

# ROSEnet COST ACTION (CA 15122)

REDUCING OLD-AGE SOCIAL EXCLUSION:  
COLLABORATIONS IN RESEARCH & POLICY

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## Mapping the Relations Between Age, Space, and Exclusion

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*On behalf of the ROSEnet Community and Spatial Working Group*

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## 1. Introduction

“Community and space” is one of the five dimensions identified by the ROSEnet leaders as being part of a (missing) comprehensive understanding of old-age social exclusion. This is scientifically argued by a *scoping review* (Walsh, Scharf, and Keating, 2017) and politically driven by the search for innovative and international responses to a largely “relative” to context specificity of exclusion. Therefore, the strong European dimension of the network and of the WG<sup>1</sup> is a *potential* for exploring various meanings of old-age exclusion related to “community and space”.

This knowledge paper has four objectives: a) to start from the resources offered by the network, i.e. the *scoping review* by Kieran Walsh and colleagues (ibid.) by focusing on the European papers they isolated from literature; b) to discuss some of the limits of this exercise; c) to propose an alternative framework that might, as we argue, offer a broader and more detailed discussion of “what is at stake” in the relations of age, space and exclusion; and d) in a last section, to illustrate some development of this frame. We conclude by exploring potential avenues to link this perspective with the other areas of old-age exclusion to meet the aim of ROSEnet. That is, to tackle social exclusion amongst older people by helping to address the underdevelopment of existing knowledge, providing support for synthesis of knowledge across the disciplines and across the policy-research axis, resulting in development of new conceptual frameworks.

## 2. What we know about “community/spatial” exclusion: a selection of European papers in Walsh et al. (2016)<sup>2</sup>

Before focusing specifically on the European papers from the “neighbourhood / community” section of Walsh et al. (2017), it is useful to summarise and comment some of the findings

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the WG come from 19 countries; members from the network come from 34 countries. A first “STSM” funded by the network, at the origin of this KP, was officially aimed at exploring the *potential* understanding of “community” in Central-European countries.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Walsh, K., Scharf, T., Keating, N. (2016). Old-Age Exclusion Domains: Summary Extraction of a Scoping Review of the International Literature (2013-2015). *Irish Center for Social Gerontology*, On-Line Resources, National University of Ireland Galway. DOI : <http://www.icsg.ie/http%3A//www.icsg.ie/publications/onlineresources>.

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arising from the initial scoping review. First, regarding the few papers (8) that present a general framework of old-age exclusion, it appears a lack of conceptualization. Interestingly, only the francophone inspired source (Guberman, and Lavoie, 2004) refers to “territorial” exclusion, a broader term than “neighbourhood” and “community”. Nevertheless, the paper presents a general working definition of old-age social exclusion:

*“Social exclusion of older persons is a complex process that involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services as people age, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people across the varied and multiple domains of society. It affects both the quality of life of older individuals and the equity and cohesion of an ageing society as a whole.”*

*(As adapted from Levitas et al. (2007) in Walsh et al., 2017, p. 83)*

Second, when they focus on the “neighbourhood and community”, Walsh et al. observe that this domain offers the greatest number of papers to be incorporated into the review; however, after excluding “*context-oriented* texts, which consider domain topics together with multiple other factors, but do not feature extensive interpretation of domain-specific exclusionary relationships” (Walsh et al., 2016, p. 88), the “neighbourhood and community” domain comes in the last position (fifth out of five). Third, out of the 116 selected source documents for the “neighbourhood and community” area, diminished by 61 *context-oriented* publications, “The remaining 55 documents addressed: social and relational aspects of place (n = 23); services, amenities and built environment (n = 22); place socioeconomic aspects (n = 14); socio-political structures (n = 8); place-based policy (n = 5); and crime (n = 2)” (Walsh et al., 2016, p. 88).

If we now focus on the 36 documents which only concern Europe (including those with a comparative perspective within or beyond Europe), we observe a strong UK dominance. This is, in turn, influenced by the early work in critical gerontology concerning the experience of places for older people in socially deprived urban areas (Scharf, Phillipson, Smith, and Kingston, 2002).

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### 3. What we don't know about "community/spatial" exclusion from the *scoping review*

While the *scoping review* draws on a careful and scientifically robust methodology and offers valuable insights into the domain of "spatial and community", at least four questions remain unresolved in the review.

