International Journal of Ageing and Later Life, *Advance access*, 2026 © The Authors
doi: 10.3384/ijal.1652-8670.6216

Ageing in a stigmatised neighbourhood: an intersectional approach to place attachment

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Abstract

This paper explores the social experiences of ageing in a stigmatised neighbourhood, using the "quartier prioritaire" Hautepierre in Strasbourg (France) as a case study. Through an intersectional lens focusing on place attachment, the study reveals how factors such as social networks and architectural barriers influence older adults' emotional connections to their neighbourhood. Based on nine qualitative interviews and participant observation, the research highlights diverse ageing-in-place experiences shaped by gender, socioeconomic status and migration background – experiences emerging within the dialectic of internal solidarity and external stigmatisation. The findings demonstrate that while some residents maintain strong emotional bonds with their neighbourhood, others face challenges exacerbating feelings of isolation. This study contributes to theoretical debates on ageing in urban contexts, emphasising the transferability of its insights to other stigmatised neighbourhoods. By advocating for intersectional

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urban planning, the paper underscores the need for context-sensitive approaches addressing the complex interplay of individual and structural factors in urban settings.

Keywords: ageing, intersectionality, neighbourhood, place attachment, qualitative research

Introduction

As people age, the immediate neighbourhood often becomes increasingly important in everyday life. This growing relevance is not only related to a reduced mobility radius in later life but also to other factors such as retirement, increased time spent in the residential environment, the importance of nearby services and the role of local social networks in supporting daily life (e.g. Chan et al. 2023; Cloutier-Fisher & Harvey 2009; Yarker et al. 2024; Yazdanpanahi & Woolrych 2023). The neighbourhood becomes a critical site where a substantial amount of time is spent, facilitating social interactions with neighbours, essential activities such as trips to the supermarket and leisure practices. The neighbourhood can serve as an important identifier for its residents, particularly for those who have lived there for an extended period. However, previous uses of the neighbourhood may become challenging due to health limitations, for example, when staircases present barriers (Douma et al. 2021; Huguenin-Richard & Cloutier 2021). Furthermore, long-term residence in the neighbourhood does not necessarily result in a strong place attachment. For instance, changes in the socio-cultural composition of the residential building or urban renewal can lead to feelings of alienation (Buffel et al. 2014; Shamur 2023). Emotional attachment to one's neighbourhood is dynamic and continuously shaped through reciprocal interactions.

This study examines place attachment among older residents in Hautepierre, a designated "Quartier Prioritaire de la Ville" (QPV) in Strasbourg. Since the 1980s, France's "Politique de la Ville" has aimed to reintegrate disadvantaged neighbourhoods through architectural and social measures. Situated at the intersection of human geography and social gerontology, our study examines the often-overlooked perspectives of older residents (aged 60+) in Hautepierre. As Finlay and Finn (2021) observe, the older population shapes cities and urbanisation processes

but is frequently overlooked in spatial research. In light of demographic changes, their perspectives are becoming increasingly important: a growing number of older adults will live in cities and significantly influence urban spaces (Skinner et al. 2018). Older adults have specific needs in urban environments, and the space itself, in its physical, social and discursive dimensions, influences the ageing process. Consequently, "ageing" and "place" exist in a dynamic and co-constitutive relationship. Furthermore, individuals relate to "their" neighbourhood in diverse ways, depending on factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status or physical condition.

Taking the relational aspect of ageing and place as our starting point, we address a dual research gap: firstly, we focus on a neighbourhood considered stigmatised to explore forms of place attachment between individuals and the environment. Secondly, we explicitly consider the perspective of older adults, which receives little attention in both academic discourse and urban policy. Our research questions are as follows: How do older residents of Hautepierre experience "their" neighbourhood? How does place attachment form, considering functional, social and emotional aspects? To what extent does an intersectional approach provide a nuanced understanding of the place attachment processes of older adults?

Literature Review

In this section, we elucidate the concepts of "Ageing in Place" (AIP) and the "Age-friendly City" (AFC), both of which are widely employed in the fields of geography and gerontology. As a policy strategy, AIP aims to enable older adults to remain in their own homes and familiar neighbourhoods for as long as possible (Clark et al. 2024). The research literature discusses various advantages of AIP. These include enhanced quality of life, a sense of belonging and social connectedness associated with staying in one's familiar environment (Lebrusán & Gómez 2022; Lewis & Buffel 2020; Milligan 2015). In particular, the home is considered a crucial place that provides security, fosters identity and facilitates self-determination (Gómez & Lebrusán 2022). In this context, the home is distinguished from a nursing home, "emphasizing the importance of maintaining a degree of independence" (Yarker et al. 2024: 1).

Creating a living environment that enables older adults to live independently for as long as possible aligns with the agenda of AFCs. The concept, defined by the World Health Organization (2023), aims to design cities and communities to meet the needs of older people. This encompasses both physical and social aspects of the environment, such as barrier-free public spaces, housing, social participation and health services (Buffel et al. 2014). AFCs facilitate an active ageing process: "Active aging refers to the process of optimizing opportunities for participation, better health and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age" (Yung et al. 2016: 115). Both AIP and AFC seek to improve the quality of life for older adults by supporting their independence and social participation in urban spaces. While AIP focuses more on the individual home and immediate community (Gibson et al. 2024; Webber et al. 2023), AFC considers the city or community as a whole and emphasises a more comprehensive adaptation of physical and social infrastructures (World Health Organization 2023).

