenges or ongoing rehabilitation from broken bones (n = 5) and general mobility reductions (no specific health challenges identified) (n = 1).

For the results discussed in this chapter, places and activities of importance to participants were coded in NVivo, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). I could then easily find out how many participants identified this place or activity and how many times they were referenced. These codes were also cross-referenced using matrix coding (or cross-tabulation) analysis to identify the places and types of movement that were most associated with social interaction. This revealed some interesting patterns related to both the places where walking occurred and the relationships between walking and social interaction. Walking was most highly referenced in relation to green and blue spaces, including local parks and the coast, walking to the shops and shopping centres, and notable roads or streets. Social interaction was the most highly referenced activity code, and some of the key places that participants described as being important for social interaction included streets and roads, village centres, local parks, and shops.

Results

Variations in Everyday Walking Routines

There were significant variations in the everyday mobilities and routines of older people in the study, in particular the extent to which they walked in their local environment, either as an activity in and of itself, or to reach a particular destination as a mode of travel. This reflects the interaction between personal characteristics on the one hand, including health status, mobility, and energy budgets, as well as how the environment supports walking as an activity. To provide an overview of some of the main walking routines, I now describe some of the common walking routines of participants to highlight some of this variation. Áine (from Áit na Mara) was the participant who most strongly valued walking and had strong identities related to walking, speaking passionately about its importance to her:

walking is a medication, I looked at it that way because it is good for your mind and it is good for your body. When you just put one foot in front of the other you are starting something, and the movement goes up and you just walk off. Now you can walk off and leave anything you like behind

you ... as you are walking you are talking to friends, and you keep going, and that is great.

(Áine, Áit na Mara)

Áine developed her walking habits through a walking group she first joined when she was aged 16. Aged 83, she was still a member of her hiking group and went on regular outings, including walking trips abroad. During her interview, Áine described a walking routine that she did every morning, where she would walk four laps of her local park for approximately one hour. She regularly walked into the city centre to do her shopping, even choosing this over regular buses that were available to her.

I don't have to tell you I have a bus pass, but I would walk into town quicker than I would hop on a bus, even though have my pass.

(Áine, Áit na Mara)

In this way, she chose to walk regularly in her local environment and demonstrated a strong determination to do so. Louise (Baile na Cora) was another participant who highly valued walking or "rambling" as she described it. She mentioned how, as someone who had lived in Study Area 1, since it was a small village, she would always be out on the road and people would beep their horns at her in greeting as they drove past. Several participants used walking as one of their main modes of travel and described walking routines that they carried out when travelling to a particular destination. For example, Anne (Baile na Cora) would walk approximately 20 minutes from her house located on the outskirts of Study Area 1 to the centre of the new town to do her weekly shop, which involved walking across a busy dual carriageway.

Some participants with greater health challenges reported the importance of smaller daily walking routines or a "bit of a walk" (Nuala, Baile na Cora). Jennifer (Baile na Cora) described a short daily walk where she would go to her local shop to collect telebingo. Jennifer had Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and would complete this walk using a walker and with an oxygen tank. Some participants mentioned that they walked very little in their local environments. For example, Edith had Parkinson's and was unable to walk far without her walker. She would occasionally walk to the bottom of her road to sit and look at the park:

I wouldn't be able to walk that far... I can only walk a bit and stop. Walk a bit and stop. I can't walk very far.

(Edith, Baile na Cora)

Several participants described walking as an activity they *should* do more of. James admitted that occasionally he might "deliberately go out for a walk"

but recognised that he “probably should do it a bit more often”, recognising that he was more likely to use his car instead:

if I am going somewhere local, I will walk, if it is within a mile or so I won't drive.

(James, Baile na Cora)

During a go-along interview with Michael, which involved both driving and walking, we went for a walk through a park that we drove to. On the walk through the park, he mentioned that when he looked after his grandchild, he would go for a walk with her in the pram, and that it often gave him the “excuse to go walking” that he felt he needed.

I probably don't do as much walking as I should do... If it is once a week, I would be lucky. It should be more.

(Michael, Baile na Cora)

When I asked Emer how often she walked in her neighbourhood, she replied, “Not enough”. Both Michael and Emer described some mobility challenges they were experiencing at the time. Michael had knee pain and struggled to go uphill in particular, and Emer mentioned that she was having physiotherapy for her hip. She had been advised to walk for half an hour every day, but hadn't been, admitting that she hadn't had the time lately for this. For some participants, walking was something that they used to do, or was something that they would like to do but were unable to:

I used to do a lot of walking. I don't do it that much.

(Méabh, Baile na Cora)

I used to go around the park, there is a friend of mine, she would be at Mass and the two of us would go around the park. I haven't done that in a while, the winter time I stopped doing it.

