



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe



Cronfa - Swansea University Open Access Repository

This is an author produced version of a paper published in:
The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology

Cronfa URL for this paper:
<http://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa27105>

Book chapter :

Hillcoat-Nallétamby, S. (n.d). *Relational Sociology: Contributions to Understanding Residential Relocation Decisions in Later Life*. F. Dépelteau (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology*, -639). Palgrave Macmillan.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66005-9_31

This item is brought to you by Swansea University. Any person downloading material is agreeing to abide by the terms of the repository licence. Copies of full text items may be used or reproduced in any format or medium, without prior permission for personal research or study, educational or non-commercial purposes only. The copyright for any work remains with the original author unless otherwise specified. The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder.

Permission for multiple reproductions should be obtained from the original author.

Authors are personally responsible for adhering to copyright and publisher restrictions when uploading content to the repository.

<http://www.swansea.ac.uk/library/researchsupport/ris-support/>

Palgrave Macmillan - Handbook of Relational Sociology

PART 4 RESEARCH TOPICS IN RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY

Title: *Relational Sociology: contributions to understanding residential relocation decisions in later life*

Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Centre for Innovative Ageing, Swansea University, UK

Abstract:

The increasingly globalised emphasis on casting individuals as consumers, empowered with choice and decision-making strategies enabling them to exercise individual agency in diverse markets has been reflected in policy discourse and service provision targeted at older people; hence they are portrayed as independent agents, free to choose and select products, services and lifestyles as informed consumers, notably when it comes to their health and social care preferences. This emphasis finds its routes in neo-liberal thinking which gives primacy to individual, voluntaristic, rational choices embedded within decision-making predicated on intentional, consequential action. Whilst this is a welcome move from the long-standing, dichotomous social representation of older people as either “dependent-disempowered”/“independent-empowered” social agents, it nonetheless overlooks the possibility of a more nuanced construction of their social action as the product of temporal, transactional processes evolving with others through complex figurations of interdependent relationships.

This chapter aims to demonstrate the relevance of relational sociology as an ontological orientation with the potential to provide renewed understanding of the social phenomenon of later life residential relocation decision-making as a transactional processes.

Viewed through a relational lens, the concepts of *temporality*, *transactional process* and *interdependencies* will provide a framework for making sense of older people’s experiences of the residential relocation process, as depicted through their own narratives. It is hoped that this work will enhance theory in the field of gerontology, where scholars have tended to focus on theorizing later life social phenomena through the lens of macro-level structural determinism and its constraining influence on individual agency, or the micro-level focus of humanistic approaches. The field of gerontology has therefore yet to adopt, in any depth, the ontological insights provided by relational sociology.

Keywords: later life; older people; residential relocation; extra-care; assisted living; gerontology; environmental gerontology; figurations of reference; transactions; self-actions; process; interdependencies; temporality^[FD1]

Relational Sociology: contributions to understanding residential relocation decisions in later life

Introduction

The increasingly globalised emphasis on casting individuals as consumers, empowered with choice and decision-making capacities enabling them to exercise agency in diverse markets has been reflected in policy discourse and service provision targeted at older people; hence, they are portrayed as independent agents, free to choose and select products, services and life styles as informed consumers, notably when it comes to their health and social care preferences. This

emphasis finds its routes in neo-liberal thinking which gives primacy to individual, voluntaristic, rational choices embedded within decision-making predicated on intentional, consequential action (March 1982, 29). Whilst this is a welcome move from the long-standing, dichotomous social representation of older people as either “dependent-disempowered”/“independent-empowered” social agents, it nonetheless overlooks the possibility of a more nuanced construction of their social action as the product of temporal, transactional processes evolving with others through complex figurations of interdependent relationships (Elias 1978^[c2]; Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips 2011^[FD3]).

This chapter aims to demonstrate the relevance of relational sociology as an ontological perspective with the potential to provide renewed understanding of the social phenomenon of later life residential relocation decision-making (RRDM) as a transactional process. For the purposes of this exercise, RRDM is defined as the processes involved in deciding and choosing whether to move to a different living environment, for example an assisted living or extra-care facility. These environments generally facilitate self-contained living in a non-medicalised but supportive communal setting (Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2014, 420). RRDM processes can culminate in a move to a different residential location or a decision to “stay put”; this chapter focuses on the former.

Viewed through the lens of relational sociology, the concepts of *temporality*, *transactional process* and *interdependencies* (Dépelteau 2008, 2015) will provide a framework for making sense of older people’s experiences of residential relocation, depicted through their own narratives. It is hoped that this work will enhance theory in the field of gerontology, where scholars have tended to focus on theorising later life social phenomena through the lens of macro-level structural determinism and its constraining influence on individual agency, or the micro-level focus of humanistic approaches (Phillips, Ajrouch, and Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2010, 204). The field of gerontology has therefore yet to adopt, in any depth, the ontological insights provided by relational sociology.

The RRDM process in later life merits particular attention because it embodies specific parameters compared with other life transitions. First, residential mobility tends to reduce significantly the older we become, hence creating a specific “habitus”, reflected through the familiarity of daily living routines, physical spaces and social environments which together, may generate feelings of “attachment” to one particular place. Second, with age, the likelihood of significant and permanent changes to the fabric of social relations through for example, widowhood or the death of family and friends increases. And third, later life is frequently associated with an increasing incongruence (albeit actual or imagined) between the physical aspects of our spatial living environments, and changing individual cognitive and/or physical requirements and abilities; for example, increasingly restricted physical mobility for someone living in a house with front steps, and poor access to transport may generate unwanted social isolation. Together these elements of mobility, familiarity, relationality and spatial (in)congruence give a particular shape to the social phenomenon of RRDM in later life.

The chapter begins with a critique of some established gerontological approaches to theorising about the phenomenon of later life relocation transitions as the umbrella for more focused work around residential relocation decision-making. This is followed by an outline of the interpretive framework proposed by the author for understanding later life RRDM processes as transactional and hence, relational phenomena. The framework is then put to the test using narrative accounts from a qualitative study set in the Welsh context (Burholt et al. 2010), which capture older people’s stories

about their journeys through the experience of relocating from their own homes to a supported, extra-care living environment. These case studies illustrate the processual and temporal nature of the RRDM phenomenon and its origins in transactional relations based on interdependencies, but they also raise questions about the relevance of self-action as congruent with transactions.