Both approaches face similar criticisms. AIP and AFC primarily address physical infrastructures, such as barrier-free buildings and the age-inclusive design of public spaces (Ågotnes et al. 2022). The significance of social and emotional aspects, such as social bonds and the sense of belonging, often plays a subordinate role. Moreover, social networks are often viewed as static, without considering their changeability (Ottoni et al. 2016; Vos et al. 2020; Yung et al. 2016). Furthermore, both concepts are criticised for contributing to a reduction in state responsibility and public expenditure. They are seen to promote the shifting of care responsibilities onto individuals and families, thereby exacerbating social inequalities (Finlay & Finn 2021; Milligan 2015). When care tasks are taken on within the home and by family members or friends, the state retreats from its responsibility to provide health care and social infrastructure. Such neoliberal developments support an "informalisation and privatisation" of care (Milligan 2015: 8). Furthermore, both concepts are grounded in a normative and homogeneous understanding of "older people." Individual aspects such as gender, race, class and age are often overlooked in favour of a homogenising perspective (Ågotnes et al. 2022). AIP and AFC are oriented towards promoting the independence of healthy older adults and offer less support for those living with extreme frailty or

disabilities (Finlay & Finn 2021). Very old age, physical and psychological impairments and the associated dependence on external support are not adequately considered. It is precisely at this point that the need for an intersectional perspective becomes apparent.

Theoretical Framework

This section conceptualises place, place attachment and intersectionality step-by-step and connects them to each other. Through our theoretical framework, we are able to understand place as both relational and territorial (Andrews et al. 2017; Yarker et al. 2024) to grasp the social and emotional bonds between individuals and their environment (Finlay et al. 2020; Wiles 2005; Ziegler 2012), and to incorporate intersectional approaches that account for the lived realities of Hautepierre's residents (Finlay et al. 2020; Ziegler 2012).

Place

Ageing and place exist in a mutually constitutive relationship. Older adults act in ways that shape place, meaning they influence and construct them through their actions. Conversely, specific contexts and spatialities impact the ageing process and the lives of older adults. "People have different access to and experiences of places on the grounds of their age, and spaces associated with certain age groups influence who uses them and how" (Hopkins & Pain 2007: 288). In particular localities such as in neighbourhoods, the lack of age-friendly facilities (e.g. benches, barrier-free entrances, ramps, pedestrian lights with extended crossing times and audio signals) can create significant physical barriers for older adults (Ottoni et al. 2016; Rowles 1983). These obstacles at the neighbourhood level are closely linked to wider structural processes, including urban development strategies as well as broader political-economic dynamics such as austerity and privatisation (Yarker et al. 2024). In this sense, we do not conceptualise place as static and bounded, but rather as dynamic and constantly changing (Finlay & Finn 2021; Wiles 2005; Yarker et al. 2024). Moreover, we emphasise that older adults are not confined to a single location (home), but can have relationships with multiple places.

Furthermore, places are constituted through social relations and practices associated with the maintenance, negotiation or contestation of identities and power dynamics. This means that places can both create a sense of belonging and identity and be alienating and socially exclusionary (Lewis & Buffel 2020; Ziegler 2012). Consequently, we employ a complex understanding of place that addresses the physical, social and emotional dimensions of spaces. The lived and experienced neighbourhood is a socially constructed and emotionally charged everyday place that is constructed by its residents (Drilling & Schnur 2019).

Place Attachment

The concept of "Place Attachment" (PA) is applied across various disciplines, including psychology, geography, environmental gerontology and sociology (Clark et al. 2024). Researchers portray PA as a multifaceted concept that characterises the bonding of people to places (Buffel et al. 2014; Kamani Fard & Paydar 2024). In addition to this individual connection to a place, the concept also describes the ability to shape this place, referred to as the "ability to make place" (Wanka et al. 2019: 2139). As a theoretical lens, PA helps to understand how people perceive, experience and identify with their environments (Courbebaisse 2023; Lewis & Buffel 2020; Scannell & Gifford 2010). In the literature, both the individual's own home and the neighbourhood are considered places to which attachment exists (Shenk et al. 2004; Yazdanpanahi & Woolrych 2023). The concept is particularly relevant in the context of older adults and long-term residents: older people often spend a long period in the same environment, leading to an accumulation of memories (Phillipson 2007).

Within the research literature, various dimensions of PA are discussed, including social networks. Beyond familial bonds, neighbourhood networks, sociocultural centres and everyday encounters play an important role (Courbebaisse 2023; Yung et al. 2016). Social interactions, such as daily greetings, contribute to a sense of familiarity (Lebrusán & Gómez 2022). Additionally, physical and functional dimensions are relevant. Accessibility, mobility and centrality, including access to essential services, are discussed in this context (Ottoni et al. 2016; Schwanen & Páez 2010; Stjernborg et al. 2015). On an emotional level, memories and experiences associated with places play a significant role and can positively impact

PA (Annink & Van Hees 2023). Changes in the social and physical fabric (e.g. altered neighbourhood structures, urban planning measures) affect PA (Kamani Fard & Paydar 2024; Shamur 2023).

Place, as well as PA, are not static but change and mutually influence each other in their respective transformations. Consequently, the temporal dimension – inherent in the ageing process itself – is relevant for the continuous construction and negotiation of PA.

