



Different types of out-of-home activities and well-being amongst urban residing old persons with mobility impediments



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ABSTRACT

Independent mobility has been proposed to be a precondition for leading an independent, non-institutionalized life. Supporting independent mobility for the growing senior segment thus has societal importance. The question of how to maintain well-being through mobility in older age is, however, a complex one. The present study explicates this by focusing on how utilitarian and discretionary activities—representing different types out-of-home activities—contribute to well-being, using data from individual interviews with persons aged 80–95, living in Copenhagen, Denmark. We structured the material by the two activity types and found both to contribute to participants' well-being by representing different sides of 'being'. Utilitarian activities were important in maintaining independence and fulfilling basic needs, while discretionary activities were important for the individual existing in relation to the surroundings. Mobility-related well-being appears constructed both through independent separateness and through sense of community. This finding implies that supporting mobility in the sense of mere fulfilment of basic needs may not be enough.

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1. Introduction

The current socio-political discussions emphasize the importance of functionality and independent out-of-home mobility for older persons' well-being, and securing and supporting independent mobility for the growing senior segment has received increasing societal attention. Previous scholarship has shown that mobility and the ability to leave the home are essential aspects of the quality of life of older persons, and often connected to psychological well-being, independence, and the sense of being empowered in old age (e.g. Adler and Rottunda, 2006; Farquhar, 1995; Fonda et al., 2001; Marottoli et al., 1997; Ragland et al., 2005; Schwanen and Bowling, 2012; Spinney and Newbold, 2009; Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011).

The maintenance of independent mobility in old age is in line with the emphasis on Active Ageing (WHO, 2002), the ideal of 'successful ageing' (Rowe and Kahn, 1987), as well as the industrialized countries' efforts to manage welfare costs as the population ages. The ability to leave the home is a means to maintain social and physical activities, and epidemiological research has demonstrated these activities are preconditions for maintaining functional capability and leading an autonomous, non-institutionalised life (Avlund et al., 2004; Everard et al., 2000; Fratiglioni et al., 2004; Mack et al., 1997; Sabin, 1993).

Nevertheless, the question how to maintain well-being through mobility in older age is a complex one (cf. Banister and Bowling, 2004; Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist, 2009). With age, a person's functional abilities as well as social and economic resources and demands change, hence inevitably affecting travel needs, level of mobility, and travel options. Recent scholarship has proposed that the meanings embedded with mobility and activities—rather than maintenance of the same absolute level of mobility—contribute to mobility-related well-being in old age (see Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010; Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist, 2009). That is, certain aspects of mobility and maintaining these may be more important for well-being than the mere maintaining of the level of mobility. Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist (2009) found that the way mobility contributed to well-being was complex, modified by individual compensation strategies and resources, lifestyles and personal meanings related to mobility. Self-perceived control, relative stability in everyday life activities,

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and maintaining one's self-perception and identity were important in terms of mobility-related well-being. Musselwhite and Haddad (2010) studied older persons' mobility needs and distinguished between practical/utilitarian needs, social/affective needs, and esthetic needs and showed that the two latter ones too are important aspects in contributing to well-being.

Neither is independence in relation to mobility a univocal concept. The connotations depend on whether we choose the individual's or the society's perspective. In their paper, Schwanen et al. (2012) pointed out the fuzziness of the conceptual pair of dependence/independence and the way they are socially constructed and influenced by the prevalent values and paradigms. Further, they found that the older persons' views on dependence and independence are influenced by the ageist discourses that treat dependency as undesirable and stigmatizing and follow (and reproduce) the socially constructed ideal of 'good ageing'.

These findings on the meanings of mobility resonate with the recent critical discussions on the concept of 'successful ageing'. Ageing well or successfully has been a debated issue in gerontology (Torres and Hammarström, 2009) and the critics have pointed out the importance of individuals' own perception of good ageing as opposed to a standardized set of criteria for the conditions that need to be met in order to age well.