(Mairead, Áit na Mara)

Mairead mentioned that during the winter she stopped a walking routine that she had developed with a friend to walk around her local park. The impact of seasonality and weather conditions was highlighted by several participants when they described their walking routines, with most preferring “fine” weather conditions and choosing to walk more during the summer:

Sometimes in the summer just going out for a walk I'd go that way.

(Bridie, Baile na Cora)

If the weather is okay, I might walk down to [a nearby high street] and do a bit of shopping. I'd walk down and get the bus back.

(Michelle, Áit na Mara)

David was one of the exceptions to this, in that he particularly enjoyed walking at the coast during stormy weather:

How many people would get rid of feeling depressed if they went out for a walk in a storm and watched the waves beating up over a wall 25 foot high? Exhilarating stuff.

(David, Áit na Mara)

In addition to weather and seasonal considerations, Anne spoke about avoiding walking at night due to safety concerns and perceived this as more dangerous than in the past, whilst Michelle avoided walking at night due to visibility concerns, as she was visually impaired:

Back in that time, you could go out and walk along the street, like. You could walk home if you were at a dance, you could walk home at night. Now... it's so dangerous.

(Anne, Baile na Cora)

I like to walk but I haven't been walking as much in latter times, especially at night, because I can't see.

(Michelle, Áit na Mara)

Overall, this section has demonstrated considerable variation in the extent to which participants walk in their local environment, as well as the meanings and reasonings they provide with regard to how long they *should* walk and what form this takes. The importance of walking as a means of interacting with others is now considered.

The Importance of Walking for Social Interaction

Connecting to others whilst leaving home was highly valued by participants, and this included talking to others whilst moving and walking through public spaces. The forms of movement most associated with social interaction included walking (including using mobility assistance devices), walking with dogs, and using or waiting for public transport. Michelle (Áit na Mara) saw this type of interaction as an important component of how she defined a good quality of life:

To be able to get out and meet with people and mix with other people and say hello to everybody, even people you don't know. And sometimes I would say hello to people, and they'd say, now I wonder who that was [laughs]. But it is lovely. I was speaking with a man the other day, never met him in my life, and we had a great chat, an elderly gentleman. And yeah, it is good to meet people and to talk to people and to smile at people.

(Michelle, Áit na Mara)

Four participants commented that one of the best things about where they lived was the guarantee of these types of interaction and the fact that

people in their community would never “pass them by”. Louise (Baile na Cora) mentioned this when discussing her rambling and walking through the neighbourhood. She explains how “they never pass you” because they were “reared” in the neighbourhood, before it had expanded to a large new town. There were many instances of participants stating that there would “always” be someone to talk to. Shauna (Áit na Mara) was also vocal about this. She reflected that in her neighbourhood it is a nice community to go out and walk in and that it “is the secret of where you are living if it is feasible to talk to people”:

That is the beauty of [neighbourhood in Áit na Mara], no one passes each other, you always get a hello. That is the beauty of going out in the daytime.
(Shauna, Áit na Mara)

... it is a nice community if you go out. Just say you are taking a walk out and you meet someone, you may not know them well, but one always says hello, that is the beauty.

(Shauna, Áit na Mara)

She admitted that sometimes she would chat for longer and sometimes she wouldn't, but there was always a guarantee of a hello as a minimum exchange, and she took much comfort from this. Mairead expressed this guarantee of always meeting someone meant that she never felt lonely:

And like here you will always go out and you will always see someone, you will always have a chat with someone, you are never lonely ... if [it's] someone that you haven't seen for a while ... you might be just going to say “Hello, how are you?”, and go off, and then you'd stop ... and then, you know, [you would think] I enjoyed that chat. You are never that busy that you can't stop.

(Mairead, Áit na Mara)

Several participants had high profiles in their neighbourhoods because of how well they were known. Most participants in Áit na Mara had been born in their neighbourhoods and their families had lived there for several generations, whilst in Baile na Cora most people had moved to their neighbourhoods during the 1970s when the houses were built. Most participants had therefore spent a large proportion of their lives within their neighbourhoods, and many were very well known as a result. Margaret (Áit na Mara) revealed in her joint interview with Nessa (Áit na Mara) that her grandchildren would no longer go with her to the village centre within her neighbourhood (including a local shopping parade) because she was always talking to people:

Margaret: Let's just say my grandchildren stopped coming to the village with me at an early age.

Nessa: You see, Margaret was born and reared in the village, and she knows everyone, and everyone knows Margaret.