Intersectionality

This section seeks to integrate intersectional approaches with PA, thereby fostering a nuanced understanding of ageing in the neighbourhood that starts with individual experiences and connects them with structural power mechanisms. As an analytical lens, intersectionality serves to consider the structural disadvantage and marginalisation of persons. These approaches draw on the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and emphasise that categories such as age, gender, class and race cannot be viewed in isolation but intersect and shape the discrimination experiences of individuals (Holman & Walker 2021; Hopkins & Pain 2007). Intersectionality, therefore, refers to the intertwining of social categories that produce various inequalities and positions within society (Cho et al. 2013). "Careful intersectional examination (Crenshaw 1993) of race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, and other social categories that overlap with old age will expand understanding of diverse approaches to ageing 'in place'" (Finlay et al. 2020: 780–781). Older persons living in Hautepierre are not merely old but, for example, also female, migrant, and with limited financial resources. They experience specific forms of disadvantage. In addition to this individual perspective, the neighbourhood level is relevant to us – that is, the extent to which living in a criminalised neighbourhood plays a role. The criminalisation of the neighbourhood and the abstraction of its residents from the outside into a homogeneous group is a crucial observation for us.

Age as a social category has received relatively little attention in social science research on inequality compared to other categories (Enßle & Helbrecht 2018). This may be because ageing is a continuous process: "In contrast to other markers of difference (e.g. gender and race), chronological and socially constructed aspects of age are continuously changing

throughout an individual's life course, which necessitates an ongoing process of re-positioning of the self" (Ziegler 2012: 1299). Similar to age, place is also not static but changes continuously.

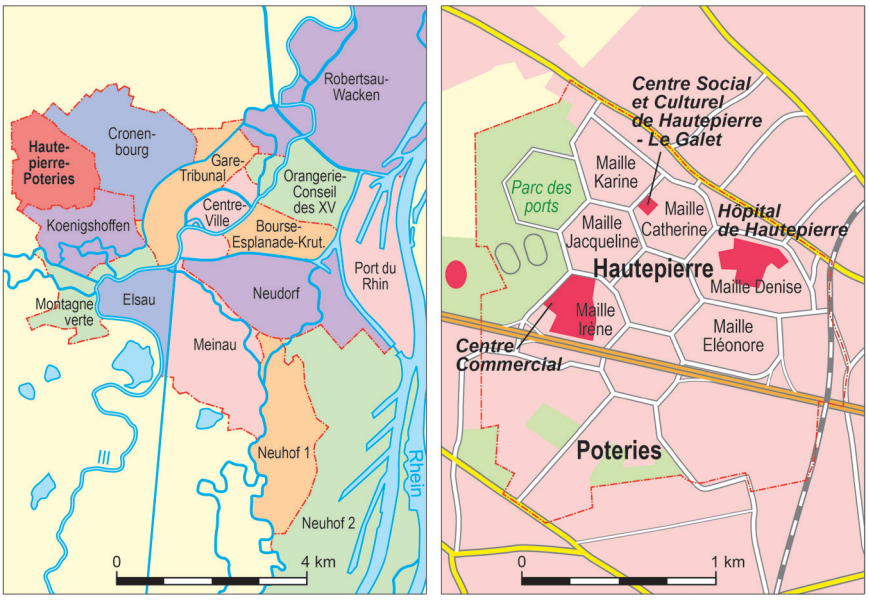
A central value of intersectional approaches lies in the rejection of homogeneous perspectives (Enßle & Helbrecht 2021; Stjernborg et al. 2015; Wanka et al. 2019). Accounting for this diversity, different uses, needs and perceptions can also be derived within the group of "older adults." For instance, it can be examined which resources older adults draw upon, which specific needs they have (e.g. community building, health services, places to linger) and which challenges or barriers they experience in relation to their age, physical limitations or financial resources. This offers valuable and multifaceted insights into the everyday lives of older adults, which might otherwise remain overlooked. It is important to focus on subgroups affected by inequalities but possibly not considered in general research or political decisions (Enßle & Helbrecht 2018).

Situating Hautepierre

Located in the northwest of Strasbourg, Hautepierre had a population of 13,137 residents in 2020 (INSEE 2024a). Of these residents, 12.6% are between 60 and 74 years old, and 3.7% are 75 years or older (INSEE 2024a). Notably, about 40% of Hautepierre's residents are "immigrés," not born in France but living there, regardless of citizenship (INSEE 2024a). Hautepierre is characterised by an above-average poverty rate of 47% (INSEE 2025). The poverty rate refers to the proportion of individuals or households earning less than 60% of the median income of the total population (INSEE 2024b). Hautepierre is designated as a "QPV". A neighbourhood is classified as a QPV when the average income of its residents falls below the national and urban levels. For QPVs, urban policies can implement measures to reduce social inequalities and economic disadvantages (Epstein 2024; Fulda et al. 2023).

Designed in the 1970s with a distinctive honeycomb structure (see Figure 1), Hautepierre consists of functional zones ("mailles") serving specific purposes: Irène (shopping centre), Denise (hospital), Catherine (residential and sociocultural centre Le Galet) and Parc des Sports (recreation), with other areas primarily providing social housing

Figure 1. Map of Strasbourg and Hautepierre (own map)



(Gérard 2018; Moreau & Hamoussa 2010). Currently undergoing urban renewal, Hautepierre faces both physical transformations and discursive challenges. Efforts to improve residents' quality of life include building insulation, tram line expansion, green space development and opening up the honeycomb structure (Michel 2023; Ville et Eurométropole de Strasbourg 2024). At the discursive level, the neighbourhood is labelled a "problem district." The image of Hautepierre is significantly affected by stigmatisation through media reporting. Accounts of criminal incidents, youth violence and unemployment contribute to the construction of Hautepierre as a "left-behind" (Aublanc 2024; Jeuffin 2021). This study seeks to move beyond such stereotypes by examining the lived experiences of older residents in Hautepierre – a quartier prioritaire whose dynamics reflect broader trends of discursive segregation in European societies. As such, it offers a critical lens to explore how ageing, place and inequality intersect in stigmatised urban spaces.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, we conducted nine qualitative, semi-structured interviews with older residents of Hautepierre, which form the core of our analysis. In addition, we spent one week in the neighbourhood observing everyday scenes and engaging in informal conversations with residents at the sociocultural centre *Le Galet* and beyond. Visiting the weekly local market, taking long walks through the honeycomb structures and attending the senior citizens' tea dance at *Le Galet* allowed us to engage intensively with everyday life in Hautepierre. This ethnographic approach should primarily be understood as preparatory work for the interviews rather than as a systematic investigation. Our aim was to gain insight into the neighbourhood and the daily lives of its residents.

