MOBILITY IN THE TRANSITION TO RETIREMENT – THE INTERTWINING OF EVERYDAY TRANSPORTATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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SUMMARY
To retire from work has potential consequences for patterns of everyday mobility in numerous ways. People born during the 1940s and are now retiring are more heterogeneous than earlier cohorts of retirees. They experience more years with good health after retirement, engage more in leisure-time activities and make more trips and errands. Therefore, their transportation behavior and mobility patterns can be expected to differ from previous generations. This paper is part of a study where the aim is to explore older people’s mobility in connection to the transition from working life to retirement, and their perspectives, resources and experiences in the shaping of their mobility. In this paper, parts of the results are presented, namely how everyday mobility is combined, intertwined, and planned according to the individual project of physical activity. The data constitutes of qualitative interviews with 24 men and women. The results show that being physically active by walking or bicycling is important after retirement and that it often determines where to shop and make errands and when other projects are carried out. Restrictions to combine physical activity and transportations is physical disabilities and illnesses, long distances to shopping- and service facilities and activities as well as poor walking- and bicycling paths. Resources that enables walking and bicycling are time, earlier walking- and bicycle habits and social networks. The study suggests that walking and bicycling are important modes of transportation among the “40s” why there is a potential to promote and increase transportation without the car among present and future retirees.

Key Words: retirement, transportation, mobility, physical activity
INTRODUCTION

Key events and transitions in life influence people’s mobility to a certain extent (Prillwitz, Harms & Lanzendorf, 2007; Verhoeven et al. 2005). Some key events and transitions may restrict one’s mobility (e.g. reduced health) or improve the same (e.g. getting a driver’s license) while other mean changes in peoples demand for transport (e.g. changes in work situation). Key events or transitions also have a big influence on attitudes towards different transportation modes which in turn results in certain behaviors (Van der Waerden, Timmermans & Borgers, 2003).

To retire from work has potential consequences for patterns of everyday mobility in numerous ways; when people no longer have to travel to work on a daily basis a new structure in everyday life can take place with more flexible time use and changes in activity patterns and modes of travel (Hjorthol, Levin & Sirén, 2010; Coughlin, 2009). Further, retirement opens new possibilities for socializing in ways that can have consequences for mobility including engaging in leisure-activities with friends and transporting grandchildren between school and their after-school activities.

The generation who is retiring in present days is in many ways differentiated to earlier generations of pensioners. Those who were born during the 1940 and now retiring are more likely than earlier cohorts to own their own house, have greater material wealth, are more likely to eat out occasionally, exercise, and make radical changes in their lifestyle after retirement such as moving abroad (Gilleard & Higgs, 2000). They also experience more years with good health after retirement, engage more in leisure-time activities and make more trips and errands (Rosenbloom, 2001; Coughlin, 2009; Statistics Sweden, 2006). Throughout their working life, they are more likely than earlier cohorts to have experienced job changes and career mobility as well as geographical mobility. Consequentially, those who are retiring at present times are more heterogeneous than earlier cohorts of retirees. According to this knowledge, their transportation behavior and mobility patterns can be expected to differ from previous generations. What effects does their mobile lifestyle have on everyday transportations? And how are transportations combined with leisure activities and other out-of-home projects in everyday life.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study presented in this paper is part of an ERA NET research project called “Keep Moving: improving the mobility of older persons” and is in cooperation between Austria, The Netherlands and Sweden. The focus of the project is to study two key transition points in people’s lives which are expected to have implications for their everyday mobility; the transition from working life to retirement and the transition from being a two-person household to being a single-person household.

The study presented here has been carried out in Sweden. Its focus is on the transition from working life to retirement whereas the aim is to explore 1) the everyday practices of older persons in adapting their mobility in connection to the transition from working life to retirement, and 2) their perspectives, resources and experiences in the shaping of their mobility.
This paper presents part of the results, namely how everyday mobility is combined, intertwined, and planned according to the individual project of physical activity. What projects are realized by walking or bicycling? What factors restricts and enables people to be physically active in their everyday transportations? And how important is it to come out every day? Physical activities that are not being implemented in transportations such as golfing, gym training etc. are not included in the analysis although the transportation to and from these activities are.

