

REVIEW

The Environments of Ageing: Space, Place and Materiality

Sheila Peace, Policy Press, Bristol, UK, 2022, 410 pp., hbk £80, ISBN 13: 978-1447310556

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This formidably comprehensive and learned text forms part of the ‘Ageing in a Global Context’ series published by Policy Press in conjunction with the British Society for Gerontology. The series aims to influence debates in a rapidly changing research and policy field, by publishing books which ascribe to three objectives: shape debates in the study of ageing; respond to the impact of globalisation; and, finally, develop inter-disciplinary connections in the study of gerontology. Peace adheres well to these daunting objectives.

The overarching aim of the book is to ‘discuss the environments of ageing through the relationships between milieu, behaviour and well-being’ (p. XV), acknowledging that historical perspectives and lifecourse development are fundamental to the ageing experience in later life. Initially a human and social geographer by academic training, Peace argues that environmental geography has become recognised as a valuable domain within social gerontology; emerging as scholars recognised the centrality of the person–environment (P-E) interaction to understanding the complexity of human lives and the environment of the everyday to ageing and later life. The P-E shorthand is used throughout the text to denote relations between people and their environment, around three levels of spatial scale: the *macro* (global), *meso* (national) and *micro* (local).

Peace draws on bracingly diverse literatures (geography, social gerontology, sociology, *etc.*) across ten interconnected chapters: the first three chapters provide a foundation through which to understand and situate the different perspectives regarding P-E interaction in relationship to later life. Chapter One, ‘Person and Environment’, defines and locates the P-E relationship within an understanding of environment which draws upon an appreciation of *space, place and materiality*, and how these coalesce to enable older people to find their environment enabling or disabling. Chapter Two, ‘Theoretical Developments’, considers the role of social and geographical gerontology in providing a framework for a broader environmental gerontology which might, for example, explore the role of climate change in ageing. Chapter Three, ‘The Global Context’, explores how the growing challenges of

population ageing, urbanisation and climate change interact to form a 'big picture' of spatial scale and its impact on the inclusion/exclusion of older people. Chapters Four to Eight move to the meso-micro level of spatial analysis to provide a United Kingdom (UK) focus on research regarding P-E interaction – which Peace describes as 'environmental living'. Chapter Four, 'Environmental Living', explores population ageing within the UK, and outlines issues of everyday living in urban and rural communities. Chapter Five, 'Housing and Later Life', turns to an exploration of *general needs housing* (the dwelling form of over 90% of older people in the UK), focusing on housing development, type and tenure, alongside a discussion of national policy initiatives which have sustained owner occupation in the UK. Chapter Six, 'Housing Histories, Housing Options', discusses the circumstances and decision-making processes of people who have moved to age-related settings or specialised housing, and the issues people encounter when making these deep transitions. This chapter contained moving and insightful interview data from the many research projects Peace has undertaken. Chapter Seven, 'Alternative Environments: Specialised Housing (with Care)', considers alternative environments of specialised housing with care/support, e.g. sheltered housing. Chapter Eight, 'Care Home Living: A Form of Longterm Care', addresses the experience of living within residential and nursing home accommodation. The ontological meaning of home as a repository of acculturation and memory as people grow older underpins Chapters Six and Seven. The final two chapters discuss issues central to the development of the contribution of environmental gerontology to social gerontological research. Chapter Nine, 'Methodological Development', pays close attention to the development of participatory research, inter-disciplinary and innovative forms of measurement, and their implication for policy and practice. The concluding chapter, 'Rethinking the Spatiality of Ageing', acts by way of a conclusion and attempts to reflect on the future theoretical development of Environmental Gerontology.

Appropriately, for a text exploring the interaction of P-E on the ageing self, this felt like a highly personal and reflexive text. Peace suggests her motivation for writing the book was the desire, as a woman in her late sixties, to make a lasting contribution to the field of environmental geography she spent her career helping to develop. The book more than achieves that aim. This is a kaleidoscopic and intensely multi-disciplinary text which will become a standard work for students and researchers in the field of environmental gerontology. It presents a compelling case for placing the P-E interaction at the forefront of debates around housing and later life. It contains a clear and systematic account of the historical/policy development of housing and care settings. I especially valued the research project interview transcriptions dating from the 1970s to 1990s interspersed in the text. The glossary of terms and the bibliography provide a wonderful resource for students and researchers.

Much praise aside, this is a book to be savoured in small sips. It is marinated in layers of source material which felt a little overwhelming; I struggled in places to retain a sense of the overall direction of the work. For a reflexive account, this was also a curiously even-tempered discussion which maintained a cool and detached view of the endless policy churn that Peace has witnessed in her academic career. The book set out convincingly how we have a settled understanding of the

aspirations of the great majority of older people to *age in place*. Public policy, however, has struggled to enact the fundamental and enduring changes needed to facilitate this ambition. The impact of neo-liberalism, marketisation, a global care economy in crisis, austerity, inequality, disinvestment, degraded public services and now COVID-19 have relegated the provision of joined-up care, health and housing to the margins of public policy. These quibbles aside, this is an ambitious book which will justifiably enjoy wide readership.

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