

## Geographies of the ageing-migration nexus: an introduction

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## **Geographies of the ageing-migration nexus: an introduction**

### ***Abstract***

*This special section builds on previous scholarship on geographies of ageing, and on relational and transnational approaches to age and migration, to assert the significance of the ageing-migration nexus in human geography. Our primary goal is to examine the intricate relationships between ageing, migration, space and place. By bringing empirical research on ageing and migration into dialogue with existing conceptual work within geography, we also aim to critically contribute to current debates in both areas. The contributors explore a wide range of migration processes and experiences through an intersectional lens, and demonstrate the importance of a diverse set of epistemological and methodological approaches to explore the spatialities of the ageing–migration nexus. Key dimensions examined include, but are not limited to, the spaces and places of ageing and migration, the multi-scalar nature of the geographies of the ageing–migration nexus, their (im)mobilities, fluid boundaries, and emotional geographies.*

***Key words:*** *geography; ageing; migration; space; place; intersectionality*

The intersections between ageing and migration have profound geographic resonance. In this special section, we seek to illuminate *emplaced* meanings of age and ageing, and related (im)mobilities, produced over space and time, demonstrating that place is more than a mere ‘container’ of older people (Andrews *et al.* 2007; Pain *et al.* 2000). Existing research allows us to map out these crossings in three substantive areas of concern, relevant for both academic work and policy-making: *the increasing diversity of ageing migrants* in all parts of the globe, both internally and across borders, and related social, cultural, economic, health and welfare-specific challenges; *the multiplicity of ageing landscapes* and the nuanced nature of migrants’ home-*un*making practices, social and intimate relationships in later-life, ageing cultures, and ageing care; and the *interstitial dimensions and individual subjectivities* that mould prescribed experiences of age and ageing, and their varied entitlements across the world.

We argue that it is by looking at the spaces and places of our everyday lives, both relationally and transnationally, that the ageing experience as an ongoing, (im)mobile, social project can be further understood. Pertinent questions that this special section addresses include the following. What are the implications of (trans)national migration for ageing as both an embodied and emplaced experience? How does geographical mobility impact migrants’ wellbeing in later-life? Do older migrants’ ideas about age and ageing shift across space and time? How is ageing care articulated across borders and what are the consequent challenges for migrants and non-migrants? In what ways are later-life identities and home-making experiences shaped at different social and spatial scales? How is privilege, accumulated over the life-course, enacted in new geographical contexts? And, how are migrants’ social and intimate relationships shaped by their (im)mobilities and emplacement?

Geographical research has worked towards developing ‘geographies of ageing’ as a distinct research arena of human geography. While the origins of this research theme can be traced to early statements by Rowles (1986), Warnes (1990), and Harper and Laws (1995), recent studies have drawn attention to a variety of geographical and spatial concerns. These include the intertwining of social and cultural, and biological and physiological, dimensions of ageing and later-life; the challenge of incorporating time and spatiotemporality in discussions about ageing (Schwanen *et al.* 2012); and the potential for relational and non-representational approaches to age and ageing within geography (Hopkins and Pain 2007; Skinner *et al.* 2015). In particular, the development of relational geographies of age has provided a robust platform for exploring the *nexus* between different social-chronological groups, shedding light on core intergenerational, intersectional, and lifecourse issues. Simultaneously, geographers, through their methodological and epistemological pluralism and multiscale approaches, have been able to provide a spatially sensitive analysis of the growing diversity of mobilities in a globalised, yet fundamentally divided, world (King 2012). Whilst these two strands of geographical engagement – on age and ageing and on migration – have been prolific on their own, their crossings have remained underdeveloped.

On the whole, the study of the complex intersections of ageing and migration has established itself as an important and timely agenda across the social sciences. This has taken place chiefly through a flurry of edited volumes and special issues (e.g. Baldassar *et al.* 2007; Ciobanu *et al.* 2017; Ciobanu and Hunter 2017; Horn and Schweppe 2015; Horn *et al.* 2013; Karl and Torres 2016; Lawrence and Torres 2015; Näre *et al.* 2017; Torres and Lawrence 2012; Walsh and Näre 2016; Warnes and Williams 2006; Zubair and Norris 2015). Fruitful discussions have developed on the diversity of older migrants (Warnes *et al.* 2004), transnational ageing (Horn and Schweppe 2017), identities and everyday practices in older age (Näre *et al.* 2017), elderly

care (Baldassar *et al.* 2007), ageing in ethnic minority or transcultural contexts (Zubair and Norris 2015), ageing and the new media (Baldassar *et al.* 2017), and policy implications of ageing as a migrant (Ciobanu *et al.* 2017). Notwithstanding their thematic richness, these analyses have, for the most part, failed to fully engage with the spatial dimensions of the ageing–migration nexus. This is the lacuna we seek to fulfil with this collection.