CENTRAL CONCEPTS AN ANALYTIC TOOLS

1. Mobility
In transportation research, mobility has been defined as the ability to travel. In a wider sense, mobility means being able to travel when and where a person wants which implies that he or she is informed about: the options available, how to use different options and to have the ability to use them and to be able to pay for them (Suen & Mitchell, 2000). The interest in this study lies partly in people’s actual movements between places but also in the meaning of these movements. This is based on a differentiation between the concepts of movement and mobility. According to Cresswell (2006), movement describes an act of displacement that allows people, objects, ideas – things, to move between locations, to travel from A to B. Mobility on the other hand, is the space between these two points which is imbued with meaning. Another important aspect of mobility which needs to be added to this study is what lies on each side of A and B, namely how movements and transportation are planned and organized before it takes place— how they are being facilitated. Therefore, the choice and decision not to travel at all is as important to consider in mobility research.

2. Time-geography
Time geography is an approach to understand and describe time and space among individuals in different contexts (Lenntorp, 1998). By using time- geography in a study of older people’s mobility, it gives an opportunity not only to explore how the individual is travelling but also to describe and understand different complex connections between people, places and tools. The time-geographic concepts of projects and restrictions are particularly important in this study. Projects can be defined as the entire series of tasks that are necessary to achieve certain goals (Neutens, Schwanen & Witlox, 2011; Lenntorp, 1998). Various restrictions describes determine what resources that are available or not for an individual to be mobile. Capability restrictions may be the individual’s physical or mental ability, time, economy, location and transportation modes which can directly or indirectly influence people’s movement in time and space. Coupling restrictions deal with relations and connections between people, tools and material artefacts. How are the transportations coordinated with other family members or in relation to public transportation? Authority restrictions are the laws, rules, norms and regulations in our institutional and societal context which implies that specific areas are only accessible to specific people to conduct specific activities at specific times, e.g. if it is possible to bicycle all the way from A to B without having to cross unsafe roads. Hägerstrand (1970) exemplifies that an individual is tied to an island within a fixed radius –a prism which represents an individual’s ability to move within space and time. Inside the walls of the prism the individual is free to travel between the places
she wishes while the places outside the prism are not available. Connections between people, places and tools constitute the form of the prism. By studying the actual movements as well as how people experience their mobility in relation to these movements, each individual’s prism can be visualized.

THE STUDY’S CONTEXT, MATERIALS AND METHODS

3. Informants
The study is based on qualitative interviews with 12 women and 12 men between 61-67 years old. The informants had retired less than a year before the interview took place, although some of them are running their own businesses part-time. They all live in a Swedish normal sized city with approx. 130 000 inhabitants where public transportation is available as well as walking and cycling paths. Sidewalks and bicycling paths are very common in Swedish cities. To walk and bicycle to and from school, work, and leisure activities are common even if cars are the main mode of transport among families with children, middle-aged and older people. People who exercise through walking, Nordic walking (walking with poles) or bicycling is also a common sight in Swedish cities. High traffic safety and relatively clean air allows walking and bicycling even if the larger cities, like in other countries, are experiencing problems with high concentrations of air pollutants. In Sweden, it has also long been a strong wellness culture with a high awareness of the importance of physical activity. Swedes are generally well-informed about factors and behavior that promotes health even if differences occur between socio-economic groups. In connection to retirement, older people are often offered to engage in various forms of gymnastics, water aerobics and gym training from various organizations.

4. Qualitative interviews
The qualitative interviews consisted of themes regarding their everyday transportations. The interview guide was semi-structured with a few questions for each theme and follow up questions depending on the answers of the informant. The interviews took place either in the informants’ home or at a nearby University, whatever suited best for the informants. To be able to listen unhindered the interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

RESULTS

In the analysis, those transportations that combine, intertwine and plan projects according to physical activity has been identified as well as the restrictions and resources that hinder or enable the informants to be physically active. Bicycle and walking are exclusively the modes of transportation that are used by both men and women in the study to carry out the project of physical activity, but roller-skates occurs as well. In their everyday transportations, the importance of being physically among both men and women active includes:

- Exercising by walking and bicycling:
  - The physical activity in itself is superior to the geographical goal and determines how and when other projects will be carried out.
- Maintenance of health, rehabilitation and care of illnesses or physical disabilities.
Having asthma, whiplash or diabetes is a motive to walk or bicycle for transportation as much as possible.