Critique of gerontological approaches to relocation transitions in later life

From the field of gerontology, theories of later life relocation transitions have led to the elaboration of explanatory frameworks about older people's mobility and migration. Some of this work has contributed to the development of environmental gerontology, a sub-field focusing on "the interaction between the older person and their environments" (Phillips, Ajrouch, and Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2010, 83). In essence, these theories approach residential decision-making and its outcomes in terms of individuals' adaptations and reactions to their physical, psychological and social contexts. A forerunner of these has been the "environmental press" theory or "ecological model" of ageing (Lawton and Nahemow 1973), and although not directly formulated in relation to the relocation process, has nonetheless highlighted the inter-relations between older individuals and their physical environment. A transactional element to this model refers to an individual's process of adaptation across time to changes in their cognitive, physical and psychological capabilities (or "competencies") on the one hand, and their reactions to different elements of the external environment on the other ("environmental press"). Transactions therefore occur between an individual's "competence" (e.g. propensity to fall), their responses to elements of their physical environment (e.g. stairs), how well they adapt their behaviour (e.g. avoiding falls) to this situation of "environmental press", and their subjective responses to these situations, shaped in part by societal norms and personal values.^[FD4] From this perspective^[FD5], change occurs as individuals adapt (with more or less (dis)comfort) in response to the demands of their environment, and depending upon their levels of competence.

This "interactionist" theory, with a focus on the interface between an older individual and their physical environment, omits any relational interpretation of transactions and is premised fundamentally on a causal framework with the individual at its core. Although recent applications of the ecological model of ageing have introduced more temporal and dynamic dimensions, including consideration of life span developments and adaptation processes across time (e.g. Baltes and Baltes 1990), from a relational perspective, they are still underpinned by an interpretation of transactions as occurring between independent "things" rather than as sets of dynamic and evolving relations between "things".

More focused on the process of later life migration, another influential behavioural theory developed by Wiseman (1979) posits that older people's decisions about whether to move will be determined by: their level of satisfaction with their current living environment; a series of "push-pull" or "decision-to-move" trigger factors; and consideration of other intangible (e.g. attachment to local community) and tangible (e.g. housing market) factors. Wiseman identified different types of moves (e.g. seasonal) and distinguished voluntary from involuntary moves. Others have subsequently recognised residential decision-making as a reflexive and iterative process (Haas and Serow 1993). Again however, at the centre of these theoretical interpretations is a focus on the individual.

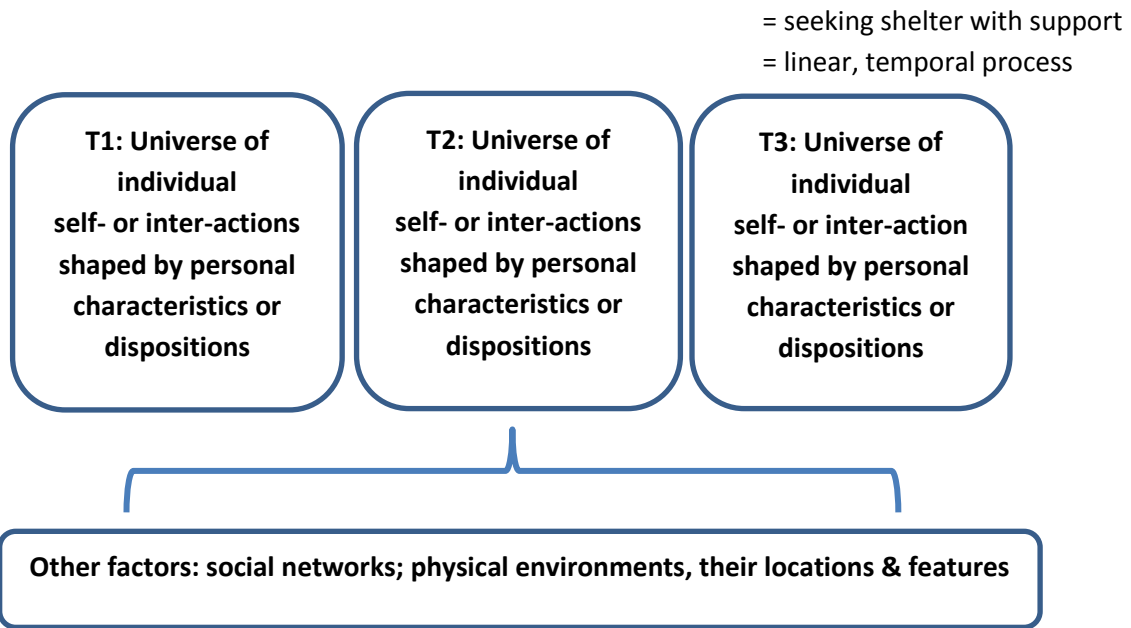
A third theoretical strand comes from the work around a developmental model of migration for older adults which proposes a typology of post-retirement moves (Litwak and Longino 1987). Relocations are explained as a means by which individuals adapt across the life course to changes in circumstance and evolving needs or priorities (e.g. amenities moves for lifestyle preferences; moves which facilitate access to support networks if there is onset of functional decline or disability).

More contemporary research has built on these foundational theories to provide frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of later life relocation transitions, for example in terms of an individual's ability to adapt to changing circumstances (e.g. "behavioural plasticity") and how this may affect relocation decisions. Other studies have focused on the nature of, or proximity to social networks as care "resources"; and how relocation trajectories vary depending on individual characteristics such as relationship status (e.g. single or couple). Older people's narratives have been used to emphasise the role of physical context in shaping feelings or perceptions of belonging, continuity and change in relation to relocation and living environmentsⁱⁱ. Some of this work resonates with the idea that later life RRDM may have temporal and transformative properties. The concept of "residential reasoning" has for example been elaborated (Granbom et al. 2014) to suggest that individuals' thoughts about residential mobility (staying put or moving on) are interlinked and evolve with time, in line with anticipated changes to later life autonomies and vulnerabilities (Koss and Ekerdt 2016).

This body of theoretical work, it is fair to say, has expanded beyond deterministic, predictive and linear analysis of the relocation phenomenon to one which recognises it as a more complex, temporal process, reflective of the interactive effect of individual socio-psychological attributes and physical contexts. [FD6] This notwithstanding, the focus remains predominantly on the individual – and at the most, a relational dimension which provides an explanation of their decisions and processes in relation to others - but with no seismic shift in ontological foundation to one of relationality. Rather, from a sociological perspective, this body of work if anything, has come to reflect "co-determinist" thinking – "... theories (that) explain the evolution of the social universe as the effect of *inter-actions* between social structures and agency" (Dépelteau 2008, 52), with the additional element of "physical" or "environmental" structure as a core dimension in the theoretical literature from gerontology.