Margaret and Nessa made a conscious decision to “walk everywhere if [they] can”, estimating that they would walk every day for about an hour, with breaks in between. During this, we walked from their local community centre, where they had just attended bingo (and where they were recruited from), back to their respective houses. This go-along interview took place on a sunny early evening in August. During Margaret and Nessa’s go-along interview, which was the only joint go-along interview conducted, I obtained a sense of how they would usually chat about the news on their usual walk home together from their local community centre, but also how they would talk to others along the way. Many times, during the go-along interview, they exchanged news about people in the neighbourhood. There were three interactions that I observed. The first involved several minutes of people who were sitting out in their front garden, the second we observed a lady cleaning the street with a broom across the road. Margaret commented that she was “probably just doing it for a chat if she sees someone she knows passing”. Margaret then shouted across the road to greet her and laughed, saying:

There’s another lady who’d chat all day! [shouts to lady across the road sweeping the road] I’m looking at you! [laughs].

(Margaret, Áit na Mara)

The third interaction involved meeting another participant (Áine), who Margaret and Nessa knew from one of the exercise classes they attend. During the go-along, they had a brief interaction about when it was due to start back after the summer break. Margaret and Nessa explained that if they were in a hurry, they had to “close [their] eyes”. For some participants, like Margaret, having this reputation and being so well known was an important part of their identity.

Another form of interaction commonly identified during interviews was interactions with non-humans, especially dogs. June (Áit na Mara) described how she regularly walked her dog and interacted with more people because of this. Sometimes she would know the names of the dogs she meets regularly but not the owners:

You meet more people with dogs, and you get to know the name of the dogs and you don’t know the name of the people. You say, “ah here is Toby, here is Rocky”. And you don’t know the owner’s name and you can’t say, “what is your name?” It wouldn’t be nice. But you know the dogs’ names. [Laughs].

(June, Áit na Mara)

David also described how if he went to the shop without his dog, she would be missed and people would ask where she was:

Oh the dog, [name of dog] went everywhere with me. My dogs, if I walked out there now to the shops someone would say, where is the dog?

(David, Áit na Mara)

Not all of the interactions that I observed during go-along interviews were with people who were already known. I also experienced people greeting strangers during go-along interviews. During Michelle's go-along interview, she said hello to six people on different occasions on an hour-long walk around her neighbourhood. The first time this happened, I asked her if she knew the person she was saying hello to and she admitted that she didn't know them. The third time this happened, she turned to me and said "And don't ask me if I know him because I don't" and laughed. There were also some notable instances when participants did not say hello to people. During Margaret and Nessa's go-along, some teenagers walked past but they did not say hello to them.

During the main interviews, participants were asked how comfortable they were talking to strangers in their neighbourhood. Some claimed they would talk to everyone, whilst others were less comfortable with this. Michael admitted that he would avoid interactions whilst walking because he didn't feel comfortable conducting "small talk":

I would try not to [talk with strangers]. If I felt that there was something interesting I wanted to talk about or if I knew somebody had a problem ... I would certainly do it, but I generally just keep going and just say hello to people. There is a ring road here and it is a known place for people stopping and talking and I just keep going. It sounds very anti-social, but I am not great for small talk.

(Michael, Baile na Cora)

Emer describes that she "would talk to anyone", whilst Louise reveals "I talk to everybody". Edith explained, "Well, I'd say hello to most people, whether I knew them or I didn't know them [both laugh] I would say good morning". This was interesting because both Emer and Edith provided examples where they adapted their behaviour or felt intimidated by others whilst out walking. Emer described how she only walked through certain parts of a local park where she could be seen and avoided areas in the centre of the park where there were a lot of bushes. She mentioned that a man had been killed in the park recently.

Other participants were openly far more guarded or cautious about interacting with strangers and explained that there were certain types of people and certain places that provoked anxiety about talking to strangers. This

was connected to experiences and perceptions of neighbours. For example, Noelle (Baile na Cora) explained that whether she would talk to strangers “depends” on the situation. She provided an example where she would be happy to talk to strangers; this was women of a similar age to her on public transport. Noelle revealed an incident where her bag had been taken and how she became more fearful walking to or from places, particularly at night as a result:

One day I was going to work, and my bag was snatched, and ever after that I... didn't like walking ... I just, got more fear into me.

(Noelle)

Meanwhile, Nuala (Baile na Cora) described how she talked to certain people while using public transport and that she perceived as safe to talk to:

If I see somebody maybe with children, I might pass some remark. Or in the bus maybe if you are sitting beside somebody, top of the weather, we are always talking about the weather anyway.

(Nuala)

Anne (Baile na Cora) appeared to be quite conflicted about interactions with others when she was out walking. She differentiated between people she knew in her neighbourhood, who were typically the people she moved in with, and “new people” that had moved in more recently, around whom she felt less comfortable. For those people she had known a long time, they would often ask after her mother, who was aged 92. She provided an example of having conversations with people in the main shopping centre of the new town. She described how she liked to give everyone a chance and that generally she was quite friendly until she saw something that gave her cause for concern. She admitted she would be cautious around certain people when she was walking and that groups of people would make her feel uncomfortable:

I think the way, that in general like, the way this, you have to be very cautious when you're walking out, when you see groups coming towards you, you know. I think it's the same everywhere, not only here, you know? You just have to be on the alert (Anne).