- Being outdoors
  - If no specific activity is planned during the day, some informants’ states that they are trying to at least go out for a walk, to move or to get some daylight.

However, going out every day is not important for all. Some informants mention that now when they have the opportunity to dispose their own time they may just as well stay at home and potter, rest and relax. These informants mean that if they don’t feel like going out, they don’t.

5. Everyday projects
Projects that combine and intertwine physical activity and everyday transportations are identified;

5.1. The project of shopping- and service errands
Three different reasons or possibilities to walk or bicycle for the purpose of shopping or make service errands are identified among the informants.

- Closeness to shopping- and service facilities such as grocery stores, post- and bank offices and the city centre.
  - To walk or bike are considered to be the absolute easiest and most convenient modes transportation. However bicycling is not as popular as walking because bicycling is considered as boring, difficult for those with poor balance and there is a risk that the bicycle will be stolen.

- Shopping- and service errand as secondary importance.
  - The informants can walk long distances to get to their local shop or to a shopping mall outside the city centre, for the main purpose of exercising.

- Difficulties walking or bicycling without a certain goal.
  - Some informants expresses that they rather go by car but are well-aware that they “need to” be physically active. To force themselves to get out of the house they make sure that they have a small errand like recycling old newspapers or buy something that they earlier have forgotten.

5.2. The project of care and support

- Walking the dog or the cat
  - An everyday project which involves physical activity, mostly walking and in a traffic environment.

- Taking care of grandchildren
  - Picking up grandchildren at school or preschool by walking or bicycling.

- Accompanying
  - Walking the dog together with someone or meeting the wife when she is on her way home in the evening.

5.3. The project of cultural activities

- Cinema, museums and concerts
  - Since cultural offerings are centered in the city they are easily reached by walking
6. Restrictions
A number of restrictions have been identified which hinders their ability to combine and intertwine transportation and physical activity and to plan their activities and errands according to their preferred mode of transportation. These restrictions are experienced both by men and women.

- Physical disabilities/illnesses
- Lack of motivation or “laziness”
- Long distances to shopping, service and activities
- Dependency on others
- Commitments
- Combining of errands
- Poor walking- and bicycle paths

The restrictions are on capacity, coupling and authority level. Disabilities such as bad knees or whiplash are usually a capacity restriction when it comes to carrying shopping bags for example. However, bicycling can be an alternative for some informants even thou bicycling is not as popular as walking. Another capacity restriction that they are facing is being lazy or lacking motivation to walk or bike which is usually experienced when they have access to a car. Coupling restrictions are identified in situations when the informants are dependent on others to get out. Taking a walk at night, e.g. walking the dog is reluctantly done alone because they feel unsafe. Loneliness, to not have a friend or relative to visit, lacks their motivation to go somewhere. Coupling restrictions are further found when they have a lot of errands to do at different places around the city or when they are committed to care for others such as grandchildren or their old parents. The authority restrictions that hinders the informants to walk or bicycle are lack of walking- and bicycle paths or when paths are poorly maintained (e.g. not shoveled during winter) and when paths suddenly ends and forces them to cross busy roads.

7. Resources
Despite the restrictions that the informants experience in their everyday mobility, factors that enables them to choose walking or bicycling as an important source of transportation are also highlighted among the informants, both men and women.

- Closeness to shopping, service and activities
- Disposal of their own time
- Earlier walking- and bicycling habits
- Social networks
- Caring of and supporting others
- Available and accessible walking- and bicycle paths
- Pleasant surroundings
- Expensive car parking