Prior to our research stay, we had already established contact with the sociocultural centre *Le Galet*. Staff members assisted us in identifying potential interview partners and provided a space where the interviews could take place. Additional conversations were arranged through recommendations or by directly approaching people in public spaces. We required participants to be at least 60 years old and long-term residents.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Before the interviews, the informed consent form was discussed with participants, allowing sufficient time to explain the study procedures and to answer any questions before written consent was obtained. The semi-structured interviews began with biographical questions and then focused on how residents use and experience their neighbourhood. We asked participants how they move through the neighbourhood, what a typical day looks like, where and when social encounters take place and how the neighbourhood has changed over time. Further questions addressed places where residents feel comfortable or uncomfortable and the reasons for these perceptions, how Hautepierre compares to other neighbourhoods in Strasbourg and what wishes residents have for the future development of the neighbourhood. These questions allowed us to explore the neighbourhood from the perspective of the interview partners and to understand how they experience their everyday environments.

The interviews lasted approximately 40–80 minutes each. Seven interviews were conducted with women and two with men; the age range was 63–82 years. Beyond age and past and present housing situations in Hautepierre, we did not systematically collect additional personal data such as marital status, income, religion or migration background. Our aim was to create an open conversational atmosphere in which participants could share the aspects of their lives that they themselves considered important. At the same time, we sought to avoid collecting social categories such as race, class or dis/ability in an additive manner that might impose a sense of vulnerability on the interview partners. During the interviews, participants voluntarily shared information about their lives – for example, whether they lived in rental housing or owned their homes, or whether they belonged to a particular religious community. Such information is considered in the analysis through an intersectional lens, allowing us to reflect on participants' different social positions in the findings section.

The audio recordings were subsequently transcribed and analysed using the software MAXQDA. We conducted close readings of the interview transcripts (Greenham 2018; Hernstein Smith 2016; Ohrvik 2024). This method is used in cultural and social sciences for qualitative text analysis. It analyses expressions on both content and linguistic levels. Through repeated and detailed reading of the texts, narrative structures are systematically examined. In this way, implicit meanings, ambivalences and semantic coherences can be revealed. Unlike other evaluation methods, close reading does not primarily work with category formation but focuses on the text-immanent analysis of individual statements in their respective context (Hernstein Smith 2016; Ohrvik 2024). A reflexive approach to one's own methodology and a transparent handling of possible preconceptions are necessary. In this regard, continuous team discussions helped us to debate our own interpretations. The goal was to ensure the most multifaceted consideration of the interviews possible.

Despite attempts to diversify interview participants, we faced limitations. Language barriers and difficulty reaching homebound individuals resulted in some exclusions. Although we tried to engage with people who are often overlooked in urban planning, we are aware that there

are individuals who face even stronger discrimination and exclusion. Notably, our status as "outsiders" led some residents to engage with us only superficially. Through our association with *Le Galet*, we primarily conducted interviews with older residents who frequently visit the centre.

In the findings section, we present the perspectives of pseudonymous Colette, Marc and Solange in detail, using other interviews as supplementary background data. Focusing on these three lifeworlds for a particularly vivid and in-depth exploration of everyday experiences in the neighbourhood. Colette, Marc and Solange were selected because they occupy different social positions which, as the following findings illustrate, translate into distinct ways of using and experiencing Hautepierre. In relation to our research objective of describing Hautepierre from the perspective of its older residents, their narratives highlight how diverse life realities coexist within the same neighbourhood. Using the theoretical framework of PA and intersectionality, we present a nuanced picture of ageing in Hautepierre.

Findings

Colette: "[…] because I live in 'la zone'"

Colette is 80 years old and has lived in Hautepierre since July 1970. She first lived in a studio apartment, located where the hospital is today. In 1984, she moved into her apartment in the Jacqueline mesh, where she has always been alone, since she hasn't got married and had no children. She used to work as a civil servant in the public administration in Strasbourg. Now, she is retired and still lives alone in Hautepierre.

She feels lonely because her best friend let her down, her other friend moved out and her family members never visit her because they are afraid to come to Hautepierre or live too far away. To get around in the neighbourhood, Colette walks with a crutch or takes the streetcar. She suffers from arthritis and is severely physically limited, so she mostly stays at home and rarely leaves the neighbourhood.

Colette's interview statements clearly indicate that neither her home nor her immediate neighbourhood is designed in a way that allows her to navigate them without difficulties. She expresses frustration with the steps in the entrance area of her apartment building:

> And now I'll tell you why I don't have a walking frame. Because I can balance better without one. There are five steps to climb in the hallway. Last year, I missed one. And I fell. And then you have to fold up the walking frame and carry it. I have osteoporosis, so I can't do that. That's why I can't have a walking frame, and I'm thinking of leaving. The nurses come every day to wash my back because I can't wash it myself anymore. (C.)