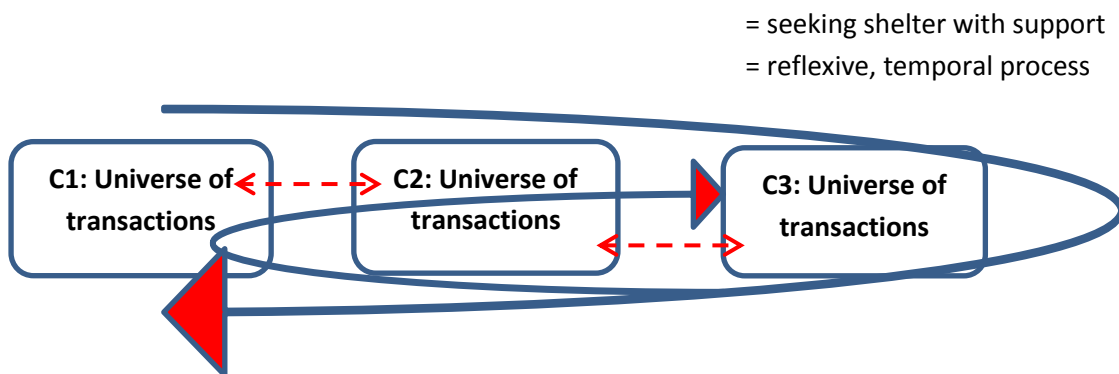
In sum, against this theoretical backdrop from environmental gerontology, the later life relocation experience has been studied predominantly as a phenomenon driven by individual, self-action. Although interactions with others are recognised, a more critical appraisal would suggest that they align within Emirbayer's (1997, 282) analysis of substantialism where the units of analysis are "substances of various kinds (things, beings, essences)", imbued with the capacity for independent self- or inter-action. From this perspective, self-actions – in this case, RRDM processes or transitions – would be conditioned by individual characteristics or dispositions (e.g. ability to adapt to change; health problems), and other exogenous factors relating to social networks or the physical nature of the living environment. Although some theoretical strands do embrace more of a reflexive perspective, the ultimate goal is one of determinism and predictability – hence an implicit temporal (T) linearity and sequence to these processes or transitions (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: Dominant conceptualisation of residential relocation transitions



Arguably, predictability could be an inherent property of the RRDM process in as much as individuals *will* seek the security of shelter, and in the example of relocation to an extra-care setting in later life, will also be seeking some form of support. From a relational perspective however, this quest is not individualised and linear. Rather, a relational ontology would suggest that it is a “back and forth”, process between reflexive actors^[FD7] embedded in transactional figurations^[FD8], in transient or evolving circumstances, but with social action nonetheless guided towards one outcome, that of seeking shelter with support.

FIGURE 2: Relational conceptualisation of the residential relocation decision-making process



In Figure 2, RRDM emanates from transactions between and across different circumstances (C) in a reflexive process, introducing the possibility for cumulative, non-sequential and sequential decision-making journeys. In this model then, transactions are not confined to one time period but may be inter-connected and evolving in time across circumstances; as such they can have transformative properties, some having more significance at particular points in time than others.

Later life residential relocation decision-making: a relational framework

Considering Figure 2, the interpretive framework proposed in this chapter draws on several elements of relational sociology. First, people do not live as isolates, but as members of networks or figurations characterised by interdependent relationships. Second, these interdependencies evolve as part of dynamic and potentially transformative transactional processes across time. Third, this transformative property means that relations of power and agency will shift or be modulated during the course of any process. The arena or social universe within which RRDM evolves is therefore formed of transactional, interdependent relations between different social actors.

Interdependent relationships – figurations: As Elias (1978) proposed, individuals identify and engage with others through different networks or “figurations” of interdependent relationships, functional interdependencies being one of them. Here I adopt Kasper’s definition of the notion of “figuration” as “[...] dynamic patterns or bonds of functional interdependence” (2013, 81), because it allows for variations in terms of the quality, quantity, temporality, power (im)balances and “habitus”ⁱⁱⁱ of these social relations (2013, 77). [FD9]

What, if any then, are the relational properties of later life RRDM? This question finds resonance with scholars who have been inspired by the disability movement’s contribution to our understanding that human relationships are based on mutual dependence, exchange and partnership, in other words, “relational interdependencies” (Barnes 2006; Reindal 1999; Shakespeare 2000). Hence an older person’s engagement in decision-making about relocation to a given care setting, would be at the heart of exchanges evolving across a constellation of actors belonging to different networks or, in relational terms, figurations (Fernandez-Carro 2016; Groger 1994; Pescosolido 1992; Shawler, Rowles, and High 2001). The complexity of these exchanges will vary depending upon whether actors engage temporarily, intermittently or constantly in the decision-making process over time; for example, a social worker whose presence is intermittent but pivotal in opening up access to formalised services; or kin members who take on the role of permanent mediators between the older person and constellations of service providers. Whilst this body of work has not been associated directly with a relational ontology, it does recognise the confluence of complex human relationships in shaping an older person’s ability or willingness to engage in the RRDM process. Hence, contrary to a rationalist and individualist approach, from a relational perspective, there is a basis for suggesting that RRDM exists and emerges through an individual’s embeddedness in their figurations of reference.

Transactional processes – temporality: Dépelteau (2008, 2015) argues that individual action cannot be separated from the transactional context to which people belong, but aligns to the principle of a relational perspective which rejects the idea of ego-centred action. Hence, RRDM would not exist as an individual endeavour but as part of interdependent, relational transactions (actors actors).