First, if the selection only of "English-language texts" is acknowledged as a limitation of the scoping review (Walsh et al., 2016), the authors do not sufficiently reflect on the potential consequences that arise from this: one example may concern the use of "community" as a universal or undiscussed notion, another one the reference to "neighbourhood" (which disappears in ROSEnet) which has been critically discussed as a practical illustration of UK public policy attempts to create cohesive communities: "In this respect, neighbourhood is seen as the most effective area in which to re-engage individuals and reforge links between people to generate a sense of belonging and identity" (Evans, 2009, p. 13). We pose the question of whether it is universally accepted that "neighbourhood" is the central locus of action for public policies in all parts of Europe. While "neighbourhood" level may be a useful research tool to grasp the experience of place without limiting this to the home-place experience, the "reinforcement" of "sense of belonging and identity" might not easily be translated into a public policy.

Second, by explicitly focusing on "gerontological literature", the *scoping review* fails to take account of broader perspectives offered by concepts drawn from other cognate disciplines<sup>3</sup>. In so doing, it confirms the need to explore broader "regions of knowledge", "stepping outside of the gerontological field" and discovering beyond the UK, US and Canada other localizations of knowledge production (Loffeier, Majerus, and Moulaert, 2017). For example, the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) may not only be used as a general justification to support the "right to the city" of older people (Buffel, Phillipson, and Scharf, 2012). It also introduced the understanding of the production of space early on in his theory of urban development, from which further fundamental urban research work has benefited. In his urban theory, Lefebvre (1991) states that place is a product of the dynamic between everyday practices and perceptions of people (spatial practice), cognitive concepts or theories of space

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<sup>3</sup> Even if not absent from the literature explored, like the "environmental press" by Lawton from human geography.

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(representations of space) and the spatial imaginary (spaces of representation). We suggest that such insights would assist in offering a more complex understanding of the experiences of everyday life of place (spatial practice) in relation to public policies (influenced by representations of space): it might also be a source of imagination new solutions for answering the challenges of social exclusion and place (spaces of representation).

Third, besides a fine-tuning description of areas explored by various authors in the domain of “neighbourhood and community”, the scoping review fails to define central terms like “community” or “spatial”. According to Walsh et al. (2017), we can expand the “relative” aspect of social exclusion to those of “community” and “spatial”. However, it might be fruitful not to define such notions from a meta theory or based on a positivistic perspective. Nevertheless, we suggest that some cornerstone about definition of such terms might be helpful when working on a common objective from diverse disciplines and diverse countries and cultures within Europe. For example, we might agree with Evans that most theories of community focus to varying degrees on three key elements: place attachment, shared interest and a sense of identity (Evans, 2009, p. 18): for example we might consider how older people adapt to the changes of a place regarding their longstanding experience of place, but also based on shared interest in living there (being recognized by their neighbours) that would create a shared identity of the place (the village, the neighbourhood, etc.).

Fourth, the centrality of “agency”, implied in the working definition adopted by Walsh and colleagues (2017) and presented above, remains underdeveloped in relation to the “neighbourhood and community” dimension of exclusion. On the contrary, and with reference to Lefebvre (1991) and Evans (2009) who also argue in that direction, an essential element of the “layered environment” (Peace, Kellaher, and Holland, 2005) is to include the subjective dimension of space. This is essential to understand how the “solidarity and significance” relation at the core of defining community (Clark, 1973) encompass emotions, values, and such, as an important part of their definition or articulation. Taking the subjective dimension into account should also prevent us from assuming any “automatic” or “causal” relation between the various perceptions of space. To avoid a “container” vision of place (or community) as “physical environmental” (natural or social), a “probabilistic” vision of space (Remy, 2015) is preferable: space (or community) *can* influence the life of an individual, and space *could* be only one element of social exclusion.

Assuming a “probabilistic” approach to the relation between space and ageing, we might consider social exclusion to be a potential, but not obvious, consequence. To organize a

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“probabilistic” approach, we propose an alternative framework that should be able to grasp the main questions that would organize the relations between age, space, and exclusion. This approach takes into account the knowledge account generated by the *scoping review* (Walsh et al. 2017), but proposes not merely a descriptive definition of the thematic association with “neighbourhood and community”, but an epistemological tool to open broader avenues that might be used more widely by researchers from across Europe, and within the varied, but clearly assumed, tools of diverse disciplines of knowledge.