This special section asserts the importance of carving a space for the ageing–migration nexus in human geography as the appropriate arena to develop relationships between ageing, migration, space and place. It offers novel insights to the wider debates on ageing and migration by foregrounding *geographical* analyses of the ageing–migration nexus. In doing so, we respond to Cutchin's (2009: 440) avowal that 'the study of the geographical dimensions of ageing has yet to achieve its full potential'. Providing innovative extensions to existing analyses of migration, we build on the conceptual strength of work on geographies of ageing (Harper and Laws 1995) and a relational approach to age (Hopkins and Pain 2007) that has helped to transform understandings of older age in human geography, gerontology and beyond (Andrews and Phillips 2005; Hardill 2009; Schwanen *et al.* 2012; Skinner *et al.* 2015 2018).

The papers included in this special section offer innovative approaches to the study of the ageing–migration nexus through a geographical lens, revealing ageing as a geographically contingent, spatially produced and embodied social process. They explore a wide diversity of migration processes and experiences through an intersectional approach to migrant subjectivities that is sensitive to the inequalities of ageing. Attention is drawn to migrants who are both wealthy and underprivileged; 'young old' and 'old old'; male and female; active and sedentary; healthy and frail; moving alone and as part of a couple; and originating from/located in both the Global North and Global South. The papers exemplify a variety of epistemological

approaches which demonstrate the importance of a rich and diverse methodological toolkit for exploring geographies of the ageing–migration nexus. Articles are based on quantitative surveys and longitudinal data, qualitative in-depth interviewing and biographical life-narratives, ethnography, comparative analysis, and visual methods.

The special section begins with intersectional discussions of ageing, in which age, gender, class and ethnicity are considered through a transnational lens. First, Oliver's (2018) study of 'choice homophily' in later life provides an ethnographic account of two distinct geographical settings – international retirement migration to Spain and older people's centres in South London – critically exploring the configuration of spaces of ageing in relation to similarity and difference. Second, Lulle's (2018) paper conceptualises relational ageing in spatial and comparative terms. It examines transnational ageing care through a time-space approach that unfolds the life stories and intra-gender and cross-generational care practices of Latvian women who migrated and those who stayed put.

A focus on the lives of older lifestyle migrants is provided in the two papers that follow. Sampaio (2018) explores the inner geographies of ageing lifestyle migrants in the Azores islands, stressing the role of individuality and a 'shift to the self' as an opportunity for self-actualisation in later-life. She demonstrates that ageing as a single person does not always lead to vulnerability, but can be also empowering. Hayes' (2018) paper exposes the complexity behind self-perceptions of privilege, looking at how relative advantage and 'white alterity' are negotiated by North Americans in Cuenca, Ecuador. The paper reveals the conflicted nature of migrants' relayed concern with the local community while, simultaneously, taking advantage of structural global inequalities.

Walsh (2018) and Cela and Bettin's (2018) papers consider the phenomenon of return migration in older age, each using a different methodological lens. Walsh deploys 'critical

geographies of home' and uses in-depth repeat interviewing with older Britons to explore their home-making practices back in Britain; Cela and Bettin's study draws on German Socio-Economic Panel data to provide a detailed quantitative analysis of subjective and objective wellbeing-related factors implicated in the decision to return to the country of origin in older age. Wellbeing in later-life is also at the core of Finney and Marshall's (2018) paper, which, based on data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, discusses the potentially advantageous effects of residential mobility in later-life, and how this can help to explain ageing inequalities at various scales.

Taken together, these articles draw attention to five dimensions of the geographies of the ageing–migration nexus that merit further analysis: first, the *spaces and places* of ageing and migration, in their emplaced and embodied socio-economic and cultural diversity and homogeneity, and potential for re-configurations over time; secondly, their *multi-scalar* nature, including (trans)national, community, and home spaces, ranging from the well-researched migration flows in the Global North to the emerging ageing mobilities in the Global South; thirdly, their *(im)mobilities*, encompassing both migrants and non-migrants and the promises, but also the constraints, of geographical mobility later in life; fourthly, their *boundaries*, which become more and more difficult to disentangle with different types of migration – be they economically, family or lifestyle oriented – overlapping and feeding into each other; and fifthly, their *emotional geographies*, which highlight ever more reflexive cultures of age and ageing.

Finally, this collection of papers suggests promising avenues for future research. These include, but are not limited to, the following. We suggest that research could be more inclusive of a diversity of ageing migrants and mobility motives, thereby recognising the limitations of current migration categorisations and emphasising the importance of lifecourse transitions. Studies are required that are more attentive to the relations between migrants and non-migrants

and the complex ways in which they interact, for instance in terms of ageing care as shown in Lulle's paper, but also regarding transnational cultures of ageing, place attachment, and social and generational interactions and expectations. Research espousing intersectional approaches that observe the relations between life-stage (e.g. separation, illness, bereavement etc.), gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity and inequality, as vehemently demonstrated by all papers in this collection, is also important to develop more widely. Likewise, studies that explore determinants of health impairment and wellbeing in later-life and foreground collaborations between different strands of geography such as geographies of health, ageing, and economic, social and cultural geographies. Research is needed that incorporates a de-colonial lens and goes beyond 'the West', such as that of Hayes (this collection), which inspires further work focusing on the diversity of ageing–migration crossings in understudied geographical contexts. And, lastly, in their methodological plurality, the set of papers in this special section invites further methodological imagination in the study of the ageing–migration nexus, for example through the inclusion of more non-representational, historical, media-focused, and cartographically and photographically documented research.

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