Kasper however argues that despite relational sociology recognising the primacy of social relations as a unit of analysis, it has yet to offer a convincing conceptualisation of them as dynamic processes, or as she says, “processual relations” (2013, 70). This suggests the need for a temporal element in

understanding the RRDM. The argument advanced here is that such temporality is at the core of the RRDM process, in later life specifically, as individuals are progressively confronted with the inadequacies (covertly or overtly recognised, or suggested by others) of their current living arrangements. This recognition or awareness will be part of a complex process, which over time shapes RRDM and reflects: the short- or longer-term impact of one-off or cumulative events or factors (e.g. changing health conditions, reduced income; loss of a partner); transactional exchanges with others, whose views, expectations and bearing on the older person's sense of independence may have profound effects (e.g. fear of a parent falling) on their RRDM; the normative context which may continue to reflect historical memories of the disempowering effect that institutional settings have on self-determination (Foucault 1977; Goffman 1961; Rothman 1971), and which can modulate a willingness to contemplate moving to a more supported living environment. In contrast, where normative expectations accommodate and value autonomy (Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2014), that is a recognition of the relative need we have for others, then a more agentic understanding of the RRDM process can be replaced with one based on recognition of relational interdependencies. The temporality of this process will vary depending upon individual circumstance and will reflect the interplay of these factors: sudden or progressive transformations to life circumstances (occurring through linear or reflexive, cumulative or non-cumulative timeframes); transactional exchanges (through figurations of reference); changing self-awareness of the meaning and implications of individual "independence". Together, these factors will have a transformative effect on later life RRDM (either as a decision to move or to stay put).

Agency and Power: From a relational perspective, agency is not conceived as action based on individual will alone, but as "inseparable from the unfolding dynamics of situations" (Emirbayer 1997, 293-4); agency therefore exists only in relation to an "other" (person or situation), and no longer retains its individualistic properties, becoming "fluid", moulded through time and relational exchanges. A relational ontology also challenges the notion of power as ascribed to, and exercised by certain individuals or groups (Elias 1978), implying instead that its existence is dependent upon the presence of an "other"; an individual oppressed is in subjugation to another, their oppressor. In other words, power cannot be "outside of" or independent of relational figurations (Emirbayer 1997, 292). Similar to agency, the exercising of power will evolve (with potential shifts in balance) depending upon transactional context and process.

What then of power and agency in the context of the RRDM phenomenon? I have argued that an older person's engagement in RRDM will reflect the nature of the relational transactions in which they engage during this process. It will also reflect the wider social context which often dictates that older people should strive to protect their independence – hence building broader normative frames of reference which place value on "independent" and "active" ageing as prerequisites for successful, healthy living in later life^{iv}. Independence in later life therefore becomes a valued social goal, acting as a motivational factor in RRDM. Progressive changes in personal circumstance have the potential to bring about shifts in social status if an older person is seen as mutating from an "independent" residential actor (i.e. living where and how *they* choose) to one who finds themselves having to renegotiate their living arrangements, through or with others. It is arguably this process of "(re)negotiated RRDM" which in some circumstances, elicits fears of lost agency and power or brings them into imbalance. Whether these "(re)negotiations" between members of the figurations of reference result in empowered or disempowered RRDM requires exploration.

To summarise: combining these elements of relational sociology, the interpretive framework proposed presents residential relocation decision-making as a social phenomenon evolving as part of a temporal process, combining elements of interdependent, relational transactions which have transformative properties. Older individuals engage in the RRDM process across time (temporality), their decision-making shaped through the dynamic relational transactions in which they engage with others. By implication, “independent” action cannot be separated from the transactional context in which people live, the individual’s ability to maintain and exercise agency in the RRDM evolving within their figurations of reference, hence losing its individualistic properties. RRDM is therefore reflective of interdependent relations which can be said to have transformative properties – the potential to bring about practical change - moving or staying put – to alter perceptions of “independence”, and to facilitate or hinder empowered decision-making as relations of power and agency evolve or mutate across figurations.

Case studies: illustrative narratives

Can the relational elements outlined here find resonance in older people’s narratives about their RRDM experiences, and do they provide a potentially valid ontological perspective for understanding this phenomenon? The following case studies are used to explore these questions by examining “thick” extracts from four narratives of older people living in Wales who have recollected their journeys through the process of deciding whether to leave their own homes and move to an extra-care facility. By the time they had been interviewed, the process of RRDM had been accomplished and they had moved.

Case Study: Mrs. J.

Mrs. J. in her late 80s, has a son and daughter, but lost her husband several years ago. She has previously been a volunteer. Having been ill for a while following a mild stroke, her rehabilitation has been facilitated through medical staff. This figuration of reference – kin, medical staff and volunteer colleagues – represent the web of transactional relationships within which her own RRDM has evolved across time, shaped by the cumulative effect of changing life circumstances, the need to contemplate, reflect and consider such a move, and to recognise her own limitations.

Interviewer: *How did you decide to come and live here?*

Mrs. J.: *I used to do voluntary work for St. Kentingern’s that’s the local hospice and I suffered terribly with my back but since I’ve been here my back has been better...I don’t have to struggle so much to do things like I used to [...]*

Interviewer: *When you decided to come here was it the facilities that pulled you here?*

Mrs. J.: *It was one of the other volunteers said to me one day [...] she said “You know where you should be living, that new place up the Prom.” I said “What about it?” That was a year before it opened; she said “Now I’ve seen the facilities, I’ve read about it and it’s for people like you” [...] I had a sister living next door and she was rather bossy and she would say “You are not going out again today” and I thought, “Is this all I’ve got to look forward to?” and that went on for about 37 years. I wanted to be away. I love her to bits, don’t get me wrong*

I do, but she is very controlling, that's her nature.... very bossy. So I feel so much happier since I moved. She rang just before you came, I said "I can't stop now" she said "Where are you going?" I said "I'm not going anywhere" she still thinks if I say I am going out two days running, "Shouldn't be doing that!". So that's freedom in one way; and also she said when I was struggling to get a lunch or some vegetables, I couldn't do it at all. Kept taking things out of the oven and burnt all my fingers, she used to say to me "You should put your name down for that, it would be ideal for you" and I put my name down and here I am. So that was it."