#### **4. An alternative framework: the ASE triangle**

The Ageing, Space, and Exclusion (ASE) triangle is a proposition to grasp most of the concerns<sup>4</sup> about the relations between these three notions, presented as constructive “contradictory terms” or as a variety of levels to take into account. Furthermore, as it should not be considered as a “fixed box” or a “ticking box” but more as an open access toolbox, it could be useful to different scientific disciplines and for policy making purposes. The selection of these elements is a product of fruitful discussions within the community and spatial working group of ROSEnet, and should be discussed collectively.

**Definitions of space.** We can, at least, assume a common definition of “space” (from a physical or a social perspective), “place” (conceived as space + meaning of space), “community” (an enduring notion that never seems to disappear in spite of its longstanding critics: Clark, 1973; Stacey, 1969) and also clarify why “neighbourhood” sometime appears as an equivalent for “community” (Evans, 2009). While it might have divergence in the dimensions of such definition, for example a psychological perspective of community giving more importance to the subjective everyday practices and perception of people, i.e. the spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991), can define environment as *private* and *personal* (beyond a *public* aspect) (Peace et al., 2005, p. 9).

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<sup>4</sup> The exercise goes beyond a literature review as it is conceived as a “vehicle” to travel through the knowledge, theoretical background and empirical data of the WG members. It should also be considered as a source for connection with other WGs of the network and, in a broader sense, to the general production of knowledge of the ASE relation. In so doing, we are conscious that we do not treat all dimensions of this triangle. For example, the “materiality” of space or of community could be discussed with reference to virtuality (internet community) and flexibility of work and place (Sennett, 1999) but also with reference to time acceleration (Rosa, 2010).