Finally, mobility in itself is an equivocal concept (see also Metz, 2000). In transportation research and planning, it is often understood as mere locomotion, measured as out-of-home trips or journeys. Mobility, or the ability to carry out these trips, is seen as a resource and a gateway to productivity and accessing goods and services (Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011). In this context, older persons' mobility and its importance for well-being are scarcely understood. In planning, facilitating the physical accessibility of public transportation and other infrastructures has received increasing attention (e.g. Iwarsson et al., 2000; Suen and Sen, 1999; see also Green and Roberts, 2012), but in general, the complexity of maintaining well-being through mobility is poorly reflected in today's planning or transportation supply for seniors. While some researchers have challenged the view of travel as solely derived from the need of reaching a destination (e.g. Mokhtarian and Salomon, 2001; Mokhtarian, 2005; Urry, 2007), mobility as a component in well-being is still predominately understood as instrumental (Kaiser, 2009; Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011), i.e. something giving access to a destination that then produces well-being.

In the present study, we will further explicate this complex relation between mobility and well-being by focusing on how different types of everyday out-of-home activities (namely, utilitarian and discretionary, c.f., Musselwhite and Shergold, 2013) contribute to experienced well-being. A qualitative approach was chosen, and the general characteristics and meanings older persons construct when describing different out-of-home activities were explored.

In this study, we defined mobility not only as activities outside home but also as potential for carrying out these activities (Metz, 2000; Schwanen and Ziegler, 2011). We defined well-being, in the context of the present study, broadly as *subjectively* experienced well-being, comprising different elements, such as affects, life satisfaction, and social engagement (e.g. Diener et al., 1999; Ryff, 1995; see also Bowling and Iliffe, 2006; Reichstadt et al., 2010). In addition, in our ad-hoc understanding of well-being defined for the purposes of the present study, we captured elements from various theories on ageing, namely the idea of general developmental task of acceptance and adjustment in old age from the theories on developmental stages (e.g. Bühler, 1933; Erikson, 1980), and psychological models of adjusting to and coping with change (Baltes and Baltes, 1990; Pearlin and Milkie, 2007).

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Materials

We collected the data for the present study in 11 individual semi-structured interviews with persons aged 80–95 (mean and median age being 87 years), living in Copenhagen, Denmark. Our interest in the present study was in older persons in an urban environment, as an increasing share of the population is living and growing old in cities.

The participants were recruited through ads in local newspapers that are delivered to home free of charge and require no subscription. The participants were not offered payment but they received a small gift of chocolate and tea for their participation (however, this gift was not preannounced). Criteria for recruitment were that the participants were aged 80 and older, and experienced some mobility-related limitations in their daily lives. These criteria were set because we were interested in the experience of having limitations in daily mobility with increasing age. As the limitations were defined as experienced and subjective, the functional status of the participants varied to some degree. However, all of them lived independently and had out-of-home activities. Seven of the participants were women and four were men. All of the women and two of the men lived alone. We did not control for the socio-economic background but our subjective assessment was that they all belonged to the Danish middle class. Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were informed about the research project, and told that their information will be handled with confidentiality, that their identity will not be revealed to anyone outside the research team, and that any possible quotes from their account will be anonymized.

We conducted the semi-structured interviews at the participants' homes. All of the participants were encouraged to talk freely and only few direct questions were addressed to them. However, all the interviews had certain predetermined elements/themes in them (see Table 1). If the different themes were not covered spontaneously in the participants' accounts, the interviewer brought them up. The predetermined themes were the following: (1) *Present activities*: daily travel (how often, which activities, which transportation modes, how important these activities are) and mobility barriers and options (which barriers, which unfulfilled mobility needs there are). (2) *Past activities*: differences in daily travel in the (undefined) past and present (what differences and changes there are, which factors the changes are connected with) (3) *Selective Optimization with Compensation* (Baltes and Baltes, 1990): which activities are selected, how the person adjusts to changes in mobility, and which tools and aids are used in everyday out-of-home activities? (4) *Future*: expectations in terms of future changes and problems in mobility.

Table 1
Overview of the pre-determined elements in interviews, material structuring and analysis.