Interviewer: *How long have you been here?*

Mrs. J.: *Just over eight months. I didn't settle in too quickly, that's just me that, nothing to do with here. I had a whole year to think about was I doing the right thing. Should I move? I loved my flat where I was but it could be so lonely in the winter ... you close your door, you wouldn't see anybody then when you needed to see them. [...]*

Interviewer: *Are you satisfied with the choice that you made coming here?*

Mrs. J.: *Yes I am. I know it's right for me because it took me a good number of years to accept that I couldn't do the things I used to, I can't walk where I used to and all that kind of thing. I could never face up to, if I had another bit of a stroke, it took me so long to rehabilitate myself, with their help of course, the physio to be as good as I am now and my doctor said it's not the medication that's done it, he said "It's you who have done it." Got rid of my calliper, got rid of my sling with my arm and my special shoes they used to make for me. So kind of back to more or less normal and this place keeps you like that. Now, I don't have to rely on, I've got one sister and she's absolutely wonderful, she comes into me nearly every day, she come in yesterday and hovered because that does my back in and she irons and changes the bed, the strenuous things. The thing is she has talked for the past couple of years about maybe when property prices change she might sell up and go back down to Kensworth where her daughter lives. So without her it would have been very difficult in my flat so here I am building up so that if or when she does go I will have somebody to fall back on."*

Mrs. J's RRDM has been embedded in a cumulative and reflexive temporal process – personal ill health over time; an awareness of the extra-care facility before it had opened; anticipating the need to live independently of sibling support; recognition of a feeling of loneliness; reflections on the relocation decision and the time taken to do this. It has also been shaped by relational transactions within her figuration of reference - a volunteer colleague's knowledge of the extra-care setting, her sister's overbearing interventions, and support from medical staff. All these relationships have had a transformative effect in empowering Mrs. J to take deliberate action in deciding to move. This also manifests in her recognition that she has made the right move, is no longer lonely but surrounded by others and has an enhanced sense of autonomy, albeit by acknowledging the increasing limitations in her physical mobility. The balance of power in the sibling relationship has fluctuated over time, with Mrs. J's feelings shifting from oppression and a need to assert her own will, to expressing a sense of empowerment through the satisfaction she has gained in moving. The relations with medical staff have also had a transformative effect through the process of rehabilitation which, together with the physical relocation to extra-care, have contributed to the outcome of enhanced

personal autonomy. In sum, through these relational interdependencies, Mrs. J. has mustered decisional and executorial autonomy (Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2014).

A driving force underpinning the transactional relationships has been the normative intent of striving for independence; this has been a motivating influence behind the actions and reactions of members of Mrs. J's figuration of references. Sibling and volunteer have anticipated problems of dependence, as does Mrs. J herself, yet her progressive recognition of decreasing physical capacities has given way to a recognition of the need for others ... and an acceptance of relative autonomy.

Case Study: Mrs. R-A

Mrs R-A, aged 85 is widowed and has one son. Recognising the impact that driving cessation and widowhood have had on her life, she decides to look for somewhere else to live, with the help of her son.

"I was living in a house in Glan Conwy and I was driving and I stopped driving. I'd passed 80 and I felt the time had come when I shouldn't be driving any longer. But I wasn't on a bus route and I was out of the village... and I became isolated. And I stayed on for a bit after my husband died [...] And then I decided I'd need to move. I've got a son living in Abergele and he said "Well we'll have a look round. Where would you like to live?" I thought I'd like to live on Rhos-on-Sea; I rather liked the sea front there. We didn't find anything that had the same facilities that they had here. And what he was particularly keen on was that ...there was around the clock care. So I get, they call it assisted living. And so we came and had a look and we both liked it and we said "Are there any apartments for sale?" And as it happened there was. And this was one of them that we viewed. And this was the one that I preferred of the three we saw."

When asked if she is satisfied with her decision to move and the choice of accommodation she has made, Mrs. R-A. replies:

"Oh yes, yes, definitely. I'm in the right place."

From a relational perspective, Mrs. R-A's story is one of transactional RRDM. Her decision to move to extra-care forms part of a temporal process, configured by the cumulative effect of life events – widowhood, cessation of driving and an increasing awareness of geographic isolation. Along this journey, the relational exchanges with her son – her primary figuration of reference – play a key role in facilitating her decision and choice of extra-care facility, and are tempered by her son's concern for there to be care support in place, as well as her personal preferences for a seaside location. The decision to move and choice of care setting therefore develop through this interdependency - personal choice combined with kin concern.

In this instance, the RRDM process therefore combines elements of individual and dyadic choice, as well as negotiation and reflexive decision-making. The transactional exchanges empower Mrs. R-A in making a choice of location ("*where would you like to live?*") which transforms to becomes one of mutual endeavour ("*.. so we came and had a look and we both liked it*"). These decisional interdependencies notwithstanding, Mrs. R-A's choice of apartment is distinctly her own ("*...this was the one that I preferred*"). Her son's preference that she should seek a living environment which

offers support is reflective of a concern for her increasing vulnerability, but this does not appear to translate into any shift in power relations or disempowered decision-making for Mrs. R-A. Rather, the relational exchanges are modulated around mutuality and empowerment.

Case Study: Mrs. W

Mrs W., aged 86, has been widowed for fourteen years, is in regular contact with her daughter but has been living by herself, and suffering from some health problems. The cumulative effect of these factors, along with distance from local amenities and a burglary which have increased her sense of vulnerability, have led her to take a decision to move to extra-care.

Interviewer: *So what were the reasons for you coming here then?*

Mrs. W.: *Well I was on my own and I was elderly and had a bad leg and I was lucky to be picked to come. I was one of the first in.*

Interviewer: *Was it your choice to come here particularly or...?*

Mrs. W.: *Oh yes I put my name down before they started building out here. My daughter lives in Betwys and she said, "They're starting to build now" so I was lucky enough to be picked.*

Interviewer: *So was it a discussion you had with your daughter then?*

Mrs. W.: *Yes. I lived in Bryn Glas [...] I lived on the top and there are no shops or anything up there. So I'm marvellous here, I have a meal put for me lunchtime and I've made friends and it's lovely. I've no complaints whatsoever.*

Interviewer: *So how long have you been here then?*

Mrs W.: *Four years.*

Interviewer: *And you're happy with the choice that you made?*

Mrs. W.: *Oh yeah, couldn't have been better. I'm friends with everybody ... And as I say we go down every evening and have a laugh, make our own entertainment.*

Interviewer: *Okay so what were your expectations then before you came here?*

Mrs. W.: *Well there wasn't very much to look forward to really, because I'd lost my husband 14 years ago and I'd been on my own a long time, and I'd been robbed, I had a burglar in my bedroom. So it was a bit nerve-wracking [...] So when I came here it was like coming to a different world wasn't it, and I've made friends.*

In this case, the RRDM process has evolved with time, reflecting Mrs. W's changing life circumstances and the transformative effect that her decision to relocate has had in alleviating her problems. Although the transactional relations with her daughter have been instrumental in her decision-making journey, it has been through Mrs. W's own volition that she has taken the initiative to register on a waiting list. The outcomes of her later life RRDM have empowered her to feel more engaged in a broader web of social relations.

