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ARTICLE

Meanings of disrupted everyday (im)mobilities in later life: running daily errands before and during the pandemic

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Abstract

This study contributes to an emerging body of research that combines new mobilities and gerontological perspectives. Most previous studies on older adults' mobilities have analysed data collected at a single point in time and there is a need for studies that explore the meanings of movement and non-movement over time, especially in relation to unexpected life events. This work explores the meanings of older adults' abruptly changing everyday (im)mobilities before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. It draws from qualitative interviews conducted with 11 older adults in a Finnish suburb in autumn 2019 and spring 2020, and focuses on grocery shopping, which most of the participants did themselves before the pandemic, but not during it. The findings provide insight into how meanings of everyday (im)mobilities are formed as older individuals (re)negotiate their relationships with their changing places of ageing. The participants' views of their disrupted everyday mobilities were shaped by active person–place engagements. On one hand, the findings highlight that individuals are not at the mercy of their circumstances; they possess agency that can enable maintaining a sense of self and independence even in restricted mobility situations. On the other hand, the findings reveal relationalities that explain why sudden mobility loss often leads to diminished wellbeing. The relational nature of the meanings of (im)mobility implies that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting older adults who face mobility difficulties while ageing in their homes. It is crucial to recognise the diversity of older adults and to support their individual lifestyles.

Keywords: ageing in place; geographical gerontology; immobility; mobilities turn; mobility; new mobilities paradigm

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic led to sudden and prolonged stillness in many people's lives as governments imposed lockdown measures and recommended that people avoid physical contact (Osborne and Meijering 2023). In many cases, these

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recommendations especially targeted older people, as was the case in Finland: 'As a general guideline, persons over 70 years of age must refrain from contact with other persons to the extent possible (quarantine-like conditions)' (Finnish government, 16 March 2020). This article explores older adults' abruptly changing everyday (im)mobilities in the face of the pandemic.

The ability to move outside the home and to engage with the wider community is deemed important for ageing *well* in place (Finlay et al. 2021; Grove 2021; Wiles et al. 2012). Extensive research has shown that a decline in physical mobility in later life is associated with negative consequences, such as loneliness (Dahlberg et al. 2015), poorer wellbeing (Rantakokko et al. 2016) and a reduced sense of independence (Nyberg et al. 2019; Rantakokko et al. 2017). It has thus been well established in research that physical mobility is important for the wellbeing of older individuals, and the opposite is deemed true for immobility.

However, especially within the new mobilities paradigm, studies have suggested that mobility and immobility are not opposites (Ciobanu and Hunter 2017; Grenier et al. 2019; Osborne and Meijering 2023; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). These studies have shown that the mechanisms that link mobility to wellbeing are complex and require a more nuanced understanding of mobility and immobility (Grenier et al. 2019; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). They have revealed that mobility and immobility can have both positive and negative meanings (Osborne and Meijering 2023) and argued that wellbeing is connected to the meanings rather than to the mere extent of (im)mobility (Musselwhite and Haddad 2010; Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist 2009; Siren et al. 2015). The implication is that declining physical mobility does not inevitably lead to decreased wellbeing (Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). However, most previous studies that have explored the meanings of (im)mobilities in later life have analysed data collected at a single point in time. Thus, there is a need for studies that explore the meanings of movement and non-movement over time (Grenier et al. 2019; Meijering 2021), especially in relation to unexpected life events (Lowe et al. 2022). Such knowledge can yield a better understanding of the mechanisms by which meanings of mobility and immobility are formed when habitual mobilities are disrupted.

The present study explores older adults' views of their abruptly changing everyday (im)mobilities before and during the Covid-19 pandemic by focusing on grocery shopping as an empirical example. Grocery shopping is an interesting case since it constitutes a relatively frequent part of people's daily lives, can be organised in many ways and is often considered an instrumental activity devoid of other meanings. This article addresses the following research questions: How did participants organise and reorganise their grocery shopping before and during the Covid-19 outbreak? How are the meanings of everyday (im)mobilities connected to grocery shopping formed in this abruptly changing situation? The study (i) draws from qualitative interviews conducted with 11 older adults in a Finnish suburb in autumn 2019 and spring 2020 and (ii) utilises ideas from geographical gerontology to interpret changing person–place relations (Cutchin 2018). The findings can inform policymakers and service providers regarding how to support older adults who face mobility difficulties in a way that is sensitive to diverse lifestyles and contributes to ageing *well* in place.