Interview elements	Analysis I—structuring the material/predetermined classifications	Analysis II—in depth analysis/predetermined dimensions
Present activities	Utilitarian activities	Account's general characteristics
Past activities		Temporality
SOC	Discretionary activities	Mastery
Future		Construction of self

The length of each interview was approximately 2 h, and they were taped and transcribed. We have translated the interview excerpts in the present article from Danish into English. In these, we have indicated the interviewer by 'E' and the interviewees by 'I'. Excerpts are also provided with a pseudonym followed by interviewee's age.

2.2. Analysis methods

We analyzed the material qualitatively. As the first step, we structured the material by identifying two out-of-home activity types in the data, namely 'utilitarian' and 'discretionary' (see Table 1). The two codes were predetermined based on previous findings on mobility and well-being in old age (e.g. Green et al., 2012; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010; Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist, 2009), the scholarly discussion on travel as a derived demand vs. desired activity in itself (e.g. Mokhtarian and Salomon, 2001; Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011), and our hypothesis that that different types of activities contribute to mobility-related well-being in a different way.

We classified activities as 'utilitarian' if they were everyday activities related, for example, to shopping, various errands, including health related errands (visiting a physician, hospital, physiotherapist or similar), or if they were out-of-home travel activities with an everyday character (general descriptions of using public transportation, for example). We classified activities as discretionary if they were related to leisure, social activities, visiting friends or family, outdoor exercise, professional activities, traveling abroad, and being active in associations and clubs, for example. Consumer studies have identified different types of subjective purposes of given trips (e.g. Zukin, 2004; Rintamäki et al., 2006). That is, shopping trips may serve social needs if combined with meeting friends, for example. Also in our material, activities that could be classified as discretionary were sometimes set in the context of a utilitarian activity (typically shopping). In this case, we always classified them as discretionary activities.

In the second step of the analysis, we analyzed the transcripts in more detail (see Table 1). A general social constructionist frame was applied, and we approached the material through language use and construction of meanings. We focused on the characteristics of the individual accounts describing the two types of activities. In the analysis, we investigated first generally on what characterized the accounts of utilitarian and discretionary activities. Second, we investigated more systematically on the following three dimensions: (1) *temporality*—does the interviewee refer to the present, past or future?; (2) *mastery*—how is the activity related to a sense of mastery, that is, individual's perception of being in control of life circumstances (Pearlin et al., 2007), and how does 'mastery' appear in the account?; (3) *construction of the self*—in the participants' accounts, is it possible to identify talk that could be interpreted as construction of subjectivity and the self through mobility and out-of-home activities?

These dimensions were primarily chosen in the light of previous literature on mobility and well-being (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010; Musselwhite and Shergold, 2013; Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist, 2009). Temporality was chosen as it forms the greater frame in which the change takes place. Temporality as a theme was facilitated in the interviews by covering past, present and future. Further, the understanding of well-being we adopted in the present paper implies that change and eventual adaptation would play a part in descriptions of well-being. Mastery and construction of self were chosen as analytical dimensions mainly because maintaining the sense of control, self and autonomy have earlier been found to be essential in the relationship between mobility and well-being (Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist 2009). Sense of mastery, defined in psychological literature (Pearlin et al., 2007) as personal understanding of ability to manage life circumstances and to be in control over one's life is one of the constructs that have been found to be closely connected to personal coping and adjustment to change, and further to well-being (e.g. Ben-Zur, 2009; Pearlin et al., 2007; Ryff and Keyes, 1995). The psychological concept of mastery has been conceptualized as e.g. the experience of 'having control over the things happening to you' and 'not feeling helpless in dealing with the problems of your life' (see Pearlin et al., 2007). Construction of the self was here understood in social constructivist terms, meaning the process by which, through language, the individual constructs the subjectivity and further, the self (e.g. Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). We assumed that accounts on daily mobility implying constructions of subjectivity (especially 'sense of self') would indicate meanings that are associated with subjective well-being.

3. Results

3.1. Utilitarian activities

3.1.1. General characteristics of accounts of utilitarian activities

In general, the participants' accounts of utilitarian activities were characterized by four distinguishable themes. Table 2 presents these characteristics and we describe them in more detail in the following.