Case Study: Mrs. S

Mrs. S, in her 80s, is widowed with a son and daughter-in-law. Initially resistant to the idea of moving, her RRDM process evolves towards one of acceptance and voluntary decision-making.

Mrs. S.: I didn't think that I would settle in because I'm a very sort of, what can you say, a lone bird, you know even growing up I sort of liked my own company at times. But there are times when you appreciate having another person to laugh with and enjoy the evening entertainments.

Interviewer: So do you find it easy to talk to different people then here?

Mrs. S.: Oh definitely. Yes because they are so...what can I say? Responsive, you know if you get into a conversation with them [...]

Interviewer: Okay. So how did you make the decision to come here then?

Mrs. S.: Through my son and his wife. Because I used to live down the road here. My house is still there and we're hoping somebody is going to buy it [...].

Interviewer: So what prompted the move into here then?

Mrs. S.: My son and his wife, they were very concerned about me. They said that I wasn't sort of looking after myself. I wasn't eating carefully enough.

Interviewer: So were you involved in the decision then to come here or was it just a decision really made by your son?

Mrs. S.: Well I did come into it yes because Ian wrote and he said "Come to the Open Day and I said "No I didn't want to come here." And they said "Well why?" And I said "Well I know lots of people by sight who I've seen here on the Open Day." And I said "Well if I'm going to go there, I felt that I wasn't as bad as what the other people were." But anyway time went on about six weeks and Ian said to me "Mum I'm worried about you." He said "Because you don't ... you seem to be losing the art of speech and that." So I said "Well I can't see what the joy is. If I'm going to have a flat of my own, because I'll be isolated again won't I?" So he said "Not really." He said "Because there's lots of things happening there that will keep you on your toes." So I came. He wrote again and this flat went vacant ... And so they said "Come and have a look at the flat." So I came and had a look at the flat and I thought "Well it's not as much to do as the three bedroom house down there." So I said "Okay." And that was the beginning of it.

Interviewer: Okay and would you say then generally you're happy with the choice that you made to come here?

Mrs. S.: Definitely yes.

Interviewer: And is there anything that particularly comes to mind as to why you think it's a good move you've made here?

Mrs. S.: Companionship and somebody who is alert to the needs of aged people. That young lady that brought you up, she's marvellous. From the accommodation to your bills for your electric and everything it's all seen to. And she's marvellous that girl.

The transactional relationships which have characterised Mrs. S's RRDM have had a transformative effect both in terms of shaping the transitional process and its outcomes, and along the way, the relationships of power between the members of her figuration of reference. The decisional context has initially been quite forcefully engineered by her son, and initially proves disempowering for Mrs. S. who needs to seek reasons not to move, as she tries to negotiate her own RRDM pathway. Here then is an RRDM journey which is temporarily subjugated to wider kin pressures reflecting normative assumptions that changes in later life are necessarily symptomatic of increased vulnerability and loss of independence. With time however, these relational transactions evolve as a "negotiated" and reflexive process, which ultimately empowers Mrs. S. to engage in a broader figuration of social relationships, leading her to recognise other advantages of living in a supported housing environment.

Critical reflections: later life residential relocation decision-making from a relational perspective

The case studies presented here have served to illustrate the potential relevance of a relational ontology in understanding the temporal, processual and transactional elements of residential relocation decision-making in later life. The figurations of reference within which individuals are embedded have shaped this process^[FD12], and in turn, have transformed relationships of power between members of these figurations. Broader normative influences about later life well-being, the quest for independence, and the vilification of dependence have come into play through these figurations forces of (dis)empowerment^[FD13]. The RRDM process then, is not a linear, rationalised and individualised one when viewed through a relational lens.

Each case study also illustrates the interplay of individuals' efforts to maintain, re-affirm or acquiesce to changes in physical and cognitive well-being over time, and to battle with (or against) the broader normative expectations of later life as a time of increased vulnerability and loss of independence. In the narratives provided here, the "battling" process between actors in each figuration of reference has been conciliatory ... where expectations of independence have given way to recognition and acceptance of autonomy ... and its meaning as the functional manifestation of a need for, and importance of interdependent relationships^[FD14]; or equally, as a "battle" of power relations.

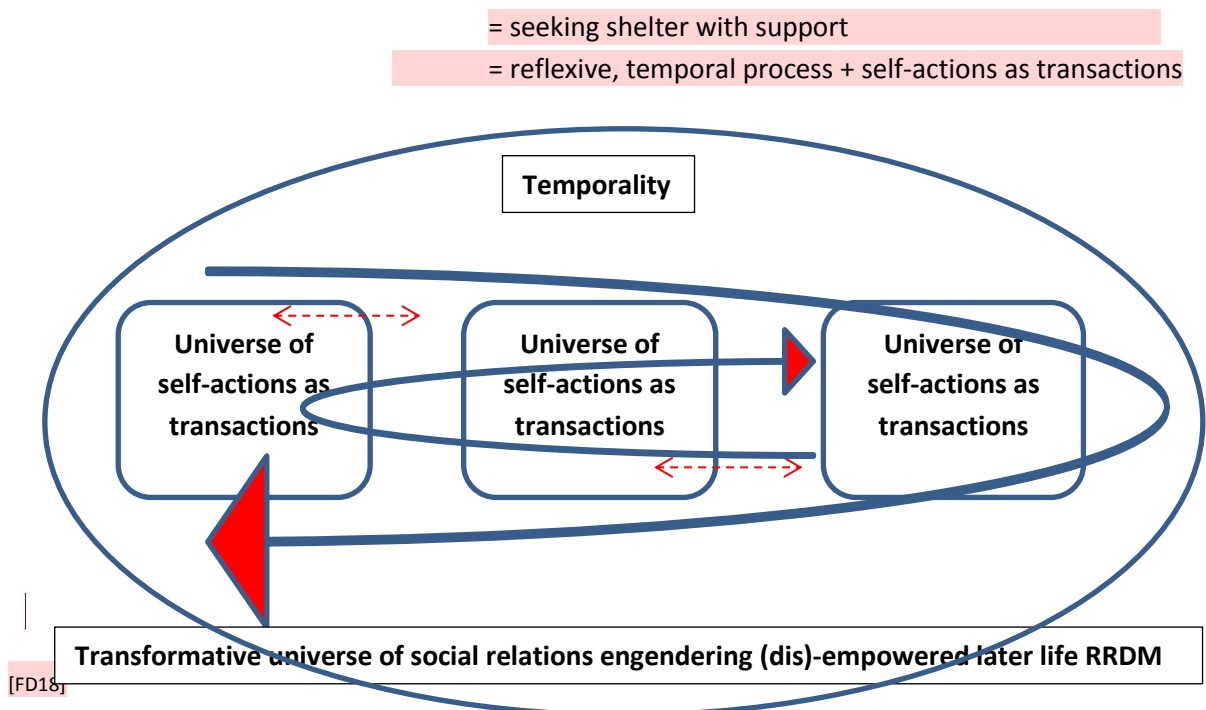
The introduction of a processual dimension to RRDM however, challenges one element of relational sociology – that action cannot exist as self-action. In his seminal work, Emirbayer has traced this notion of self-action to the influence of the substantialist perspective where units of analysis are seen as "substances of various kinds (things, beings, essences) (Emirbayer 1997, 282), imbued with the capacity for independent action. This he argues, is because "individual persons are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded" (Emirbayer 1997, 287). Similarly, as Dépelteau (2008, 60) argues in his elaboration of the principle of trans-action: "Self-action" is related to the notion of agency in voluntaristic and co-deterministic explanations ... " and as such, is viewed as acting under its own powers.