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A relational understanding of older adults' everyday (im)mobilities situated in places of ageing

The new mobilities paradigm: meanings of everyday (im)mobilities in later life

This article builds on the new mobilities paradigm that constitutes a mobility turn in the social sciences (Sheller and Urry 2006). Mobilities research has revealed that mobility is much more than just physical functioning or a neutral act of moving from point A to point B. In essence, mobility is central to 'what it is to be in the world' and is imbued with manifold meanings, experiences and emotions (Cresswell 2011, 551; Sheller and Urry 2006). Mobility is about independence, being part of society and enjoying the outside world (Musselwhite and Haddad 2010). However, not all movement is desired, and mobility can also have negative meanings (Parviainen 2021). Similarly, immobility is imbued with versatile meanings, both positive and negative (Osborne and Meijering 2023).

Although the field of mobilities research has grown rapidly over the last two decades, only a small share of these studies have explored the lives of older adults (Gatrell 2017; Grenier et al. 2019). Previous studies have shown that the meanings of mobility and immobility are not fixed or stable; rather, they are subjective, relational and contextual. They are an outcome of a sense-making process by which older individuals interpret their (im)mobilities in relation to technologies, infrastructures, artefacts, other people, societal structures and previous life experiences (Adey 2006; Grenier et al. 2019; Schwanen et al. 2012; Waight and Yin 2021; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011).

The meanings of (im)mobilities are thus connected to people's circumstances. Previous mobilities studies have highlighted that a decline in mobility does not always occur due to a lack of capability; it can also be a desired way to organise daily life (Burnett and Lucas 2010; Grenier et al. 2019; Parkhurst et al. 2014). As such, the decision *not* to actualise one's full potential for mobility can support a sense of independence and wellbeing (Kaufmann 2002; Kellerman 2012; Parkhurst et al. 2014). Even an involuntary decline in mobility does not automatically lead to diminished wellbeing in later life (Ziegler and Schwanen 2011), although it can do so and often does (*e.g.* Nyberg et al. 2019; Rantakokko et al. 2016). It is sometimes possible for an individual facing mobility difficulties to exercise control over which activities to engage in and which to avoid. This control can enable the individual to maintain a sense of autonomy and mastery despite constraints (Siren et al. 2015). Moreover, involuntary physical immobility can have both positive and negative meanings. A recent study that explored older persons' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic showed that forced stillness was perceived both as unwanted withdrawing and as a resource that provided time to reflect on one's life and to take up new, meaningful projects (Osborne and Meijering 2023).

The meanings of (im)mobilities are also conditional on other mobilities, which can compensate for diminished physical mobility. Ziegler and Schwanen (2011) showed that movement through psychological space can enable the maintenance of wellbeing despite an involuntary decline in physical mobility. The authors called this movement the 'mobility of the self'. It involves maintaining a positive attitude and being open to alternative ways to engage with the world when physical mobility becomes restricted (Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). For instance, communicative travel via telephone or the internet enables people to connect even across great distances (Burnett and Lucas 2010;

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Parkhurst et al. 2014). Social relationships can be maintained by sending gifts when physical co-presence is not possible (Ali and Suleman 2017). Places can be revisited through imaginative mobility via memories and photographs (Parkhurst et al. 2014; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). The physical mobility of other people and objects can enable errands to be managed without the need to be physically mobile, as other people can deliver items (Burnett and Lucas 2010). However, people do not have equal opportunities to reorganise their daily lives, as different contexts are associated with unequal resources (Burnett and Lucas 2010). Older individuals also have varying capacities and skills to utilise technologies (Peacock and Pemberton 2019) and to adjust to changing situations (Stjernborg et al. 2015).

In addition, various temporalities shape the meanings of physical mobility and immobility. Schwanen et al. (2012) showed that independence enacted through mobility is produced in relation to different temporal scales. On the one hand, (in)dependence is constructed through constantly shifting assemblages of older individuals, artefacts, infrastructures and other people. On the other hand, a broader temporal perspective is at play, as individuals' sense of independence is also shaped by previous life experiences (Schwanen et al. 2012). Major life transitions, such as retirement or illness, shape everyday (im)mobilities and their meanings (Berg et al. 2014; Lowe et al. 2022). Changing mobility situations can represent a discontinuity between the past and the self and force individuals to reforge their identities over time (Siren et al. 2015; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). Everyday (im)mobilities are also a way of structuring daily life (Berg et al. 2014). While trips to run errands can contribute to a meaningful daily rhythm, moments of stillness can be equally important as they provide rest during daily activities (Berg et al. 2014; Phoenix and Bell 2019; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011).

In summary, the literature review shows that the meanings of mobility and immobility are contingent upon the context as well as on the individual's views, capacities and past experiences. Nonetheless, there is a need for research that addresses the experiences and meanings of movement and non-movement over time (Grenier et al. 2019; Meijering 2021), especially with regard to unexpected life events (Lowe et al. 2022).