The first theme, *tools and aids*, was very prominent in the material, and was characterized by ambivalence. While many of the participants described having had doubts about starting to use a walking stick or a rolling walker, and almost always mentioned the stigmatizing effect of using such aids, the participants also expressed their satisfaction with these aids.

I: Yes, oh yes...There are those daily things and...the only thing that I lack is...I mean I get dizzy and they couldn't tell why that is. And then at the end of it I had to give in to that rolling walker which I hated to even think about.

E: Mm.

I: But I am quite happy about it in daily life because now I can go to places that are close by.

Nelly, 89 years

Many accounts described *conflicts with other road users* and 'struggle for space', including encounters with other road users especially in public transportation but also on sidewalks, cycle paths and roads. The interviewees described their experiences of being invisible to others, others' lack of consideration and the unwritten rules of priority on the streets and when entering public transportation, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

I: (...) I always have my son with me because I can't get the rolling walker up to the bus by myself and all that...but the worst is when there's no space. There are baby pushchairs...and they have priority you see.

E: They have priority?

I: Pushchairs have priority over rolling walkers.

Then we stand there waiting for the next bus and hope there aren't any mothers so we can get onto that.

E: I see.

I: Of course they also have to have the right to be there. And we have the right to be there. Yes, that's (laughs)...But who is the one to stand there and wait? Is it the one with the rolling walker or the one with the pushchair?

Karla, 89 years

Receiving and accepting help from others in daily activities was also a prominent theme in the accounts of utilitarian activities, and it was especially characterized by the difficulty in accepting help from others. Accepting help was not only difficult because the interviewees

Table 2
Overview of the themes characterizing the accounts on utilitarian activities.

Characteristic	Examples of discussed issues
Tools and aids in everyday mobility	Use of rolling walker, walking stick or similar when outside home
Conflicts with other road users and struggle of space	Encounters with other road users, showing consideration, who has priority
Receiving help from others	Asking others for rides
Public transport	Accessibility, frequency of service

wanted to manage independently, but also because they did not want to bother others, especially people they knew. The following excerpt illustrates both of these aspects:

I: And then I get chauffeured a bit, but that's not very often.

E: They help you with some things?

I: Not really...well, if I ask them to. My son is kind enough to visit me. He's very caring.

E: Mm.

I: But he is just so busy...

But uhm...I want to do things myself. That's what I often say to myself. I can manage. When we are going somewhere further away, or to visit someone or it's a special occasion, then they'll pick me up. My grandchildren do that too. When I ask them to.

E: Yes.

I: Sometimes they even come voluntarily.

Ellen, 86 years

Finally, as the participants lived in a city, they often mentioned *public transportation* in connection with utilitarian activities. It was both praised and criticized. The density of the public transportation network, as well as the accessibility and frequency of the recently built metro contributed to satisfactory travel. On the other hand, many experienced ingress to and egress from buses, lack of space for a rolling walker, and lack of seats as difficult.

3.1.2. Temporality, mastery and the self in accounts of utilitarian activities

The accounts of utilitarian activities tended to be descriptions of the present. Past was referred to mostly when describing the change in these activities. We identified many descriptions of change and how the mobility radius for the utilitarian activities gets smaller with age. The interviewees also described how they prioritize and select their activities: with increasing mobility impediments, only necessary and nearby activities are maintained. The following excerpts illustrate the change in daily activities with increasing age and impediments:

I: I think many things have become difficult...Earlier, I could do two to three things a day. And now I can't even do one thing a day. You know, I had a friend and she once said she can do one thing a day and I said "Only one? I can do a lot more" and now I understand what she meant. You know, now I can't do more than one thing in a day any more. It is difficult.

E: And what would that one thing be, for example?

I: The pharmacy, hairdresser, dentist, the hospital where I go at least twice a year because I have diabetes. And to the physician's because of my feet, and ten other things I could mention. And when I renewed my driving licence I had to go to the office and to get my photograph taken and so on and so forth.

Jutte, 81 years

I: And what's, uhm...what I think has happened is that all the limitations begin to occupy more and more so, uhm, so the only things one does outside home are the necessities. Like getting the groceries or visiting the doctor's.