The informants describe that everything they need is close to them; shopping- and service facilities, public transportation and culture. Another very important capacity resource is their time. When they no longer have to go to work, they are free to decide when, where and how they want to travel. Those who earlier experienced
shortness of time because a hectic and time-consuming work now have the opportunity to walk or bicycle for transportation which they never had time to before. But, they also have the opportunity to stay at home, not going anywhere which they describe as being enormously pleasant and liberating. If they are used to walk or bicycle to their earlier workplace, walking or bicycling is the most preferred mode of transportation even now as pensioners. Weekly walks together with a group of friends as a social activity is a form of coupling resource for being physically active. Similarly, picking up grandchildren at school or preschool is preferably done by foot or bicycle. The informants describes that there are good walking and bicycling paths throughout the city and several nice surroundings like old buildings, parks and water. These authority resources, together with expensive car parking in the city motivate them to walk most of the time instead of taking the car. Again, bicycling is not as popular as walking but for those who like to bicycle, they rather bicycle than take the car for errands in the city.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that several projects are carried out by combining physical activity with everyday transportations. For many of the informants, physical activity seems to be the most important project in their everyday life. It may be a reflection of the social culture in which they live and have worked in, where wellness and health promoting activities are one of the norms. Because they have now entered a new phase in life, a phase which it is seen to mark entry into old age, the importance of physical activity might become more prominent. Certain physical weaknesses may have made their presence felt for some years which they now have the time to care for and they are keen on staying healthy as long as possible. But health aspects are also appearing in their reasoning about not coming out. "To just be" seems to be just as important to their health as physical activity. A high mobility therefore includes the ability to choose whether to go out or not.

The use of car and public transportation has not been highlighted in this paper more than in comparison to walking and bicycling. But it nevertheless emerges, in contradiction to earlier research, that the car is not always suitable for their needs in their implementation of everyday projects. We know from previous research that the car is the main mode of transportation among older people but the informants in this study argues that it is too complicated to take the car into the city and parking is expensive. The car does not satisfy their needs to come out and be physically active, why they rather walk and bicycle. They might be dependent of the car in the way that they know the car is available if they need it. Mobility is therefore perceived as high because they have the opportunity to choose, but when bicycle and public transportations are the fastest means of transportation that they have, they perceive their mobility as low.

Two key conditions to combine and intertwine transportations and the project of physical activity with other everyday projects are time and proximity. It does not seem particularly important for them to transport themselves quickly. Rather, they are willing to spend time being on the move and being physically active. A 20 minute walk to get to the city is seen by many as a moderate walk and some are even happy to take longer walks. This change is due to the fact that they have retired and are now disposing their own time. Proximity is another important condition that
enables them to walk or bicycle. How would their projects be carried out if they lived far from the city or at the countryside? One guess is that they would not combine transportations and physical activity to the same extent. The results therefore contribute with knowledge about everyday mobility patterns among retirees living in a city or a suburb. Future retirees with similar conditions can therefore be assumed to change their travel patterns when they retire, namely by walking or bicycling more than they previously have.

Restrictions and resources that hinder the informants to be physically active in combination with everyday transportations constitute the frames for the individual timespace prisms. The prisms can take different forms for different individuals although the number of trips per day may be the same. According to the restrictions and resources that have been identified; poor health, lack of access to transportation and dependency on others are likely to limit their timespace prism. A person who only has a bicycle cannot travel as far, at the same amount of time, as a person who has a car. Further, a 20-minute walk to the store and back might be possible for one person while for a person with a whiplash, that 20-minute walk might be impossible to accomplish.

Gender differences have not been discerned in this study. Both men and women emphasizes that they like to walk and bicycle for exercise and/or transportation. Both men and women also reported that they are sometimes lazy and take the car even though they need to take a walk. This is why they make sure they have a specific target for a walk to force themselves to get out. Earlier research shows that men drive more than women while women use other modes for transportation to a greater extent than men. This however cannot be confirmed in this study. If not random, can it be that the differences are clearer among working men and women but flatten out when they retire? Or will see new mobility patterns among future retirees which are related to socio-economic factors more than gender?

CONCLUSION

This paper deals with transport mobility in the transition to retirement and peoples abilities to walk or bicycle as modes of transportation. In recent years the heterogeneity among older people has become increasingly important to consider. This study illuminates both similarities and differences in everyday mobility among newly retired people. The results suggest that the “40s” are not generally a car dependent generation. Rather, walking and bicycling are important modes of transportation among them, especially because they are anxious to maintain good health as they are getting older. Therefore, there is a potential to promote and increase transportations without the car among present and future retirees.
REFERENCES