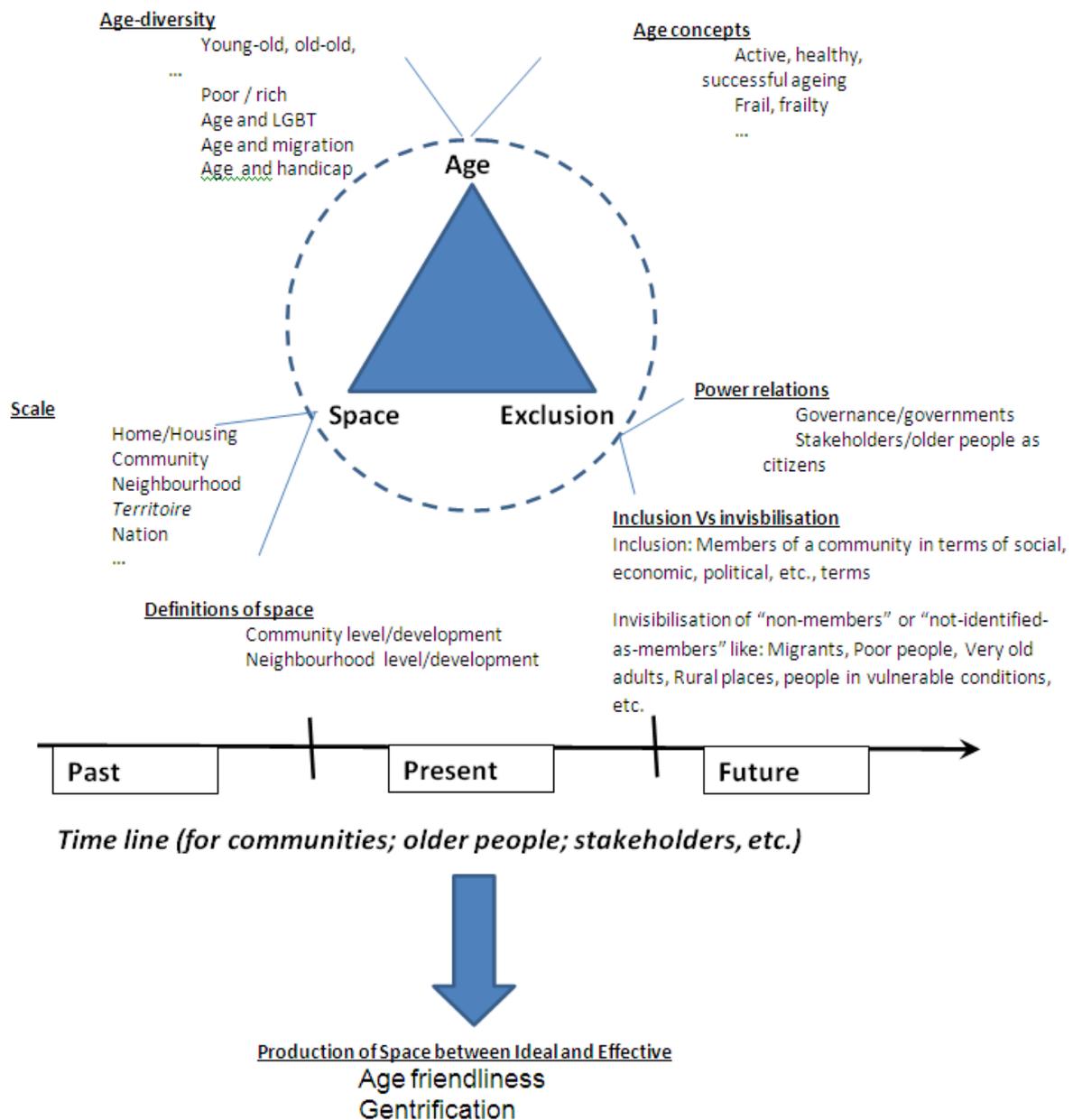


Figure 1: The ASE Triangle, or the Landscape of contradictions about ageing and community (Based on an original idea of Matthias Drilling)

Here, the sources inspiring definitions should be identified as their understanding might not seem as universal as it might sometimes be assumed in gerontological literature framed within an Anglo-Saxon context (Loffeier et al., 2017), as it can be illustrated through “critical gerontology” (Moulaert, 2012), a field of knowledge that is, by and large, ignored in some socio-cultural regions of the world, as the francophone one might illustrate. For example, when referring to “community”, how close or far are we from the German-based discussion of *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft* of Ferdinand Tönnies (Tönnies, 1887).

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Power relations refer to the structural and political dimension of space. Since the Marxist perspective of Lefebvre through his three levels of production of space (Lefebvre, 1991), definitions of “space” should focus attention on power circulation. In critical urban research, urban development is understood as being the result of actions and decisions made by different powerful stakeholders. Social, economic, physical as well as spatial structures of neighbourhoods and cities are understood as being in constant change and producing relational spatial structures, which in theories of urban development are often referred to as “social space”, “practice of everyday life” or “lifeworld” (de Certeau 1984, Sennett 1994).

Such spaces are understood not only as being the result of human actions, but also as mirroring social relations and being influenced by the wide scope of human action.

While such an interpretation can be revisited through “gentrification” or the influence of globalization on local areas (Phillipson, 2004), it could inform us about the new dynamics of “community governance” (Sullivan 2002); it is also a driver to understand the call to regard older people as citizens, as explored in some local experiences of “age-friendly cities and communities” (Buffel, 2015) and in the general attention paid to older people as co-producers of space or “*territoires*”.

**Scale** refers to the variety of levels where the discussion is located. While (Anglo-Saxon) literature has originally (Townsend, 1962) focused on “age-segregated” housing (Peace et al., 2005), recently the turn to “ageing in place” gives greater attention to the variety of housing options available in later life, from “age segregated” housing to “ordinary” or “age integrated” housing. Propositions arising from a psychological perspective in gerontology offer a general research agenda in this area (Iwarsson et al., 2007; Wahl, Iwarsson, and Oswald, 2012).

However, “home” or “housing” needs to be considered in relation to other scales like neighbourhood, community, and larger forms of (socio-political or cultural) space like region or nation. In a context of globalization (Phillipson, 2004) definitions might cover common trends but also specificities.

**Ideal vs Effective** contradiction refers to the *praxis* of ageing knowledge. While a normative dimension of “ageing well” or “active/healthy ageing” is assumed in some areas of critical gerontology, and has fuelled the “age-friendly cities and communities” (AFCC) approach of the World Health Organization (WHO), a “stepping out” positioning from “ageing studies” or gerontology (Loffeier et al., 2017) suggests the need to observe “effective” practices that reach beyond “ideal” discourses. Adopted to study the AFCC method, this perspective has

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offered a material shift (Buffel et al., 2012) and is reflected in the internationally diverse reception and/or production of AFCC (Moulaert, and Garon, 2016) and the central question of age-friendliness (Scharlach, and Lehning, 2013). Another application to this contradiction would concern the effects on gentrification through an ageing lens.