Karla, 89 years

It was clearly important for the interviewees to experience being in control of things when carrying out basic activities. Being in control meant independence, activity and autonomy for them, even if they had notable mobility impediments or the activities as such were limited in their radius or frequency. This is illustrated with the following excerpt:

I: Well, I am just happy to get to Kvickly [the supermarket], uhm, and I do that every day too. I call it therapy.

E: Yes

I: I have to get a pastry for my afternoon coffee and I do that every day. I think it is a sort of therapy...it makes me get up, get dressed and get out, you see.

So I think it's splendid. I'll just stick to that.

(...)

E: Yes... how often do you get out of the apartment usually?

I: Every single day!

E: Really, every day?

I: Every day! I have to get my piece of pastry every day and it's also that when I get to Kvickly they recognize me now because I go every day and buy my pastry.

Keld, 95 years

The sense of having control over life circumstances meant also being useful and visible to others, and being involved in things. The interviewees emphasized the importance of not being dependent on others or being a burden to others. Lack of mastery, i.e., not being in control over the circumstances, was often connected with public transportation. On the contrary, cycling and driving—both individual based modes and both no longer available for many of the interviewees—were associated with mastery.

The construction of subjectivity and the self in the accounts on utilitarian activities was closely connected to being able to maintain independence despite the limitations. On the one hand, we could read construction of active subjectivity through accounts on independent everyday activities (regardless how small in radius), such as Keld's account above. On the other hand, we could identify construction of subjectivity and self in the accounts where ambivalence regarding aids and tools and adjusting the self-perception of oneself (i.e., one's identity) as a user of aids and tools (e.g. a rolling walker) was described.

3.2. Discretionary activities

3.2.1. General characteristics of accounts of discretionary activities

We distinguished four themes in the participants' accounts of their discretionary activities. Table 3 presents these themes, which we then describe in more detail in the following.

Accounts of *social relations and social activities* were the most prominent theme in the descriptions of discretionary activities. These included descriptions of both social relations with friends, family and spouse, and more organized social involvement, such as membership of associations, boards and clubs, organized exercise, and political involvement. Social activities serve well-being by giving a sense of belonging and being useful. Several interviewees mentioned how friends' passing away has had an effect on social activities, and discussed also the effects physical limitations have on social participation:

I: And that's... really sad I can't do many things any more. I can't take part any longer. But that's just...there's nothing to change that (laughs) but it really is a barrier...going and attending an interesting public lecture or just visiting someone. I can't do that.

E: Hmm.

I: Because I am dependent on the rolling walker.

E: Hmm

I: And I am happy...about the walker. Or it's maybe a bit exaggeration to say I am happy with the rolling walker, but without it I couldn't go anywhere.

But...it would be important to me to get to those places I want to visit. Like, I can no longer visit my son because then I would need to get onto a bus.

Karla, 89 years

Leisure and holiday travel was also a distinguishable and frequent theme in the accounts of discretionary activities. Many of the interviewees had traveled a lot and spent vacations at a summerhouse. What characterizes these descriptions is that these activities in large part no longer existed in their lives. Traveling by a plane or a bus was experienced as difficult and inconvenient. While some of the interviewees expressed a wish to still travel, many pointed out that they 'had seen enough of the world' and had no further desire to travel.

Discussion of *earlier life phases* and past working life was the third emerging theme in the accounts of discretionary activities. Working life had an impact on the daily activities at that time, constructed the interviewees' identity and had an important role in defining who they were. Many of the earlier activities were connected to the life phase when the interviewee was still working. Retirement was a transition point that had an impact on the activities too. While the discretionary activities did not necessarily cease post retirement, they changed in nature and were no longer connected with a professional identity and the everyday rhythm created by working life.

Finally, the accounts of discretionary activities were characterized by descriptions of *outdoor activities* and leisure trips, in terms of just getting out of the home. This included especially vivid descriptions of experiencing nature and the beauty of it. This type of activity had ceased for many of the interviewees, and many expressed longing and unfulfilled mobility needs and felt it was difficult to substitute these activities.