In another statement, Colette highlights additional challenges she faces in her daily life:

> I'll be honest, I no longer feel comfortable anywhere because I don't go out anymore. I only go out to run errands or if I need to go to Aldi, but I only buy two or three items because I can't manage any more than that. And now, well, you may not be interested, but at the moment, in my building, and I've called about it, when you press 6 inside the lift, you have to press really hard to get it to start, and now you actually have to press with two fingers. I have arthritis, so I can't do it. So I have to select the 5th floor, get out on the 5th floor, and walk up by foot instead. (C.)

Colette's health has significantly declined in recent years, necessitating adaptations in her daily life. The house where she has lived for 40 years presents various physical and material barriers. Consequently, she rarely leaves her home. As Milligan (2015: 7) states: "The home can thus provide an important buttress to an older person's sense of security and identity, self and independence, particularly for those who may feel vulnerable outside the bounds of their own private spaces." This applies to Colette: "Because with the crutch, I don't feel safe. Plus, when it rains, it gets slippery." (C.) Additionally, she complains about benches without backrests. The newly installed benches located outside *Le Galet* and in the Parc des Sports actively exclude her from participating in public space (see Figure 2).

The lack of backrests on benches is an expression of exclusive urban planning and structural disadvantage. Colette experiences ableism and stigma directly through the built environment (see McKee et al. 2024). As Adorno et al. note, homebound older adults "perceive themselves as 'forgotten' and devalued; lacking economic viability in the city's

Figure 2. Mineral benches in Parc des Sports (own photo)

development" (2018: 13). Colette's frustration with the age-*un*friendly design of her neighbourhood is exemplified in her statement:

> I am disabled. Even you, there in front, well, not you, I mean the town hall, I think, or the local council, have you seen how beautiful it is, what they have done? They have only put in stone benches, stone blocks. […]. I can't sit there. I need a backrest. And they left some wooden benches, but there are no backrests there either. And the worst thing is, I could go there, but it's in direct sunlight. (C.)

Colette's limited mobility is further exacerbated by changes in the neighbourhood that make it harder for her to maintain her social network. Regarding her social integration, there is an ambivalence in her narratives: on the one hand, she expresses deep disappointment with her closest social circle. On the other hand, she strongly identifies with the neighbourhood and its residents. Her family does not visit her, which she attributes to living in "la zone":

> I'm telling you, no one ever comes to see me because I live in "la zone," as they call it. I'm the only one here. I have five brothers and one sister. And as they say, I live in "la zone." For them, Hautepierre is "la zone." They're afraid to leave their cars there because they see them getting burned. That means no one ever comes to my house. (C.)

The labelling of the neighbourhood as a problem area, where cars are set on fire, deters Colette's relatives from visiting her. Hautepierre, similar to other neighbourhoods like Neuhof in relation to the metropolis of Strasbourg, is "situated at the very bottom of the hierarchical system of places" (Wacquant 2008: 1). QVPs are often associated with crime and violence in media reports. These perceptions, reproduced here by Colette's family members, construct Hautepierre as a problem neighbourhood. "Stigmatization consists of two main components: a characteristic attributed to someone/something, and a negative connotation and treatment on the basis of this attribution" (Van De Wetering 2020: 305). Hautepierre's label as "dangerous" directly impacts residents' daily lives.

In contrast to the stigmatisation, Colette displays a strong identification with the neighbourhood and its residents. When asked if she identifies with the neighbourhood, she responds:

> Yes, absolutely, ever since 1970. And there are people who know me. They recognise me […]. And I feel completely integrated. I am 100 per cent a resident of Hautepierre. (C.)

Colette's insider perspective is strongly shaped by her positive relationship with her "French-Moroccan" neighbours, whom she has known since they were children and who view her as a grandmother figure. "And back when I was still able-bodied, I would take them for walks in Hautepierre, to the playground, everywhere and anywhere." (C.) Today, the neighbours help Colette by running small errands for her. Colette emphasises the cross-cultural togetherness, although her statements are not free from racist stereotypes. She highlights differences between the residents of Hautepierre (through the construction of ethnic differences) but also positively emphasises their solidarity.

Colette feels at home in Hautepierre. She has witnessed the neighbourhood's growth and has many positive memories from the past. Being known in the neighbourhood and receiving help with daily tasks support her bond with the community. However, it is evident that her health has significantly deteriorated in recent years. Her living environment

presents structural barriers that exacerbate her social isolation. Colette's experiences illustrate that immobile individuals are scarcely considered in urban planning, resulting in a mismatch between the built environment and personal needs. Consequently, her place attachment relies heavily on nostalgic moments. She is aware that moving to a care home will be her next step. With the impending move to a care home, our interpretation is that her emotional attachment to Hautepierre will persist, but more in the form of memories rather than physical engagement with the space. Viewing Colette and her expressions of PA through an intersectional lens reveals that actualising her attachment through practices is hindered by her physical limitations. Her physical impairments dominate her daily life, reducing her range of action and increasingly presenting the neighbourhood as a physical barrier.

Marc: "And the sea is over there […]"

Marc was born in the 1940s in a small town in Portugal and has lived in Hautepierre since 2002. He tries to visit Portugal regularly and keep in touch with his family roots. He has two children from his first marriage and lives today with his second wife in Hautepierre. After working in several companies, he and his wife are now living the calm life of a retiree. They both like to spend time at home and value their privacy, but try to have occasional contact with their neighbours.

