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Mobility in the transition to retirement – the intertwining of transportation and everyday projects

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ABSTRACT

Through travel diaries and interviews with newly retired urban residents in Sweden our aim was to explore (1) mobility patterns in the transition to retirement, (2) the influence of space–time restrictions and resources on mobility and (3) the meaning and embodied experience of mobility. This time-geographic study contributes with knowledge on how mobility is influenced by individual, social and geographical contexts. Illustrated by four cases, our result show that retirement changes the preconditions for mobility and creates new space–time restrictions. To spend more time on projects that were previously carried out outside working time, such as caring for grandchildren, volunteer work and household responsibilities, influenced the informants' demands for mobility and choice of transport mode. However, the informants have resources that can be seen as strategies to overcome space–time restrictions. Most of the informants found it important to structure the day, to some it was vital to have something to do during the day while others enjoyed the possibility to take each day as it comes. Everyday mobility was a way of forming a structure by getting out of the house, either just for a walk or for making errands. The informants' embodied experiences of mobility influenced their choice to walk and cycle for transport for the reasons of comfort, get fresh air, or simply to get out of the house. The daily mobility pattern that was established was a result of individual preferences and resources as well as negotiations with family members. We conclude that the transition to retirement is a period when new mobility patterns are considered, evaluated and practiced.

1. Introduction

The transition from working life to retirement and becoming a pensioner has long been seen as marking entry into old age (Vincent et al., 2006). However, what it means to be old has changed, and few recent retirees in contemporary Western society, where health and activity are keywords for successful ageing, would consider themselves as old (Katz, 2000). Because of the increasing number and proportion of older people in the Western world (WHO, 2011) and the heterogeneity of interpretations of old age and various experiences of growing old (Grenier, 2011) a more nuanced picture of older people as a target group in transport research and planning is needed. Drawing on a time-geographic case study among newly retired people living in a medium-sized Swedish city, this paper aims to explore (1) mobility patterns in the transition to retirement, (2) the influence of space–time constraints on mobility, and (3) the meaning and embodied experience of mobility. Mobility is defined here as actual movements, the ability to travel, and the meaning and experience of moving based on Metz (2000) and Cresswell (2010). This paper contributes with knowledge about how late life transitions, in this case retirement, influence mobility. When everyday structures change people reconsider their choices and possibilities (Waerden van der et al., 2003; Verhoeven, 2010). In the transition to retirement it can be expected that mobility patterns as well as the meaning of mobility change as the individuals search for other ways to organise everyday activities. The choices made in this period of transition may form future mobility. Retirement as an important transition in life is therefore of central importance for transport planning and decisions aiming to influence older peoples transport patterns. There is a dearth of research on older people's mobility with an explicit focus on the transition to retirement (Burnett and Lucas, 2010; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010).

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The paper is organised as follows. We initially describe previous research and gaps, as well as the research question of this study. The theoretical framework and concepts used in our approach are then presented. The subsequent section describes methods, data and context, followed by an analysis based on qualitative interviews and travel diaries. The paper ends with a discussion of the results in the context of previous research, and points out the retirement changes that may be part of the preconditions for mobility.

2. Life-course transitions and mobility

Although statistics show that the number of journeys made by people aged 65 and older in Sweden is lower than in younger cohorts, the characteristics of the journeys change with an increase in service-, shopping-, and leisure-related journeys (Transport Analysis, 2011). In relation to retirement, however, several complexities need to be considered. Shultz and Henkens (2010) acknowledges the changing nature of retirement such as gradual and partial retirement, extended working lives and the individual's attitude to retirement. Walker and Foster (2006) emphasise that retirement implies lower incomes and new economic constraints. Post-retirement mobility is also affected by aspects of individual background such as gender, age, health, marital status/family and previous working conditions, according to Pinquart and Schindler (2007). Gustafson (2006), Kwan (2000), and Schwanen et al. (2008) find that women and men have traditionally had different travel-activity patterns due to different career opportunities and unequal responsibilities for household and child care. The distribution between spouses of household responsibilities can be expected to change when one retires (Szinovacz, 2000).