Table 3
Overview of the themes characterizing the accounts on discretionary activities

Characteristic	Examples of discussed issues
Social relations and related activities	Family and friends, organized social activities
Leisure and holiday travel	Accounts on trips abroad, to summer residence
Past working life and the related life phase	Professional roles, everyday life before retirement
Leisure activities, in terms of just getting out and experiencing the world outside the home	Esthetics of nature

I: But uhm...I know a person in the same situation as me. She had someone who came and drove her wherever she wanted to go.

E: Yes.

I: And she knew exactly where she wanted to go... In the springtime to see the woods and then again in the fall. That's how it was. And I can really understand it, that's something one can really understand. When it's spring and we wait for the sun...and then in the fall when it's so beautiful and a bit sad at the same time.

It's trips like that I could think of...but like all these bus tours that the church arranges, they always say that they're not recommended for people with physical disabilities.

E: Yes...

I: Yes. And then you know you would be a burden. Others would have to help you. And you try not to ruin the experience for others, right?

Karla, 89 years

3.2.2. Temporality, mastery and the self in accounts of discretionary activities

The accounts of discretionary activities were mostly set in the past and present, with the past being predominant. Accounts in the past tense focused on description of activities, especially of leisure type that had been of great personal importance, while accounts in the present tense tended to be characterized by descriptions of the cessation of past activities, barriers, and a longing for past activities. Change was a prominent theme—including reflections of certain lifestyle activities that it was no longer possible to carry out, descriptions of how physical limitations lead to social limitations, and reflections on adjustment to change. We identified a tendency to cope with change by seeking compensating activities that could be carried out without leaving the home, such as subscribing to paper and magazine, watching TV, or reading books. Having visits at home from friends or family more often, or using the telephone or virtual social media (through the internet) to maintain contact was not mentioned in this context, though. We interpret this type of adjustment to reflect a wish to be connected to the surrounding society rather than an attempt to maintain social connections. The following excerpt illustrates this type of coping:

E: So you go out in the evenings?

I: No, we try to avoid that unless we need to, you know...

E: Unless you need to?

I: It's funny, they have started to have theater plays starting at five o'clock now.

Not that it would matter to us, but it's funny... Or it depends...no, we don't [get out in the evenings]. If we go to the movies, it's always in the afternoon.

Partly because there are other people and it's light outside. And so on.

And you can combine it with a walk. There's no point in walking when it's dark...and we like to combine and get exercise too, you know, because we like to read a lot. I have this old habit from the time I was working that I read newspapers...I subscribe to three papers. 'Politiken', 'Berlingeren' and 'Weekend Avisen'.

E: I see...

I: And then we get several magazines. I do not know if you noticed, but there is a pile of magazines from previous months I haven't yet had time to read.

E: Mm.

I: And of course a lot of it is something you can just skim through, but sometimes there are articles that have a lot of substance. Now my wife has...I mean we have started to subscribe to 'The Economist'. My wife decided to do that. After the chemo, she felt a need to use her head and read something in English. She used to be really, really good at languages.

Knud, 85 years

As to sense of mastery, the accounts indicated the importance of maintaining either independent activities or oneself as a person who is 'not a burden to others'. If and when physical capability allowing independent activities had ceased, there was a tendency to choose inactivity rather than dependency on others. Independent transportation, especially driving a car and often also riding a bicycle were connected to a sense of control in interviewees' accounts.

Activities we labeled as 'discretionary' appeared to be important for interviewees' construction of the self. Being active and in connection with the world could be seen as an important resource in construction of the self. We interpret the frequent mentions on change, and the attempts described to compensate for the decreasing outdoor activities to reflect this.

4. Discussion

The present study examined how different types of everyday out-of-home activities, namely 'utilitarian' and 'discretionary' activities, contribute to experienced well-being. We analyzed individual in-depth interviews conducted with persons aged 80 and older who experienced some mobility limitations in their everyday life.