Marc tries not to get involved in the neighbourhood life too much. He meets his daughters and some friends on a regular basis and visits the tea dances at *Le Galet* together with his wife, where he also meets his "friends from dance". Apart from that he does not frequent public spaces often. He is not specifically attached to Hautepierre as his neighbourhood, but is happy to have and provide a good home and have everything important nearby.

Marc began the interview with us as follows:

> My name is Marc […]. I am originally from Portugal, with dual French and Portuguese nationality. I am married to a French woman, the mother of my children, and remarried to another French woman, from Alsace, who has two children of her own. That's me in a nutshell. (M.)

These statements highlight two key aspects that shape the rest of the conversation and will be explored further in the following: 1. Marc strongly identifies with his Portuguese heritage. 2. His second wife plays a central role in his life. She is instrumental in maintaining their social contacts and providing care.

Marc, who has lived in France since 1960, still strongly identifies with his birth country, Portugal:

> And I regularly go to Portugal for short breaks. I don't call them holidays, because holidays are what you have when you work. […]. I could go somewhere else, but I go there because I still have family ties. I have a little property there that I want to keep going as long as I can and for as long as everything's in order. (M.)

The short breaks, which also emphasise his status as a retiree, bring him satisfaction that carries over into his daily life in Hautepierre:

> We've started going to Portugal regularly to enjoy the sunshine. And when we're there, it's the sea, it's this, it's that, and then when we come back, it's a bit like hibernating, not because we stay at home, but because it's so calm, you know? (M.)

Marc does not seem to have a strong need for much activity in his daily life. On the contrary, it appears that he draws contentment from his short trips to Portugal. He feels emotionally connected to Portugal, evident in his solely positive accounts of his visits. In contrast, his statements about Hautepierre seem less emotionally charged. He recounts how he ended up living in Hautepierre in a rather pragmatic manner:

> We chose Hautepierre because we liked the flat and the area. And there was nothing that … Actually, that being said, there was nothing that specifically drew us to Hautepierre. We spent a month looking for flats. But this one caught our eye when we came to see it. (M.)

The choice was not explicitly for Hautepierre but rather for the apartment that happens to be located in Hautepierre. The neighbourhood plays a secondary role and seems replaceable. The fact that Marc has developed few emotional attachments to the neighbourhood since moving into the apartment two decades ago is evident when he speaks about the area in a very functional way. He confirms that everything he needs is available, referring to shopping facilities and public transportation (see Figure 3). His primary sphere of activity is his own home:

Figure 3. Tram stop in Hautepierre (own photo)

> When you have pretty much everything you need at home, there's no reason to leave. That's a good reason too. I leave my house, or flat, and I'm right at the tram stop. If I need to go to the hospital, I walk there, since it's only 200 metres away. So there you go, it's not … As for public spaces, aside from the streets, which I use like everyone else, pavements and all, I don't really use any other public spaces. (M.)

Marc worked in various companies. Now, he seems to prefer the quiet life of a retiree. Such a life appears to align with his ideals for later life:

> And then, I don't know if it's age, but we like things to be quieter. It's not that we want to stay shut in, but we like it … Yeah, but that's just the way of the world. (M.)

He and his wife cultivate a few steady social contacts. Twice a week, they meet their friends from dance, and they regularly see other friends for game nights. With his direct neighbours in his apartment building, Marc maintains a superficial contact:

> I get along well with everyone in the neighbourhood. I don't have any issues with anyone. No problems with the neighbours. But let's say that apart from saying hello and good evening, there isn't much in the way of neighbourly friendliness. (M.)

In his further explanations, Marc presents himself as withdrawn, while portraying his wife as the opposite:

> [My wife] knows a lot of people. When she goes out, she can't pass for a stranger, anonymous. But it's not unpleasant either. Sometimes I watch TV. There was a period during the Euro football championship when I followed it quite closely and enjoyed watching some of the matches. (M.)

It is interesting that while Marc describes his wife in terms of classically "feminine" roles, he associates her with the public sphere, whereas he portrays himself as someone who stays at home watching television. Marc further states: "It's not worth complaining because if things are going well, once we get home, we close the door and don't worry too much about what's going on outside, whether it's here or elsewhere." The metaphorical closing of his apartment door signifies a retreat into his private life (see Figure 4). He does not interfere in the affairs of others and expects the same in return. Having fulfilled his duties with "42 years of payments" in a capitalist achievement-oriented society, he now finds satisfaction in his retirement through his marriage, his home and, most importantly, through his identity-affirming visits to Portugal.

The example of Marc demonstrates that PA can occur on a micro level, specifically through the connection to one's own apartment. Additionally, it becomes clear that PA does not necessarily form with the current, and in his case long-term, neighbourhood as a place of residence. While he describes Hautepierre in purely functional terms, he shows emotional attachment to Portugal. Using an intersectional approach, we were able to highlight the significance of Portugal – in contrast to France or the neighbourhood of Hautepierre. The enduring importance of the place of birth in connection with familial ties is often highly relevant for individuals with a migration background, which also indicates the multiplicity of attached places (Palladino 2019). Furthermore, Marc's example illustrates that age and gender-related role expectations are important; they influence – alongside his migrant identity – the shaping of his daily life.

Figure 4. Entrance of a residential building in Hautepierre (own photo)

Solange: "The centre is like my baby."

Solange is 82 years old and a native of the Strasbourg area. She has lived in the same apartment in Hautepierre, in the Catherine mesh, near Le Galet, since 1971. She has raised her two children there, and her husband died 15 years ago. As a housewife, she has always been very involved in various associations related to the neighbourhood and social welfare. When the centre was created with the fusion of several associations and the support of the city of Strasbourg, she became its president.