During Margaret and Nessa's interview, I asked them whether they were comfortable talking to strangers in their neighbourhood, but their response was far more positive, although they did comment that if someone looked “shifty”, they wouldn't talk to them.

Several participants commented on changes to the social fabric of their communities, which resulted in them knowing fewer people than they did in the past. This had implications for how comfortable they felt interacting

with others. Some participants felt there were more strangers than there used to be, with new people moving to the area. This was the case in both Áit na Mara and Baile na Cora. June (Áit na Mara) reflected that she used to know everybody, but now she doesn't. She explained that she still tried to say hello to everyone:

Now there would be a lot of people you don't know because of all the high-rise blocks and all. I mean years ago I used to know everybody, but you wouldn't know everybody because there is a lot of strangers. But you know, most of them will say hello if you say hello to them. You try to say hello to people and make them feel welcome if you can.

(June, Áit na Mara)

Michelle (Áit na Mara) commented during her interview about how people have come and gone and moved to the area. Her experience was that some of the people who had moved to the area didn't want to converse and that they lived very private lives. She found this sad because she really valued those interactions when she was out and about. Whilst some participants commented on a decrease in neighbourly interactions, for some there was a noticeable absence of these types of interactions mentioned during interviews or observed during go-along interviews.

Discussion

This chapter has explored the everyday walking routines of older people living in the Greater Dublin Area. Results have highlighted the variation in walking abilities and routines amongst participants in the study, demonstrating the heterogeneity of the older adult population. In general, these findings are consistent with existing research that has shown the various ways that walking can be beneficial for health and wellbeing (Alves & Sugiyama, 2006; Sugiyama & Ward-Thompson, 2007) and how walking is a place-making activity, which shapes a sense of belonging in a neighbourhood (Lager et al., 2021). Findings identified some of the temporal variations to the walking routines of participants and how weather conditions, seasonality and time of day can influence walking routines. Weather and seasonality have been identified as important environmental factors which can influence the extent and ease with which older people get out and about (see Böcker et al., 2017; Finlay, 2018; Franke et al., 2013; Holland et al., 2005; Ludwig, 1997; Tanner, 2010). Existing research has highlighted the "seasonal rhythms" that occur amongst older people (Lager et al., 2016, p.1573) and how for some this can lead to a "dependence on the weather" (Lager, 2015, p. 104), which means that it is easier to age well in place at some times more than others.

Results revealed various examples of social interactions whilst walking, either described or observed first-hand during go-along interviews. These

included interactions with people who were both known and unknown, and with humans and non-humans. In line with existing research that has explored the social worlds of older people, this chapter has shown that in general “street socialising” (Day, 2008, p. 308) is of great importance to many older people (Gardner, 2011; Lager et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2023; Phillips et al., 2021). Being well known and knowing others made these social interactions more likely and contributed to participants feeling “comfortable” in their surroundings and neighbourhood. This demonstrates their place attachment and how this is developed through the social “insiderness” that they feel (Lager et al., 2021; Rowles, 1983, p. 299). Similar findings have been found in research that has explored the daily walking routines of older people in urban parks, which revealed the important layer that social relationships bring to these routines and demonstrated how “recurring encounters between familiar strangers” are “full of significance” (van Eck & Pijpers, 2017, p. 166).

In addition to positive experiences of socialising whilst walking, this chapter has provided examples where valued social walking routines had become more challenging or had changed and were now perceived as less sociable. Such feelings of feeling “othered” through walking have also been found elsewhere when exploring the everyday walking routines of older people (Lager et al., 2021, p. 1088). In some instances, these walking practices were now seen as too dangerous, with some participants no longer engaging in these activities, thereby missing out on the various opportunities for health and wellbeing that could be obtained through leisured walking.

This chapter has extended understandings of walking as a leisured practice for older people who are ageing in their neighbourhoods and shown how it can contribute to ageing well in place for older people with different walking abilities. The extent of walking that people carried out did not necessarily correspond to the value it held amongst participants. Several individuals commented on how they enjoyed walking but had to complete shorter distances, as this was more attainable for them. Exploring the *meaning* associated with walking (Lager et al., 2021), can reveal valuable insights into the motivations behind why some people walk more than others and strive to continue doing so even when it becomes more difficult. When thinking about walking as a leisure-based activity, it is important to be aware of existing inequalities and resources that make it far easier and safer for some to walk than others. Furthermore, we should be cautious of promoting ageing well narratives that encourage older people to be active and healthier by walking more without considering the dynamic personal and environmental contexts which shape their ability to do so.

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