Geographical gerontology: studying shifting person–place relationships

Studying everyday (im)mobilities over time requires understanding of the shifting relationships between older individuals and the places where they are ageing. Therefore, this article draws on geographical gerontology, an interdisciplinary field that is particularly concerned with person–place relationships in later life (Cutchin 2018; Skinner et al. 2018). Like other subfields in gerontology, geographical gerontology has commonly treated places as rather static and distinct entities (Andrews et al. 2018; Cutchin 2018; Lewis and Buffel 2020). However, more complex and dynamic accounts of places have started to emerge as relational thinking has entered the field (Andrews et al. 2018; Cutchin 2018).

Adopting a relational perspective involves recognising that all phenomena are 'relationally networked, constituted and defined in multiple ways' and therefore cannot be understood in a vacuum (Andrews 2017, 727). From this perspective, places are seen not as distinct islands but rather as co-constituted through manifold present and past

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connections with other places (Andrews 2017; Andrews et al. 2013; Andrews et al. 2018; Skinner et al. 2015; Wiles 2005). Places are also shaped through an active and mutually transformative relationship between them and people (Cutchin 2018; Wiles 2005). According to Cutchin (2018), this relationship is characterised by instabilities, transitions and negotiations. Instabilities refer to changes in persons and/or places that sometimes occur due to transitions such as retirement or neighbourhood decline. Instabilities and transitions necessitate person–place negotiations that transform both individuals and places (Cutchin 2018). For instance, a longitudinal qualitative study by Lewis and Buffel (2020) showed how older residents constantly renegotiated their attachments to their changing neighbourhood. The participants lived in a neighbourhood that was undergoing population turnover and loss of local services, which led some residents to feel an increasing sense of alienation. However, other residents were involved in activities that aimed to transform their neighbourhood, which fostered their attachment (Lewis and Buffel 2020).

In this article, I utilise the idea of the person–place relationship as an *active* and *ongoing engagement* in which both individuals and places possess agency. This perspective emphasises the constant change through which places and people co-constitute each other (Cutchin 2018).

Data and methods

To explore older adults' changing everyday (im)mobilities, I analysed qualitative interviews with 11 older adults who were ageing in a Finnish suburb. I conducted the interviews at two points in time, autumn 2019 and spring 2020, six to nine months apart. The analysis thus focused on the time preceding the pandemic and the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, which can be understood as a transition period during which the abrupt event was 'intensely experienced' (see Hutchison 2011; Lowe et al. 2022, 3).

The site of research: a Finnish suburb

The study was situated in Finland, where the share of people aged 65 and over was 23.3 per cent in 2022 and is predicted to increase to 27 per cent by 2040 (Official Statistics of Finland n.d.). Like many other countries, Finland has responded to these demographic changes by pursuing an ageing-in-place policy since the 1990s that involves reducing the share of traditional institutional care and prioritising ageing in one's own home or a homelike setting (Anttonen and Karsio 2016).

The interviews were conducted with persons who were ageing in the suburb of Hervanta in the city of Tampere. The city has approximately 250,000 residents, and Hervanta is the largest suburb, with 25,000 residents. Hervanta is a high-density mixed-use suburb with many age-friendly features: abundant green and blue spaces, many public and private services, active volunteer organisations that provide help and activities for older residents, and good pedestrian facilities and public transport connections. These last include fixed-route buses, a tram (since 2021) and dial-a-ride buses for people who have difficulties using regular public transport. A senior discount is available between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. Therefore, in many ways, Hervanta is a good place to age.

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However, there are also accessibility issues since many apartment buildings were built in the 1970s and 1980s and have barriers at their entrances.

First phase: go-along and sit-down interviews in autumn 2019

In autumn 2019, I initially collected data to study the use of dial-a-ride buses in later life (see Luoma-Halkola and Jolanki 2021). I recruited 12 dial-a-ride bus users from 2 local community centres (n = 5) and a shopping centre (n = 2) as well as from existing participants (n = 3) and during bus rides (n = 2). The number of participants was kept small since the aim was to develop an in-depth understanding of how the meanings and opportunities of everyday (im)mobilities are formed in later life as opposed to generalising about the heterogeneous group of older people.

I shared a bus journey with each participant (go-along) and conducted a sit-down interview. I wrote field notes based on the bus rides, and audio-recorded and transcribed the sit-down interviews. This article focuses only on the sit-down interviews. The first part of the interviews focused on the participants' everyday lives in general: what did they usually do during a regular week or day? Where did they go, and how? The second part focused more specifically on the dial-a-ride bus: how often did they use the bus? Where did they travel? When and why did they initially start to use the service? What was the meaning of the bus in their lives? I asked additional questions based on observations from the shared bus rides. The aim was to create an understanding of the participants' everyday lives and the role played by the dial-a-ride bus. The length of the sit-down interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent.