Given these positions, how then, to interpret Mrs. J's RRDM journey which has evolved through the relational transactions with her sister, but also through a voluntaristic, self-initiated decision to actually move? ("I had a whole year to think about was I doing the right thing? Should I move? [...] Interviewer: Are you satisfied with the choice that you made coming here? Mrs.J.: Yes I am. I know it's right for me"). Similarly for Mrs. R-A, her RRDM has been one of mutual endeavour with her son, yet her narrative portrays a choice of apartment which is uniquely her own ("And this was the one that I preferred of the three we saw"). And Mrs. W. had already registered to be considered for an extra-care apartment before her RRDM had become part of a transactional process shaped through her figurations of reference: "Oh yes I put my name down before they started building out here". Is part of her journey not also fashioned through voluntaristic self-action?^[FD15]

Does this interpretation fall away from relational thinking, if we see the residential relocation decision-making process comprising elements of action, existing independently of each figuration of reference? This interpretation would be untenable from a relational perspective if we follow the premise that "specific social actions can be understood only as parts of a chain of transactions" (Dépelteau 2008, 60-61); hence the indistinguishability of agency (social action) from structure (transactions)^[FD16].

A tentative answer to these rhetorical questions is that each case study presented here suggests that parts of the RRDM process (of social action) can be conceptualised as self-action *provided* they are seen as emerging and evolving from the broader spectrum of relational transactions within which they are embedded (^[FD17]Figure 3). Conceived in this way, personal choice or decision-making emerge from the chain of transactional exchanges occurring within an individual's figuration of reference, and the individual recognises a sense of enhanced (empowered) or reduced (disempowered) agency or both, as part of their RRDM journey.

FIGURE 3: Relational conceptualisation of the later life residential relocation decision-making process



Self-action – self-determinism - can therefore be understood as integral to transactions, provided both are understood as part of a broader temporal and hence, processual phenomenon. In other words, temporality provides the interpretive lens through which self- and transaction can be seen to co-exist. This is not to say that agency can be seen as an individual property (Depelteau 2008, 63), but rather, can be understood to emerge, and equally to recede, if conceptualised as part of a temporal process where transactions have a transformative effect. As Maines has argued, in line with Einsteinian principles, time itself can only be conceptualised as relational – “... the observer and the observed are always caught up in a communicative relationship and that reality is perspective-dependent (1987, 305). Time and communication always interpenetrate”. Considering the RRDM as part of a temporal process – seeing time as substance, as a structuring mechanism itself rather than a linear process - therefore addresses the problem of linearity and non-reflexivity which I have argued, characterise the key theoretical perspectives of this phenomenon in environmental gerontology. It also goes some way towards addressing the fundamental criticism advanced by Kasper (2013) that relational sociology still needs to provide a convincing conceptualisation of these relations as *dynamic processes*. My suggestion is that this gap stems from the need to conceptualise social relations as integral to, and transformed through *temporal processes*.

The other challenge that these case study examples raise for a relational approach to later life RRDM is how and where to accommodate the non-relational factors (e.g. changes to health, physical attributes of the living environment), which many of the theories from the field of environmental gerontology would consider as “explanatories” of this process. These factors, it may be argued, exist “beyond” the individual in as much as they do not clearly emanate from transactional relations evolving across figurations. How then to account for them through the lens of a relational ontology? Kasper (2013) again gives some perspective on this in her model of dynamic relations when she identifies the *built environment* as one element of the biophysical context in which, she posits, all social life necessarily occurs (2013, 81). The built environment (for example, someone’s home) could therefore perhaps be conceptualised as she proposes, as part of the “interrelated contexts of biophysical conditions, figurations and habitus” which together contribute to generating different and ever changing “lifestyles”. Similarly, Donati proposes that architecture as a social phenomenon can be interpreted in relational terms if it is “defined as the site of the human intentionality which is expressed in it through a configured use of relational space” (2011, 43). In his terms ... and relevant to RRDM ... a “well-designed” house will facilitate good social relations; conversely, “a house can become simply a dormitory, instead of a place of meeting, dialogue and increased communication [...] (2011, 44). He continues “More generally, a house [...] (is) perceived as being less human if the instrumental imperatives (those of technical functionality) [...] are such as to render the place unsuitable (or less suitable) to that tract of human relations for which we enter such a structure [to live ...]”. Whilst this sociological definition of architecture does help give “place” to the built environment of the home in a relational sense, it is also strongly reminiscent of the deterministic perspective of the “environmental press” theory which would use this architectural incongruence as an explanatory factor of the RRDM process.