In general, a striving to maintain the basic premises for living an independent life and existing as an individual characterized the accounts of utilitarian activities. The change in the radius and frequency of utilitarian activities was in general not portrayed as a problem

and the absolute level of mobility and maintaining it in terms of these activities was less important for the participants. Rather, the ability to independently carry out at least a minimum level of the necessary activities, such as grocery shopping and physically getting out of the home, was important. The autonomy in terms of mastery and sense of self was constructed through the ability to manage the daily life regardless how limited the activities might be.

The accounts of discretionary activities dealt markedly with change, and acceptance of and adaptation to change. Not only had the interviewees their own personal ways of dealing with change, but also the different activities and the related personal meanings required varying ways of coping. Sometimes, coping meant limiting the physical radius and adjusting the mobility needs accordingly, and in other times it meant finding compensatory means of maintaining the overt content of the activities. While for utilitarian activities, the maintenance of autonomy—and further well-being—was tied to the internal experience of managing the daily life, for discretionary activities it was more often tied to being autonomous in regard to others (cf., [Schwanen et al., 2012](#)). The accounts were characterized by existence in relation to the outside world, that is, other people, institutions and society. The discretionary activities had an important role in individuals' attempts to be part of society in a meaningful way.

We interpret the way the two types of activity have implications for well-being as representing different sides of 'being': while utilitarian activities are important in order to maintain an independent life and to take care of the basic needs, thus serving the sense of separateness and individual existence, the discretionary activities are important for the individual existing in relation to the surrounding society, thus serving the sense of belonging. The maintenance of different types of everyday activities thus serves different sides of the experienced well-being. Further, maintenance and external support of mobility understood in the sense of mere fulfillment of basic needs (such as grocery shopping), may not be enough.

In the present study, the qualitative approach allowed us to explore and identify different characteristics in everyday activities of older persons with mobility limitations. In the analysis, we emphasized robustness and trustworthiness. We applied a literature-based frame for the analytical categories. When we examined the issues characterizing the two types of activities, we systematically noted the themes and patterns emerging throughout the material and the categorizations were discussed amongst the authors.

The interviews proved to be a rich source of material for understanding the role of different types of activities in sustaining well-being in old age. There are however a number of issues to be considered when generalizing the findings. Our particular interest was in ageing with mobility impediments in a city, and the participants were thus a purposive, small sample. That the interviewees responded to an ad and contacted the researchers, imply that despite mobility impediments, they were at least socially and psychologically rather functional. Thus, their experiences on mobility and well-being may be that of urban, middle-class, rather active, albeit functionality challenged persons'. In addition, the interviewees belong to a cohort that is likely to differ from the younger cohorts of older persons in some aspects. For example, the willingness to accept external help may be greater in the younger cohorts, who are more used to consuming services. Nevertheless, case studies such as this support knowledge accumulation and analytical generalization ([Yin, 1994](#)) and the found characteristics of utilitarian and discretionary activities and their contribution to well-being provide an interesting platform for further investigations and knowledge accumulations in other contexts.

5. Conclusion

So far, the interventions, recommendations, and solutions supporting the independent daily mobility of older persons have predominately targeted the minimum necessities for leading an independent life, that is, daily life without formal external support. The focus has been on the instrumental value of mobility ([Kaiser, 2009](#); [Ziegler and Schwanen, 2011](#)) and thus on issues such as physical accessibility, universal design, and a dense public transportation network. However, we can ask, if these objective criteria for sufficient mobility supply meet the subjective needs. In line with the critical discussion about 'good' or 'successful' ageing ([Torres and Hammarström, 2009](#)), it may well be that mobility-related well-being is defined differently by society and by older persons themselves ([Schwanen and Ziegler, 2011](#); [Schwanen et al., 2012](#)).

While it is important that the policies address the barriers for independent living in old age and support the general mobility and accessibility, our results indicate that it is equally important to address the more discretionary mobility needs and specifically support activities that strengthen older persons' sense of belonging to the community. This conclusion is in line with other recent studies on the area that have pointed out the importance of local community activities as a source of social capital and well-being ([Shergold et al., 2012](#)). As the results of the present study demonstrate, mobility-related well-being in old age appears to be constructed through not only independent separateness but also a sense of community.

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