Second phase: telephone interviews in spring 2020

In spring 2020, I conducted telephone interviews with the same participants except for one who dropped out and whose data were therefore excluded from this article. I conducted telephone interviews rather than face-to-face interviews due to the sudden onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews focused on the participants' daily lives during the pandemic: how had their lives changed since the previous interview? Where did they go and what did they do during the week? How did they spend their time and organise their daily activities? The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 110 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The interviews captured different phases of the pandemic in Finland. Some interviews (n = 4) were conducted at the beginning of the outbreak when strict age-specific recommendations regarding physical distancing (quarantine-like conditions) were still effective. Other interviews (n = 7) took place after the government had loosened these recommendations on 19 May 2020. Moreover, in spring 2021, one participant was contacted to gather additional details about her grocery shopping.

Data and participants

The interviews focused on the participants' everyday lives before and during the pandemic. One aspect of daily life that the participants talked about was grocery shopping, which was chosen as the focus of analysis.

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The 11 participants (6 women and 5 men) whose interviews I analysed were 58–82 years of age and lived independently in apartments, either by themselves (n = 7) or with a spouse or sibling (n = 4). They were ageing in place with physical mobility difficulties. Ten participants had a mobility impairment, and eight used assistive devices (a walker or a crutch). One participant had difficulties managing grocery bags on regular buses and therefore used the dial-a-ride bus service.

The participants had access to resources that enabled them to be mobile despite their mobility difficulties. All participants had used the dial-a-ride bus service on a weekly or almost daily basis for many years. The bus provides door-to-door transport for people with mobility restrictions as part of the public transport system. Passengers can receive help entering and exiting the bus, and bus staff even carry shopping bags to passengers' doorsteps if needed. Five participants also used publicly subsidised taxi services available only to persons with functional limitations or disabilities. Some participants (n = 5) could still use regular buses on certain occasions (*e.g.* when they did not have heavy bags), but did so rarely. Moreover, many participants (n = 5) received occasional lifts from members of their social networks (friends, neighbours or daughters/sons). All participants also made trips on foot, as Hervanta is a walkable suburb. None of the participants drove a car, although four had done so in the past; three had lost their driver's licences due to health problems, and one had voluntarily given up driving as he did not need a car. The other participants had made daily trips earlier in their lives mainly by regular public transport, by bicycle and/or by foot.

Analysis

To analyse the meanings of everyday (im)mobilities, I utilised Musselwhite and Haddad's (2010, 2018) model of mobility needs, which is based on qualitative interviews and travel diaries with older persons. According to the model, physical mobility can fulfil three types of need: utilitarian, affective and aesthetic. Utilitarian needs refer to the need to travel from point A to point B for practical, social or recreational purposes – to access services, meet people and participate in events. Affective needs involve psycho-social needs to feel independent, in control and part of society. Aesthetic needs are about enjoying the journey itself, such as enjoying scenery, exploring and discovering. The model thus captures a wide range of motives for everyday travel based on older adults' own views and provides an apt starting point for categorising meanings of mobility in later life. However, I remained open to other possible meanings, especially as the model focused on mobility rather than immobility.

Grocery shopping was analysed as an empirical example of everyday (im)mobilities. The first step of the analysis entailed identifying ways in which the participants organised their grocery shopping before and during the pandemic. The second step involved systematically coding and grouping the data by identifying manifestations of utilitarian, affective and aesthetic needs related to grocery shopping. The analysis revealed that grocery shopping trips can fulfil a need to uphold a meaningful temporal rhythm, which is not covered by Musselwhite and Haddad's (2010, 2018) model. Temporal and aesthetic needs were combined into one category since they seemed to be two sides of the same coin; they reflected a need to get out of the home for spatio-temporal variation. The third step involved assessing *in relation to what* meanings were formed.

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The findings are interpreted in the 'Discussion' section in light of ideas concerning active person–place relationships (Cutchin 2018).

Findings

The findings provide a relational account of the participants' abruptly changing everyday (im)mobilities. Before the pandemic, all participants made their own grocery shopping trips, either by taking a dial-a-ride bus (n = 9) or with help from their social networks (n = 1), except for one participant whose wife took care of the task. Most participants bought their groceries at a local shopping centre that had three grocery stores, a post office, a pharmacy, a bank, cafés, restaurants and other stores. Some participants occasionally walked there as they lived nearby, but they usually took the bus back home.

After the pandemic began, eight participants isolated themselves and outsourced their grocery shopping to their social support networks, including their adult children, friends, neighbours, volunteer organisations or a church. Three participants continued their usual grocery shopping practices. By the time of the interviews, some participants who had initially quarantined had resumed their previous routines when the government loosened the restrictions. The findings thus capture shifting situations as the participants organised and reorganised their daily lives according to their changing circumstances.