Introducing these biophysical elements to a dynamic, processual relational model of RRDM nonetheless still side steps the question of how to accommodate “things” such as an individual’s

physical health conditions or their financial resources, which do not lend themselves easily to a relational interpretation because they are *sui generis* to that person. Dépelteau's explanation here would perhaps be that "individual characteristics are key dimensions of actions and reactions, but actions and reactions are also interdependent ones" (2015, 56). This suggests then that these "things" are integral to, and not distinguishable from their relational context. However, this still begs the question ... what do they do *in* these relations? By analogy, yeast is in the dough, and dough is not dough without it, but we know full well that its contribution is to make dough rise through a chemical process of fermentation. My tentative response would be to see these "things" from a relational perspective as "elements of ammunition" which serve to enable normative-driven "battles" to be waged about what constitutes signs of changing "independence" (for example, increased difficulties in an older person's ability to walk and limited financial resources to adapt a home to this reality), and which can lay the foundations for the onset of the RRDM process.^[FD19]

In conclusion, there is clearly scope for "re-viewing" later life residential relocation decision-making through a relational ontological lens, and from a broader perspective, continuing to explore how this can inform environmental gerontology. To achieve this however, one of the key challenges will be to elaborate in a meaningful way, a place for those "things" which span beyond the individual because they belong to the realm of the inanimate physical environment or to the biological makeup of an individual. Core to an environmental gerontological interpretation would be that these "things" are pivotal in shaping the phenomenon of later life relocation.

References

- Baltes, Paul B., and Margaret Baltes. 1990. "Psychological perspectives on successful aging: The model of selective optimization with compensation." In *Successful aging: Perspectives from the behavioural sciences*, edited by Paul B. Baltes and Margaret, M. Baltes, 1-34. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnes, Marian. 2006. *Caring and Social Justice*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burholt, Vanessa, Paul Nash, Shane Doheny, Christine Dobbs, Ceri Phillips, Judith, E. Phillips, Hannah Marston, Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Sherrill Evans and Sinead O'Mahoney^[c20]. 2010. *Extracare: Meeting the needs of fit or frail older people?* Centre for Innovative Ageing, Swansea, UK: Swansea University.
- Department for Work and Pensions. 2015. *Policy paper. 2010 to 2015 government policy: older people*. Accessed 25 March 2017. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-older-people/2010-to-2015-government-policy-older-people>
- Dépelteau, François. 2015. "Relational sociology, pragmatism, transactions and social fields". *International Review of Sociology* 25 (1): 45-64.
- Dépelteau, François. 2008. "Relational Thinking: A Critique of Co-Deterministic Theories of Structure and Agency." *Sociological Theory* 26 (1): 51-73.
- Donati, Pierpaolo. 2011. *Relational Sociology. A new paradigm for the social sciences*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *What is Sociology?* London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1997. "Manifesto for a relational sociology". *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (2): 281-317.

- Fernandez-Carro, Celia. 2016. "Ageing at home, co-residence or institutionalisation? Preferred care and residential arrangements of older adults in Spain". *Ageing and Society* 36 (3): 586-612.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and punish*. London, UK: Allen Lane.
- Granbom, Marian, Ines Himmelsbach, Maria Haak, Charlotte Lofqvist, Frank Oswald, and Susanne Iwarsson. 2014. "Residential normalcy and environmental experiences of very old people: Changes in residential reasoning over time." *Journal of Aging Studies* 29: 9-19.
- Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Groger, Lisa. 1994. "Decision as process: A conceptual model of black elders' nursing home placement". *Journal of Aging Studies* 8 (1): 77-94.
- Haas, William H., and William J. Serow. 1993. "Amenity retirement migration process: A model and preliminary evidence". *The Gerontologist* 33 (2): 212-220.
- Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Sarah. 2014. "The Meaning of Independence for Older People in Different Residential Settings". *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 69 (3): 419-430.
- Hillcoat-Nallétamby, Sarah and Judith E. Phillips. 2011. "Sociological Ambivalence Revisited". *Sociology* 45 (2): 202-217.
- Kasper, Debbie. 2013. "Advancing Sociology through a Focus on Dynamic Relations." In *Conceptualizing Relational Sociology. Ontological and Theoretical Issues*, edited by Christopher Powell and François Dépelteau, 67-86. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Koss, Catheryn and David J. Ekerdt. 2016. "Residential Reasoning and the Tug of the Fourth Age." *The Gerontologist* 00(00) 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnw010>[c21]
- Lawton, Mortimer P., and L[c22]. Nahemow. 1973. "Ecology and the aging process." In *The psychology of adult development and aging*, edited by Carl Eisdorfer and Mortimer, P. Lawton, 619-674. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Litwak, Eugene and Charles, F. Longino Jr. 1987. "Migration patterns among the elderly: A developmental perspective". *The Gerontologist* 27 (3): 266-272.
- March, James G. 1982. "Theories of choice and making decisions". *Society* 20: 29-39.
- Maines, David R. 1987. "The Significance of Temporality for the Development of Sociological Theory". *The Sociological Quarterly* 28 (3): 303-311.
- Perry, Tam E., Andersen, Troy C., and Daniel B. Kaplan. 2014. "Relocation remembered: perspectives on senior transitions in the living environment". *The Gerontologist* 54 (1): 75-81.
- Pescosolido, Bernice. 1992. "Beyond Rational Choice: The Social Dynamics of How People Seek Help". *American Journal of Sociology* 97 (4): 1096-1138.
- Phillips, Judith, Kristine Ajrouch and Sarah Hillcoat-Nallétamby. 2010. *Key Concepts in Social Gerontology*. London: Sage Publications.
- Reindal, Magnus. 1999. "Independence, dependence, interdependence: Some reflections on the subject and personal autonomy". *Disability and Society* 14 (3): 353-367.
- Rothman, David J. 1971. *The discovery of the asylum*. Boston, MA: Little Brown.
- Shakespeare, Thomas. 2000. "The social relations of care." In *Rethinking Social Policy*, edited by Gail Lewis, Sharon Gewirtz and John Clarke, 52-65. London: Sage.
- Shawler, Celeste, Graham Rowles, and Dallas High. 2001. "Analysis of Key Decision-Making Incidents in the Life of a Nursing Home Resident". *The Gerontologist* 41 (5): 612-622.
- Wiseman, Robert F. and Curtis Roseman. 1979. "A Typology of Elderly Migration Based on the Decision Making Process". *Economic Geography* 55 (4): 324-337.

15/05/2017

- World Health Organisation. 2002. Active Ageing. A Policy Framework. 's policy framework for active ageing. Accessed 25 March 2017. http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/67215/1/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf.

ⁱ Anticipated or unanticipated “push” factors include things like loss of a partner, distance from family members, whilst “pull” factors will include proximity to services or other locational considerations like climate.

ⁱⁱ For a more detailed review, see Perry et al. 2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ Which Kasper defines as “our socially conditioned ways of being in the world” (2013, 77).

^{iv} See for example the World Health Organisation. 2002. For the UK see Department of Work and Pensions. 2015.