**Inclusion vs Invisibilisation** contradiction is linked to the notion of “community”. In “community” perspective, place is experienced by members and non-members. As a consequence, and even if “power relations” might encourage the “diversity of ageing” to be taken into account, a series of complementary characterizations of the older population (not as an “intrinsic” dimension of “old age” but as a process evolving across the life course) might produce invisibilisation. However, if we adopt an *agency perspective* for the working definition of social exclusion adopted in ROSEnet (previously cited), a complex question has to be considered: even if access is offered to a visibilisation of older people’s voice<sup>5</sup>, what is the meaning of “staying at home” or in the “private” space (Clément, Montovani, and Membrado, 1996; Smith, 2009)?

Finally, the proposition of a **time line** refers to a missing element in the *scoping review* (Walsh et al., 2017) and arising in different dimensions of the relations between “age, space and exclusion”. For example, “ageing in place” might refer to a different perception of time for longstanding inhabitants of a place (Buffel, 2012), than from a policy maker wishing to promote gentrification in a particular location.

## 5. From theory to empirical studies

ROSEnet domain “Community and space“ started to debate how the proposed conceptual thoughts could be (at least partially) applied to actual framings of ageing and place. By using the urban vision of “age-appropriateness” or “age-friendliness” we can identify images/representations of age and place as well as stereotypes about the urban life of elderly people. A last section suggests to think about the new research questions that could emerge from a variety of terms used to understand exclusion.

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<sup>5</sup> This discussion might be a connection with the “civic exclusion” WG of ROSEnet.

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### 5.1 “Age-appropriateness” as an example of a strategy against age-space-exclusion

Age-appropriate (neighbourhood) planning should enable a self-determined and independent life in old age through the design of the built environment (Kreuzer, and Scholz 2008, p. 83). However, the guiding principle of “age-appropriateness” should not be exclusionary. Rather, it should be neutral in terms of utilisation. But due to a lack of scientific debate about what is age-appropriate and what excludes older people from space, urban developers often narrow the concept of neutrality and refer to an understanding of “barrier-free building” as the starting point for developing guiding principles for age-appropriate neighbourhoods.

On the one hand, researchers are only just beginning to explore how and to what extent the individual needs of today’s and tomorrow’s older people are taken into consideration at different scales, such as at the local or regional level, how the differentiation of lifestyles is included or excluded, and how particular neighbourhood settings affect ageing adults’ everyday life, Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005), for instance, raise the question as to whether the segregation of age groups (old people and young people) facilitates negative stereotypes on ageing and thereby indirectly promote exclusion processes.

On the other hand, critics claim that the state of knowledge indicates that the planning and policy area for an age-sensitive neighbourhood development encounters persisting concepts about older people, and ignorance as well as visible and invisible age discrimination. In cases that older people themselves start to attribute themselves as ‘old’ or such, processes of self-segregation exist and end up in strong situations of exclusion (Vitman, Lecovich, and Alfas 2014).

### 5.2 Examples from praxis: “Aging in place” and “age-friendliness”

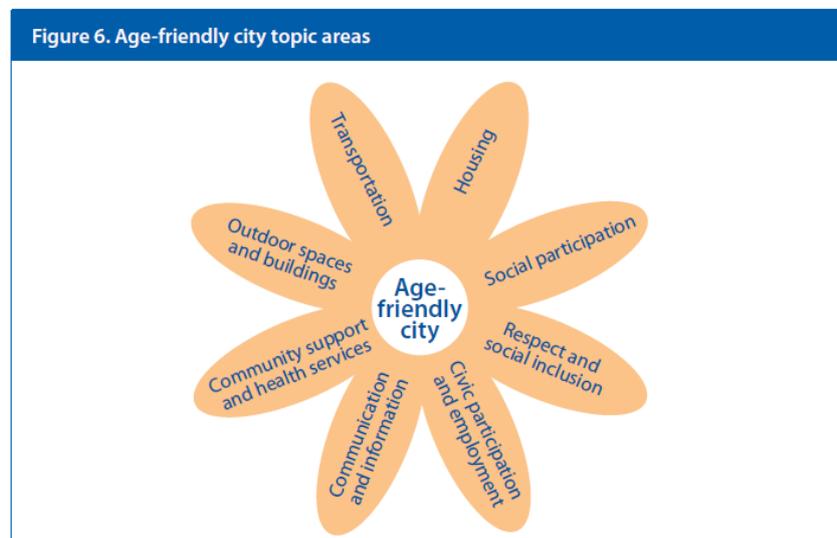
‘Ageing in place’ has been an influential notion in ageing policy since the 1990s. Ageing in place means that ageing happens in a certain spatial environment, and this environment is meant to be the familiar environment of the own home, the community, and the neighbourhood, instead of an unfamiliar, institutional environment (→*scale / definition*).