Utilitarian needs: missing out on meaningful social connections and pastimes due to the loss of grocery shopping trips

The participants valued their habitual grocery shopping trips as these trips fulfilled multiple practical, social and recreational purposes in their daily lives. In addition to fulfilling the obvious practical need to acquire groceries, the participants' routine trips enabled them to build and maintain social relationships and to spend time in meaningful ways. In contrast, the act of outsourcing grocery shopping was viewed mainly as a mere practicality during the pandemic.

The practical need to acquire groceries was fulfilled by both making the trip to the grocery store and outsourcing the task. Nevertheless, outsourcing the errand was viewed as a less practical solution for three main reasons. First, grocery shopping trips provided the participants with more autonomy to decide where to shop and what to buy; outsourcing the task meant that the participants did not necessarily have a say in where members of their support networks bought groceries, and the participants sometimes provided shopping lists without even knowing the store's selection. Second, the participants' routine trips were a familiar means of buying groceries, whereas outsourcing the task was a new practice that created difficulties. Third, the fulfilment of practical needs was linked to available resources. Physical trips were perceived as practical due to the walkable setting of the suburb and the availability of supportive modes of transport. However, available resources can change over time. One participant mentioned changes that had taken place at the shopping centre during the pandemic:

> 'It's been difficult, as grocery shopping trips have become more demanding because there's no place to rest; you must be on the go all the time, and then you get really tired. … They took benches away' (Interviewee 9, Spring 2020).

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The participants' views of their grocery shopping trips as a practical way to acquire groceries were thus contingent upon the supportiveness of their shifting socio-material setting, in line with previous research (Waight and Yin 2021).

The participants' routine trips also fulfilled social needs. For the participants, the local shopping centre represented a social place that enabled them to engage with their local communities in addition to facilitating their grocery shopping trips. Opportunities to socialise also took place during the dial-a-ride bus trip to the store: 'Let's say I've had a bit of a bad phase in life. But, luckily, I've had the dial-a-ride bus. It's good because there are people who have become my friends that I can talk to, so I don't have to worry about things on my own' (Interviewee 9, Autumn 2019).

The social and recreational significance of the participants' routine trips was more broadly connected to their daily lives. Before the pandemic, some participants already spent considerable time at home and felt lonely. They valued the social aspect of their routine trips, which became even more important during the pandemic when many social activities and events were put on hold or moved online:

Interviewee 6: My daughter has given me a tough talk about staying at home since I am over seventy so that I don't get the coronavirus. … But let's say that since the end of May and during this month, I've gone once a week. I told her that [laughs] I want to go to the store to have some sort of life.

Researcher: Why do you want to go to the store yourself?

Interviewee 6: I get to see people I know. When you watch a virtual church service on YouTube, you can't talk to people before and after the service. There isn't that kind of interaction. But at the store, you see a lot of people you know and [laughs] even though I haven't talked with them during the corona situation that much, but just to see that, oh, that person has stayed healthy and so on. (Spring, 2020)

The quotation shows how the participant interpreted grocery shopping trips in relation to other social activities. When one does not have opportunities to meet people elsewhere, the social significance of seemingly mundane routine trips becomes heightened, and they can represent a way of participating in public life (see also Graham et al. 2020).

In contrast, outsourcing grocery shopping was viewed merely as a necessity to acquire groceries during the pandemic in a safe and socially acceptable manner. It served no recreational purpose and provided very limited opportunities for socialising, as many participants followed a strict protocol when receiving their groceries: 'And then I don't open the door for anybody. I told everyone that they can't come over and that if somebody helps me by bringing me food, they have to leave it at my door' (Interviewee 1, Spring 2020).

In summary, the participants' grocery shopping trips fulfilled a much wider range of needs than outsourcing grocery shopping and were clearly their preferred way to run errands. However, rather than being fixed, these views were contingent on socio-material settings and the overall configuration of the participants'

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daily activities, which can sometimes change abruptly, as the case of the pandemic showed.

Affective needs: negotiating a sense of independence through changing grocery shopping practices

Independence was clearly important for the participants, and grocery shopping represented an act of maintaining independence. Both ways of organising grocery shopping fulfilled this apparent need, although the participants viewed their habitual trips to the grocery store as providing a greater degree of independence, control and freedom than outsourcing the task.

The participants were forced to outsource grocery shopping to stay safe from the virus and to obey their government or loved ones. This involuntary aspect of the situation inevitably shaped their views of outsourcing errands. However, despite the more limited scope for autonomy during the pandemic, the participants were still active agents in making alternative arrangements. One participant noted that she was the one in charge, although home-help services delivered groceries for her (and assisted with other tasks such as cleaning): 'They don't take care of things for me. I've ordered these services myself, ordered myself, and they just provide the service they are ordered to do' (Interviewee 2, Spring 2020). This illustrates that independence is not only about the ability to function without help but also about a sense of mastery and the ability to make decisions (see Plath 2008; Siren et al. 2015). Even though the pandemic forced the participant to opt for home delivery of groceries, she was still in charge of organising the task, fulfilling her need to feel independent.