Much research has explored mobility among older people. Mobility has been shown to positively influence quality of life and wellbeing in later life, and several studies have emphasised the importance of car use for being independent and mobile (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010; Schwanen et al., 2012a; Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011). When driving is no longer possible this is experienced by many as a loss. Lately, a broader perspective on mobility has been used with the introduction of the new mobility paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006). This paradigm underlines the importance of integrating mobility as a dimension of social activities. In studies of older people's mobility, this perspective was applied by Ziegler and Schwanen (2011) and Burnett and Lucas (2010). One of the topics of these studies is whether old people use information and communities technologies (e.g. media, internet and telephones) in new ways to maintain their social networks.

There has been little research on the relation between the transition to retirement and its implications for everyday mobility among older people. Highlighting life-course transitions rather than focusing on chronological age can challenge dominant views of older people as travellers. Previous research has investigated work-life transitions, such as relocation, professional change, and retirement and its influence on commuting distances and choice of transport mode (Prillwitz et al., 2007; Scheiner and Holz-Rau, 2013; Verhoeven et al., 2007). These studies used quantitative methods but did not specifically address how potential changes influenced the everyday life experiences of mobility.

By bringing the perspectives of time-geography and mobility together to study late-life transitions, we can gain knowledge on variations in how older people use and experience transport systems, as well as knowledge on their preconditions for mobility. Such information is necessary for transport planning. Older people can be expected to have different space–time constraints than adults who seek to reconcile home and work demands. Studies using a similar time-geographic approach are, for instance, the work by McQuoid and Dijst (2012) and Scholten et al. (2012) but these did not consider retirees. On the whole, there is a lack of research using time-geography to study mobility in later life. To retire from paid labour has potential consequences for patterns of everyday mobility and space–time use for at least three reasons (Coughlin, 2009; Hjorthol et al., 2010). First, shopping and service errands, for which little time was available previously, might now be carried out at other times of the day or on various occasions during the day. Second, the modes of transport that were used between home and the prior workplace might not be suitable or preferred for activities after retirement. Third, new space–time constraints might come into force; for some, being retired means new responsibilities towards children or old parents, while for others it means new possibilities for leisure activities and travel (Fingerman et al., 2012; Godfrey et al., 2004).

3. Mobility, time-geography, and retirement transition

Cresswell (2010) defines mobility as the intertwining of *movement*, *representation* and *practice*. *Movement* is the act of displacement between one place and another, which can be mapped or measured. These movements have been *represented* in many different ways: "as adventure, as tedium, as education, as freedom, as modern, as threatening" (Cresswell, 2010:19). Mobility is given a shared meaning based on socially and culturally bounded ideologies. The *practice* of mobility is what people do as they move, like walking or driving, and how it is experienced and embodied. Mobility practices and the representation of mobility are intimately related, as underlined by Cresswell (2006). Walking, driving a car or taking the bus can cause different feelings depending on who we are, what expectations we have and whether we have chosen to move or not. Metz (2000) explains that mobility has certain benefits: the psychological benefits of getting out and about and the benefits of getting exercise and participating in social activities. Metz echoes prevailing understandings of mobility as an indicator for quality of life, good health, and independence (WHO, 2002), but mobility in this sense is given a normative, positive ascription and it is taken for granted that it is voluntary. Evidently, sometimes moving can feel burdensome, while at other times we look forward to it. Gabriel and Bowling (2004) point out that to older people who cannot drive it can be a burden to walk to bus stops, especially in bad weather and on icy streets. Cresswell's definition of mobility offers an analytically useful framework for exploring the complexity of mobility patterns in the transition to retirement, and people's own subjective interpretations of mobility, in order to discover more than is possible in traditional travel surveys.

We use the time-geographic approach, developed by Hägerstrand (1970) and developed further by Ellegård (1999), in order to explore how movements, as defined by Cresswell (2010), are intertwined in everyday life among newly retired people. *Projects and constraints* are central concepts that are especially relevant here. All of the activities that are carried out in an individual's life are seen as individual projects, i.e. the entire series of tasks that are necessary to achieve certain goals (Ellegård, 1999). Some projects require cooperation between people and imply certain access to tools and materials. Our focus is not on everyday projects per se; instead our aim is to analyse how the realisation of projects can be limited or enabled. Three types of space–time constraints that limit individual's actions are central in time-geography: *capability* (knowledge, physical and mental capacity and material resources), *coupling* (interactions with other people, places, and physical objects), and *authority* (laws, regulations and norms) (Ellegård, 1990; Hägerstrand, 1970; Lenntorp, 1999). These types of constraints will be examined to identify how they influence the ability to travel and show how mobility is temporally