To enable ageing in place, those places have to be (made) age-friendly (→*ideal*). With the increasing political – and societal – desire that older people should maintain independence as long as possible came the realisation that such independence relies on certain living conditions – one of them being the residential area. Politically, this seems to be particularly

pressing in urban areas for two reasons: First, the share and the number of older persons in cities are increasing. By 2030, two-thirds of the world’s population will be living in cities and at least a quarter of them will be aged 60 and over (Handler, 2014). Second, urban / rural variations in the form of care-giving persist and that older adults in rural environments are still more likely to be taken care of by their social networks and less likely to be admitted to an institutional setting (McCann et al., 2014). Thus, urban areas seem to pose a particular risk factor to ageing in place (and thus saving costs). In 2006, the WHO launched the ‘Global Age-friendly Cities’ project in 33 cities, resulting in a “Global Age-friendly Cities Guide” (WHO, 2007), an influential checklist for policy-makers. In this, they present the concept of active ageing as a model to guide the development of age-friendly cities, with the physical environment constituting one determinant of active ageing.

### 5.3 Images and symbols of urbanity and age

When we talk about age-friendly cities, we are dealing with images and symbols of both urbanity and age. The “comprehensive” definition of active ageing by WHO in AFCC has been summarized through an eight-petalled flower (figure 2).



**Figure 2: Age-friendly city topic areas, WHO 2007: 9**

The centre of public life, as it was shaped in the 18th century, was the metropolis, the capital, the city (Sennett, 2008). The cosmopolitan city is, in its imaginary, a space blind to race, class and gender – it is in fact defined by its diversity (→ *inclusion*). Sennett, for example, perceives the focus of urban life on society instead of community as thoroughly positive. As

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the term '*res publica*' comprises the whole network of relations and obligation between people that are not part of one family or community, but one society, the interest of the city is thus more orientated towards preserving the common good instead of serving particular interests. One of the main characteristics of public space, as equalled with urban space, is thus also that it is accessible to all.

Beyond the very essential imagination of the city as urban anonymous space versus the village or neighbourhood as community space, symbolic power plays a role in urban and neighbourhood developments like → *gentrification*. Gentrification describes the "the process by which higher income households displace lower income residents of a neighbourhood, changing the essential character and flavour of that neighbourhood" (Kennedy, and Leonard, 2001) that is gentrification describes the process in which economically poor, but culturally 'rich' population groups (artists, intellectuals, students or the 'creative class' in general) move to cheap neighbourhoods, valorising them with their cultural capital and eventually letting rental prices rise. Loew et al. (2007) describes the re-shaping of a neighbourhood's image that is a core part of gentrification as staging of territorial borders to draw clear demarcation lines on an aesthetic level. The symbols that are being used to evoke identification or alienation help to in- and exclude groups on a subtler level, but nevertheless producing and reproducing inequalities (→ *inclusion*). Such staging processes can also facilitate place identity and place attachment among those that are included; however, they evoke feelings like alienation among those excluded.

It is not always gentrification that causes place detachment though. In their well-known 'broken windows' theory of urban decline, Kelling and Wilson (1982) argue that even minor incivilities that are publicly visible (e.g. graffiti) can attract predatory crime. The underlying causal model is that such traces of disorder send out a certain signal to potential criminals – namely that this is a disintegrated neighbourhood with no social cohesion or support and that the inhabitants will not intervene in case of a criminal act (Skogan, 1992). Sampson (2009) adds that visible disorder does not necessarily lead to increasing crime rates, but much rather perceived insecurity than actual threat because inhabitants feel just as well like they would not receive help in such environments. In older adults, this fear of crime/feelings of unsafety in their neighbourhood is associated with less mobility outside their home and less social participation (Lloyd-Sherlock, Agrowal, and Minicuci, 2016).