Interestingly, the participants' routine trips were not only about their sense of independence in the present. They were also about securing independence in the future by representing opportunities to exercise and maintain functional capacity: 'They always say that people over 70 years of age should exercise, so I always walked there, it was something like 15 minutes tops, and then I bought my groceries and took the 10 or 11 o'clock bus back' (Interviewee 4, Spring 2020). The quotation illustrates how the meanings of everyday (im)mobilities are connected to societal discourses and ideals of ageing that emphasise the importance of staying fit and active (see Schwanen and Ziegler 2011).

The participants' views of (im)mobility and (in)dependence were also connected to the resources they required to take care of errands. Before the pandemic, most participants made their grocery shopping trips with a dial-a-ride bus that provided door-to-door transport for persons with mobility restrictions. The participants greatly appreciated the service because it enabled them to continue to run daily errands independently, despite mobility difficulties. This illustrates that independence is not always about self-reliance but can also be constructed in relation to resources such as technologies and services (Luoma-Halkola and Häikiö, 2022; Plath 2008; Schwanen et al. 2012).

More complicated relations between a sense of independence and a sense of dependence were connected to relying on other people when outsourcing errands during the pandemic. Some participants seemed to feel that they needed justification to deserve help and perceived reciprocity as such. Different forms of reciprocity

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included providing money in exchange for help and exchanging help and favours over time:

Researcher: How has it worked when your daughter has gone to the grocery store?
Interviewee 4: I wrote down a list, took a photo and sent her a WhatsApp message and added the picture as an attachment. Then, she brought me stuff, and that's how we did the grocery shopping. But she was working the entire time, so it's not like she was waiting at home to see what I sent her. So she was in a hurry, and I noticed that she bought me coarse ground coffee instead of filter coffee. So she probably picked up things for me in a hurry while doing her own grocery shopping. She has three daughters and a husband, so that's a large family to run, and I live here separately. But I moved from another city many years ago to help when the children were small. … So I've helped them, and now it's the other way around.

The quotation illustrates shifting roles: the participant helped her daughter's family for many years, whereas during the pandemic the participant needed assistance. This reciprocal relationship helped her maintain a sense of independence.

The fulfilment of affective needs of independence and control was related not to mobility and immobility per se but rather to the circumstances and resources needed to manage (im)mobilities. The pandemic was an involuntary situation that forced most participants to rely on help from their support networks, which created a complicated balancing between independence and dependence. This balancing can be seen as a struggle to achieve the ideals of activity and self-reliance promoted by collective discourses and practices in individualistic societies (see Schwanen and Ziegler 2011).

Aesthetic and temporal needs: losing opportunities to enjoy the world outside and to maintain a daily rhythm, when forgoing grocery shopping trips

Before the pandemic, grocery shopping trips provided the participants with a frequent reason to get out and about. Outsourcing the errand during the pandemic thus meant losing opportunities to enjoy the world outside. The participants highly valued their routine trips, and picking up groceries was sometimes not actually about the practical need to acquire groceries but rather an excuse to leave the house:

> I'm at home quite a lot, or actually only at home, so I don't really go anywhere. So this is a lifeline for me to come here [to a shopping centre]. I often come here just to get a carton of milk, just to get away from home. I get to see other people. I've seen enough of the same four walls. (Interviewee 9, Autumn 2019)

The need to get out and about was partly connected to the need to maintain a daily rhythm, which is in line with the findings of previous research (Berg et al. 2014). Before the pandemic, most participants visited a grocery store two to three times a week; some did so almost daily. Many participants appreciated these routine trips as they created a meaningful temporal structure that enabled them to avoid monotony. For this reason,

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one participant whose son did her grocery shopping during the pandemic still joined him for car rides:

Researcher: I'm interested in why you went to the parking lot and didn't wait at home, for example.

Interviewee 3: It was something different, for goodness' sake. I don't like only being at home, and I haven't gone anywhere [during the pandemic]. It was nice to watch people while they walked there. I didn't get bored at all. I like doing things like that. … And then it's completely different than just being at home. I got to ride around, and my son is happy to take me along. He is nice like that. (Spring 2021)

The participant enjoyed shared car rides, illustrating that the journey itself can be enjoyable even when it is undertaken to run daily errands. This also became apparent when the participants talked about their dial-a-ride bus trips, which enabled them to explore their neighbourhood:

> It's nice that the dial-a-ride bus drives around when coming here, so I can see some different views. … There are two dial-a-ride routes in Hervanta: south and north. There's more to see on the south route. And it depends on the order in which they drop people off. I'm one of the first ones who gets dropped off. (Interviewee 2, Autumn 2019)

Some participants liked to watch the scenery from the bus window, but, as the quotation illustrates, this was contingent on the bus route. The quotation also shows that routine travel to run daily errands and discretionary travel to enjoy the world outside can be closely intertwined. In fact, the distinction is often blurred, and many trips represent a hybrid of the two functions (Parkhurst et al. 2014).