Today, Solange is no longer part of the board of *Le Galet* but she remains very active there. She leads the women's meeting group and comes here four times a week. Due to her back problem, she rarely leaves her apartment, except to go shopping, to *Le Galet*, to visit her children or to go out to dinner with her friends.

In the interview with Solange, her neighbourhood engagement takes centre stage: she proudly discusses her involvement in neighbourhood associations, the founding of *Le Galet* in the 1990s and the chairmanship she held for 10 years: "I'm a bit like the founding mother of some neighbourhood associations, as they say." (S.) To this day, Solange actively shapes the program at *Le Galet* and leads the Thursday group, which she affectionately refers to as "my group." This group consists of women who gather to chat, recount anecdotes, exchange recipes and organise trips (CSC Hautepierre Le Galet 2026). Ziegler (2012: 1297) argues that "social participation in later life has to be understood as part of a continuum of social interactions which are based on life-long spatially situated social relationships." Solange participates in all events organised by *Le Galet* (see Figure 5). When these activities are not held, she feels a void:

Figure 5. "La Maison de Hautepierre" with *Le Galet* (own photo)

> For example, we don't run activities or workshops during the school holidays, which I miss. On a daily basis, we're at home and… What do we even do? (S.)

The rhythm of school and work schedules, as well as holidays, structures the urban life and, consequently, the program at *Le Galet*. In such an employment-oriented framework, retirees and individuals not engaged in work can feel left out.

For Solange, it is primarily the social connections that have kept her rooted in Hautepierre all these years:

> Yes, because quite often, there were many people who, especially when there was a bit of trouble, would say to me, "Listen, why do you stay in Hautepierre?" Family members who live in a village not far away would ask, "Why don't you sell your flat and come to the village?" No, I never wanted to. I like it here. We have everything we need in Hautepierre. […] And we're happy here. We have our friends in Hautepierre. If I moved away, I wouldn't have anyone. And there's a point when it becomes difficult to find new friends … to start over, you know. (S.)

This statement is interesting because Solange speaks in the first-person plural, acting as a spokesperson for like-minded individuals. This demonstrates how closely she is connected with other residents of her generation. The friendship network, combined with the difficulty of starting anew in old age, motivates her to stay. She explicitly attributes the relationships formed through *Le Galet* as a significant factor:

> My family is now mostly made up of people from the centre. I have a lot of friends there. We're like a family. We do things together, because we've known each other forever … and they're really like family to me. The centre is like my baby. I tell everyone that. It's kind of … well, it's very important to me. (S.)

In addition to her children, the "people from the centre" form her extended family, and *Le Galet* is her "baby." Although friendships are central to Solange's connection to Hautepierre, she notes at several points in the conversation that these relationships have changed over time. Due to mobility limitations and health impairments, fewer friends from other neighbourhoods visit her, and her social network in Hautepierre is also less mobile. Throughout the interview, Solange hints that her social circle is shrinking, as some friends have passed away due to age.

Solange presents herself as an insider when she reminisces about the "old days":

> Because we really liked the neighbourhood with all the greenery everywhere. There were trees and lush vegetation. When the urban renewal project started, it was somewhat upsetting for some people because a lot of trees were cut down. […] We managed to keep the small patch of woodland though, which was very important to us. […] And we actually did manage to keep it. But it's true that … the flower beds in front of each building used to have flowers. It was sweet. But now, it's starting to green up again, with little trees starting to grow back. (S.)

The urban renewal that came from external forces and changed the neighbourhood from within appears as a rupture in the neighbourhood's history. Solange describes the preservation of the small patch of woodland as a success of civic engagement. Her statement almost seems to distance herself slightly from the discontent surrounding the tree felling and relativises it, as it was "somewhat upsetting for some," but not so much for her. Throughout the interview, we gained the impression that she wants to represent her neighbourhood positively and construct a harmonious narrative. One's history and those of others become "bound up in place" (Degnen 2016) – an expression of emotional place attachment. Her statement illustrates that the physical places are less meaningful than the significances attributed to them by people.

Solange's example illustrates that PA is not merely given but actively created, successively renewed and maintained. For her, this is evident through her engagement with *Le Galet* or her efforts to preserve the small patch of woodland. Due to the opportunities for participation and the long personal history she shares with it, *Le Galet* represents far more than a sociocultural centre; it is a meaningful place that structures her daily life and social relationships. Solange is an older, widowed woman who was already deeply embedded in the neighbourhood before her husband's passing 15 years ago. She spent much of her life as a housewife raising two children, and her socio-economic position suggests that opportunities for participation outside the immediate neighbourhood may be limited. Through her engagement at *Le Galet*, however, she has developed an extensive local social network and close friendships with people she now considers family. Viewed through an intersectional lens, Solange's experiences highlight how

gendered life trajectories and socio-economic circumstances intersect in shaping everyday life in the neighbourhood. Her biography as a woman who devoted much of her life to unpaid care work reinforces the importance of accessible and low-cost local spaces of social participation. At the same time, these intersecting positions contribute to a strong spatial anchoring in Hautepierre, where long-standing relationships and familiar community spaces sustain her daily routines and sense of belonging.

Discussion

QPVs are defined through statistical income indicators and addressed through funding programmes, framing them as "problem areas" requiring improved living conditions and reduced inequalities. However, this administrative approach – operating within fixed territorial boundaries (e.g. "Plan d'action territorial") – fails to capture older residents' lived realities. Our findings demonstrate that older adults' experiences of neighbourhood life are shaped less by these administrative and functional categorisations than by everyday practices, social relations and emotional attachments to specific places within the neighbourhood and beyond.