#### 5.4. Spatial exclusion – a matter of terms

The social sciences know many terms for describing unequal life chances: segregation, disintegration, inequality, deprivation, replacement, exclusion, expulsion, marginality – to mention but a few. There was a time when cities were perceived as ‘integration machines’ – for example by the famous Chicago School – it is today mainly said to have lost this function (Geiling, 2003). The ‘spatialisation’ of social inequalities points to the phenomenon that disadvantaged populations tend to live in disadvantaged areas, and vice versa, which can then be called residential segregation (Savage et al., 2003). Residential segregation defines all those processes that eventually lead to internally homogenous spaces that can be based on different social criteria like socio-economic status or ethnicity (Loew et al., 2007). This spatialisation, in turn, affects the life chances of those populations, reproducing social inequalities (Häußermann, and Siebel, 2000).

| Term           | Definition   | Research questions  |
|----------------|--|---|
| Segregation    | all processes that lead to internally homogenous spaces that can be based on different social criteria like socio-economic status or ethnicity | How diverse is a residential environment? Who lives there and who doesn't? Why? |
| Disintegration | ...  |   |
| Inequality     |  |   |
| Deprivation    |  |   |
| Replacement    |  |   |
| Exclusion      |  |   |
| Expulsion      |  |   |
| Marginality    |  |   |
| ...            |  |   |

**Table 1: Central terms of ROSEnet domain “community and space” as challenges of a cross cultural and transdisciplinary understanding**

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Summarizing the accounts above, spatial exclusion in older age can take different forms: First, older adults who do not live in age-friendly environments are more likely to encounter barriers to go out and appropriate their neighbourhoods, like physical barriers or higher crime rates. Second, such environments tend to offer fewer opportunities or infrastructure for different practices, like greenspaces, learning centres or sports courts. Third, older adults living in deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to be socially disadvantaged themselves and thus restricted in their life-chances in other domains. Those inhabitants are, fourth, more likely to have ‘spoiled identities’ (Wacquant, Slater and Peirera, 2014, citing Goffman) and thus might be less likely to identify with their living environment. They might even, as Wacquant describes in his concept of territorial stigma, rebel against it.

## **6. Conclusion and starting point: ASE triangle as a “vehicle” towards other WG**

ASE is a tool to structure a comprehensive vision of ageing and exclusion with a community/place focus. However, it should not forget other dimensions of exclusion. Because of longer life expectancy, differentiated lifestyles (including living alone), the number of older adults living with various social ties and, therefore, potentially without strong social support, may increase. In this regard, social services (service WG) and other peer groups (social relation WG) will be of particular importance, next to the neighbourhood as a reference framework and as a place of everyday life. Neighbourhood needs to be understood as a spatial-physical living environment and also as a social setting for participation and support networks and, as such, as fundamental for successfully dealing with everyday life (Drilling, and Schnur, 2017). One under-discussed and explored dimension of this paper is, back the centrality of *agency* in the original definitions, the role that old people themselves can play in shaping place and community through their everyday practice (civic exclusion WG); indeed, older people are not obviously “victims” of processes (segregation), but they can also behave like (and be considered as) actors (civil right fighting, engaging in the maintenance of their remoted communities, all strategies to avoid spatial exclusion in old age.

The openness of the ASE triangle has the potential to connect debates about age, space and exclusion from different disciplines and professions and identify most relevant issues for political action.

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## ROSEnet CA15122 COST ACTION

*ROSEnet aims to overcome fragmentation and critical gaps in conceptual innovation on old-age exclusion across the life course, in order to address the research-policy disconnect and tackle social exclusion amongst older people in Europe.*

### **Research Objectives**

- Synthesise existing knowledge from regional, disciplinary and sectorally disparate dialogues, forming a coherent scientific discourse on old-age exclusion;
- Critically investigate the construction of life-course old-age exclusion across economic, social, service, civic rights, and community/spatial domains;
- Assess the implications of old-age exclusion across the life course within economic, social, service, civic rights, and community/spatial domains;
- Develop new conceptual and theoretical frameworks that can be practically applied in understanding and combating the exclusion of older people in European societies;
- Identify innovative, and implementable, policy and practice for reducing old-age exclusion amongst different groups of older people and in different jurisdictional and regional contexts.

For further information please visit: [www.rosenetcost.com](http://www.rosenetcost.com)