Perhaps for obvious reasons, outsourcing errands during the pandemic did not fulfil aesthetic or temporal needs. One participant vividly explained how the lack of daily routines during the pandemic influenced her wellbeing:

> I've noticed that in the beginning [of the pandemic], I was energetic. Then, there was a downwards spiral and, in all honesty, depression. I did not feel like doing anything, not walks, not anything, because I've got used to doing things myself. Usually [before the pandemic], in the morning, I went on a grocery shopping trip, and then I took the dial-a-ride bus home with my stuff. At noon, I ate, and then in the afternoon I went to my daughter's place. And then around four or half past four, I walked home. So this was my daily rhythm. I had a clear daily rhythm, and actually my daughter encouraged me to have it so that things work out well. … Last night, I watched a talk show where these professors said that we need to figure out something else for older people than just have them sit at their homes. I've thought that with a mask and gloves on, I'll start going to the grocery store next week so that I can get some sense of things. (Interviewee 4, Spring 2020)

In summary, the participants' trips to run daily errands were about enjoying the opportunity to leave home, which was connected to a desire for spatio-temporal variation.

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Grocery shopping trips maintained a meaningful balance between mobility and immobility and between being at home and being elsewhere. This spatio-temporal balance created a meaningful structure and rhythm for daily life that was drastically disrupted during the pandemic.

Discussion

The present study explored how the meanings of everyday (im)mobilities are formed as older persons negotiate and renegotiate their relationships with their places of ageing in an abruptly changing situation, namely, the Covid-19 pandemic. The article focused on the case of grocery shopping. Before the pandemic, most participants visited the grocery store themselves. When the pandemic began, most of them quarantined and were forced to rely on their social support networks. In this situation, the participants viewed their disrupted everyday (im)mobilities in a more or less dichotomous manner. Seemingly mundane grocery shopping trips supported their wellbeing in many ways; they provided opportunities to uphold a meaningful daily rhythm, build and maintain social relationships, exercise and enjoy the world outside. In contrast, outsourcing the errand was mainly a practical necessity during the pandemic. All participants who had given up their grocery shopping trips clearly yearned to resume their old routines, and some had already done so at the time of the interviews. The findings revealed that these views were by no means innate to mobility and immobility but rather were the outcome of active person–place engagements.

The findings contribute to an emerging body of research that has combined new mobilities and gerontological perspectives. These studies have suggested that a decline in physical mobility does not inevitably lead to diminished wellbeing. It is sometimes possible to rely on alternative mobilities (*e.g.* virtual mobility or the mobilities of other people) and to maintain a positive attitude even in very difficult situations (Burnett and Lucas 2010; Grenier et al. 2019; Osborne and Meijering 2023; Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). The present study partly supports these ideas, but also highlights critical issues with them. The findings advance understanding of aspects that can explain why abrupt mobility loss often leads to negative consequences and why it may not inevitably do so.

First, the findings show that the participants were *active agents* in negotiating their daily lives and identities in relation to their changing circumstances. During the pandemic, the participants' control over their lives declined, and they were forced to depend on others, which is not easy in an individualistic society that celebrates self-reliance as a sign of successful ageing (Plath 2008; Schwanen and Ziegler 2011). Some participants clearly felt the need to provide justification for deserving help and renegotiated their sense of independence in relation to social norms, which shows how broader societal processes shape person–place relationships at the micro level (see Wiles 2005; Yarker et al. 2023). However, the findings indicate that individuals are not at the mercy of societal forces; the participants were able to maintain their sense of independence by actively shifting their frame of reference, which can be seen as a form of mobility of the self (see Ziegler and Schwanen 2011). It is nevertheless important to note that individuals have varying capacities and resources to adapt to changing mobility situations (Peacock and Pemberton 2019; Stjernborg et al. 2015), and it is crucial to pay attention to such inequalities.

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Second, the findings show that in abruptly changing situations, the present moment is interpreted in relation to the past. The act of outsourcing grocery shopping was thus not evaluated in its own right; rather, it represented a discontinuity between the participants' past and present lives that was viewed negatively. For the participants, the local shopping centre and the dial-a-ride bus represented meaningful social places where they had been building social relationships for several years. These places were therefore essential nodes in their *neighbourhood networks* (see Andrews et al. 2013; Gardner 2011), and the loss of grocery shopping trips represented disconnection from the wider community. However, previous research has indicated that discontinuity of mobility patterns can sometimes represent a welcome change. In Berg et al. (2014), one retired participant enjoyed days without plans and staying at home since her life before retirement had been very busy and stressful. For her, staying put represented freedom from past responsibilities (Berg et al. 2014). The meanings of changing everyday (im)mobilities are thus formed through the relationality between the past and the present, which involves multi-faceted connections with people and places. If mobility decline means being involuntarily disconnected from important social networks, it can be quite difficult to exercise 'mobility of the self' and to 'think positively'. In fact, mobilities studies have been criticised for neglecting negative experiences (Gatrell 2017).