In this regard, our study contributes to debates on "AIP" and " AFC" by showing that ageing in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods cannot be understood solely through infrastructural or policy-oriented frameworks. While both approaches emphasise the importance of enabling older adults to remain in familiar environments and to participate in urban life (Clark et al. 2024; World Health Organization 2023), our findings highlight that the lived experience of ageing in place is highly differentiated and shaped by intersecting social positions. The three cases presented here illustrate this diversity: Colette's attachment to Hautepierre persists despite physical barriers that increasingly confine her to her home; Marc maintains primarily functional relations to the neighbourhood while emotionally identifying with another place in his home country; and Solange actively produces place attachment through long-standing neighbourhood engagement. These findings resonate with previous studies emphasising the importance of social relations and everyday practices for place attachment (Buffel et al. 2014; Lewis & Buffel 2020), but they

also show how these attachments evolve over time and are embedded in broader structural inequalities.

By combining place attachment with an intersectional perspective, our study offers a conceptual lens that extends existing approaches to AIP. Previous research has criticised AIP and AFC frameworks for their tendency to rely on relatively homogeneous understandings of older adults and for focusing strongly on physical infrastructures (Ågotnes et al. 2022; Finlay & Finn 2021). Our findings support this critique. Colette's example illustrates how the built environment can reproduce forms of ableism, as seemingly minor design decisions – such as benches without backrests – can effectively exclude individuals with limited mobility from public space. At the same time, Marc's case demonstrates that ageing in place does not necessarily imply emotional attachment to the immediate neighbourhood. Instead, attachments may extend across multiple places and reflect migration histories and transnational family ties (Palladino 2019). These examples highlight that ageing in place should not be understood as a static condition but rather as a dynamic process shaped by life-course trajectories, health conditions and social relations.

The intersectional lens further allows us to capture the heterogeneity of ageing experiences in a stigmatised neighbourhood. Factors such as gender, migration background, socio-economic status and health intersect with spatial conditions and discursive constructions of place. In Hautepierre, external stigmatisation – reinforced through media representations of crime – directly affects residents' everyday lives, for example, when relatives avoid visiting the neighbourhood because it is perceived as dangerous. Similar processes have been described in research on territorial stigmatisation (Van De Wetering 2020; Wacquant 2008). Our findings suggest that such discursive framings shape not only the external perception of neighbourhoods but also the social relations and opportunities available to their residents. Integrating these dynamics into the analysis of place attachment, therefore, represents an important contribution of this study.

At the same time, the interviews reveal that residents are not merely passive recipients of structural constraints but actively shape their environments. Solange's engagement in the neighbourhood demonstrates how everyday practices and social participation contribute to the

production of meaningful places. Sociocultural places such as *Le Galet* function as an important hub for social interaction across generations and allow residents to maintain social ties over long periods of time. These findings align with previous research emphasising the importance of social networks and everyday encounters for well-being in later life (Courbebaisse 2023; Lebrusán & Gómez 2022). At the same time, they highlight the importance of accessible, low-threshold community spaces that enable older residents to remain socially embedded within their neighbourhoods.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative design and small number of interviews limit the generalisability of the findings. The perspectives presented here should therefore be understood as in-depth insights into individual lifeworlds rather than representative accounts of ageing in Hautepierre. Second, due to language barriers and difficulties reaching homebound individuals, some voices remain underrepresented. In addition, many participants were recruited through the sociocultural centre *Le Galet*, which means that residents who are socially isolated or less engaged in neighbourhood activities may not be captured in the analysis. Finally, our positionality as researchers and temporary visitors to the neighbourhood may have influenced the interview dynamics and the ways in which participants presented their experiences.

Despite these limitations, the study highlights several directions for future research. In particular, further work could deepen the intersectional analysis of ageing in urban neighbourhoods by examining more systematically how structural inequalities – such as poverty, migration histories and health disparities – interact with spatial stigma in shaping everyday experiences of ageing. Comparative studies across different neighbourhoods would also help to better understand how these dynamics unfold in different urban and national contexts. In an era of global urbanisation, cities face mounting pressures from economic competition and neoliberal governance models that prioritise efficiency (Kemper & Vogelpohl 2020). The commercialisation of public spaces increasingly restricts opportunities for community building and social cohesion. To counteract these neoliberal urban planning trends, we find value in engaging with older adults from different neighbourhoods who face discrimination and exclusion.

While our study does not primarily aim to develop concrete policy recommendations, it nevertheless points to several considerations for urban planning and neighbourhood development. The findings underline the importance of maintaining accessible public spaces and low-threshold community infrastructures that enable everyday encounters and social participation among residents. Such spaces can play a crucial role in counteracting processes of social isolation. As before, urban planning is oriented towards middle-aged, employed, and healthy individuals, while older and/or physically impaired people often fall through the cracks (Hoffelner 2018). Incorporating the perspectives of older residents into urban planning processes can help to challenge homogenising narratives about both ageing and disadvantaged neighbourhoods and contribute to more inclusive forms of urban development.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the research group Human Geography at the Department for Environmental Social Sciences and Geography at the University of Freiburg for useful discussions and suggestions.

Funding Statement

This research was supported by the Frankreich-Zentrum at the University of Freiburg.

Ethical Statement

Our institution does not require ethical approval for the reporting of individual cases or case series. In this study, we focus on reports from older adults living in Hautepierre, Strasbourg (France). Prior to participation, all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, its procedures and potential risks and benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were also informed that they could refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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

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