Third, the meanings of daily trips to run errands are connected to individuals' shifting configuration of daily life. The pandemic drastically limited the participants' social lives and disrupted the balance between 'being at home' and 'being elsewhere'. The findings suggest that when an individual spends a great deal of time at home and has few other out-of-home activities, the significance of seemingly mundane grocery shopping trips for wellbeing grows. In such situations, routine trips are an important means of engaging with the wider community, pursuing a meaningful daily rhythm and enjoying the outdoors. In line with this idea, previous research has shown that persons whose lives are otherwise filled with activities and responsibilities may perceive grocery shopping trips as a mere duty or even as a nuisance. For them, home delivery can represent a way to ease daily life (Berg and Henriksson 2020). The meanings of everyday (im)mobilities are thus contingent on the balance between mobility and immobility; too little or too much mobility and activity can impair wellbeing, in line with previous research (Phoenix and Bell 2019).

Fourth, the findings paint a picture of a plurality of meanings. Although the participants mostly viewed their involuntary immobility in negative terms and as the opposite of mobility, this was not entirely the case. For some participants, the act of reorganising their daily life represented mastery, accomplishment and control. Individuals' interpretations of their everyday (im)mobilities can thus result in versatile, fragmented and sometimes even contradictory meanings, in line with the findings of previous research (Osborne and Meijering 2023). Meanings are also not stable but rather are precarious and constantly negotiated (Schwanen et al. 2012).

What does this mean in terms of supporting ageing in place for older adults who face mobility difficulties while ageing in their own homes? Old-age policies in Finland and many other individualistic societies (*e.g.* Australia, the UK and the US) tend to promote self-reliant, active and mobile subject positions for older individuals (Anttonen and Häikiö 2011; Plath 2008; Portacolone 2011; Schwanen and

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Ziegler 2011, 727; Schwanen et al. 2012). However, failure to achieve such collective ideals of ageing can lead to negative consequences. The ethos of self-reliance can make it difficult to ask for help, and being forced to depend on others can impair one's sense of self (Portacolone 2011). The difficulty of accepting help was visible in the present study. The results suggest that policy discourses and practices aimed at supporting ageing in place should be sensitive to diverse ways of ageing and being part of society in later life.

Recently, solutions to deliver services and goods directly to people's homes both digitally and physically have been seen as cost-effective ways to support older adults who face mobility difficulties (Golant 2019; Valokivi et al. 2023). The present study highlights that it is important not to assume that home delivery is fully equivalent to making trips to run daily errands. Daily routine trips are not only about the practical need to perform tasks but can also constitute a meaningful experience and social event, in line with previous research (Alidoust et al. 2019; Kohijoki and Koistinen 2022; Waight and Yin 2021). While home delivery and digital services can fulfil practical needs, they miss the mark with regard to fulfilling social, aesthetic and temporal needs. On the other hand, previous research has shown that, for some older persons, outsourcing is the preferred way to take care of errands (Burnett and Lucas 2010). These findings highlight that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Both sides need to be considered: (i) how to enable older individuals with mobility difficulties to visit local services themselves and (ii) how to deliver services and goods to their homes digitally or physically in an accessible manner.

The unfortunate Covid-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to explore abrupt changes in everyday (im)mobilities in old age. The current study captured only the participants' initial experiences and adaptations at the beginning of the virus outbreak. The study would have benefited from a longer time perspective to trace how the meanings of (im)mobilities developed over time. Studies that explore older persons' views of their mobility and immobility over longer periods are needed, such as the rare study by Stjernborg et al. (2015) that followed the lives of a Swedish couple for three years. Such an approach would provide new insight into the temporal aspects of (im)mobilities, which remain an under-researched area (see also Franke et al. 2020; Lowe et al. 2022). Longitudinal studies can also provide dynamic accounts of how older individuals engage with their places of ageing when they organise their everyday (im)mobilities.

Conclusion

The present study shows that the meanings of everyday (im)mobilities depend on multi-faceted past and present connections between the individual and the place of ageing. This very personal relationship, which is constantly negotiated, has implications for how to support ageing in place for people facing mobility difficulties while ageing at home. For some, local services represent meaningful opportunities for social interaction, and having assisted ways to access services may be the preferred option for taking care of daily errands. For others, home delivery can be a welcome means to ease daily life. The key is to support older adults' autonomy in choosing how to best organise their daily lives in a way that contributes to ageing *well* in place.

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