

**From the “Mariahilfer Straße” of Újlipótváros to the
“Berlin Wall” of Angyalföld: Ageing in two Gentrifying
Neighbourhoods of Budapest**

By

Csilla Hajnal-Smith

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

Supervisors: Dr. Violetta Zentai
Dr. Alina-Sandra Cucu

Budapest, Hungary

2019

Table of Contents

Abstract	II
Acknowledgements	III
Introduction	4
Chapter One: Locating the neighbourhoods in time and space	8
Chapter Two: The older residents in Újlipótváros	12
2.1 Ilona's story – "This is the Mariahilfer Straße of Budapest"	12
2.2 Judit's story - "Today I'm more or less a normal looking person, but as a child I was ridden with illnesses"	20
2.3 Teci's story - "I'm not an emblematic Újlipótváros resident"	29
Chapter Three: The older residents in Angyalföld	36
3.1 Éva's story - "They erected a Berlin Wall and saying Hello repellents"	36
3.2 Érszébet's story - "A homogeneous social group used to live here"	40
Chapter Four: Processes of continuity and change	44
Conclusion	47
Bibliography	49

Abstract

The thesis takes old age as the investigative lens through which neighbourhood change is observed and interpreted in Budapest. I seek to understand the relationship between ageing and the immediate social environment in two gentrifying neighbourhoods of the city. Furthermore, the thesis aims to identify the different characteristics of the processes of gentrification in the two neighbourhoods of the city, and in Budapest itself. Surprisingly, older people's experiences have largely been neglected in studies of gentrification. Drawing on in-depth life story interviews conducted with five older residents in two neighbourhoods of Budapest, Újlipótváros and Angyalföld, I apply biographical research method to bring individual experiences in the centre of my study. By interrogating these personal narratives, I argue that my informants' experiences of old age are very different, therefore they develop diverse strategies to respond to the changes in their social environments, and to maintain the continuity of their self amidst the vicissitudes of ageing. As far as the processes of gentrification are concerned, I conclude that gentrification are more nuanced and consensual in the two neighbourhoods in focus of the study than some other areas of the city, and and than that of the North American experience most urban theorists describe.

Acknowledgements

For my sister, Bibi, who supported me through my whole academic adventure, and especially during the arduous journey of writing up, while she nourished me with her hearty home cooking.

For my family for their love and support.

For my informants for welcoming me in their homes and their willingness to speak with me openly and at length.

For my supervisor, Dr. Violetta Zentai for her thoughtful suggestions, prompt responses and gentle nudges, and her enthusiasm for the topic of my research.

For my second reader, Dr. Alina-Sandra Cucu for her wholehearted support through times of despair and difficulties.

I would like to express my gratitude to the department of Sociology and Social Anthropology for giving me the opportunity to participate in their academic programme, which challenged me and broaden my vision to an extent I never thought was possible.

Introduction

Age is socially and culturally constructed, and it is the outcome of social interaction. This interaction between an individual and society continually shapes people's identity. Adding to this, the social environment gives the context in which identity is situated and where people encounter self later in life (Hockey and James, 2003). In the postmodern world, individual identities are constructed less in relation to overarching social structures and institutions, hence, there is a great variety of ageing experiences. In this context, place emerges as a significant marker of social identity, because 'where you live has become an increasingly important source of identity construction for individuals' (Butler, 2007, 163). In this study I examine the diversity in ageing, and explore how the environmental context influences this development. After the 'spatial turn' in ageing research, a growing number of studies deal with the dynamics between older people and their immediate social environment. Buffel et al argue that 'the role of the social environment is a dynamic, multi-dimensional, historically and spatially contextualised process that is both shapes and is shaped by the experiences and practices of older people' (Buffel et al, 2012, 14). Cumulative life experiences influence this dynamic relationship between older people and their social environment. As Bond et al observes, '[i]n order to understand people in later life it is necessary to see them in the context of their whole life history with the problems both successfully and unsuccessfully resolved from earlier periods of life', because '[r]ather than growing more alike as we age, we therefore become more individual' (Bond et al, 1993, 29-30). People's personal histories impact on their unique experiences of ageing, and influence the strategies they develop to deal with the vicissitudes of old age. The questions arise: How does the immediate social environment affect older people's life trajectories later in life? How do they sustain their sense of self and belonging amidst a changing social fabric of their gentrifying neighbourhoods?

In my exploration of the issues surrounding these questions, I use biographical research method because it allows me to understand individual action and engagement in society. The

centrality of the individual account is crucial to my study, because the accumulated advantages and disadvantages of an individual's life impact on how they experience old age. By adopting a biographical approach, I gain insight into individuals' perceptions and their understandings of their experiences of ageing. The biographical interviews collected and analysed here are the outcome of a process in which the person constantly moves between past, present and future while they interpret their life, and within this temporal reflexivity the changing nature and persistence of social relations emerge. During the close analysis of the interviews, the following themes came into focus: neighbours, neighbourhood, home, home possessions, habitual routines, and social networks.

Two gentrifying neighbourhoods in Budapest's thirteenth district, Újlipótváros and Angyalföld, provide the place for my investigation into their older residents' experiences of ageing in place. While several of my informants live in close proximity to each other, their lives and everyday experiences diverge a great deal. Place and locality represent the common immediate social living environment, albeit their effects are very different on the older residents.

Examining two gentrifying neighbourhoods of Budapest makes it possible to interrogate the gentrification literature and extend the gentrification discourse not only beyond the Anglo-American context, but beyond that of western Europe, and introduce a post-socialist perspective to the ongoing debate about the distinct sociospatial processes gentrification represents for older residents. By doing so, I join those scholars who call for a greater attention to the cultural and historical variations of gentrification by which the tendency to 'overhegemonise' the phenomenon could be overcome (Clark, 2005; Butler, 2007). Butler argues that 'local cultures clearly have a continued agency in shaping the gentrification process', therefore researchers need to be sensitive to 'the nuances of linguistic, cultural, and national difference and to forms of urban development with which to conceptualise the sociospatial changes that are now occurring in cities across that spatial scale and in different parts of the globe' (Butler, 2007, 164-178).

I don't attempt to give a comprehensive analysis of post-socialist urban changes, but I recognise that not only did the concept of gentrification transcend its meaning that emerged in the 1970s, but analytical insight could be gained by acknowledging the underlying social processes which occurred in central and eastern Europe during the state socialist regimes and since their collapse. Gentrification, as Butler argues, 'needs to be decouple itself from its original association with the deindustrialization of metropolitan centres such as London and its associates with working-class displacement', because the phenomenon 'has now spread into a variety of wider sociocpatial contexts' (Butler, 2007, 162-163).

At the same time, I try to avoid overlooking the similarities between Budapest and some other cities in the West. Regarding the analysis of the socialist urban phenomena, Bodnar identifies three main challenges and most common traps which scholars might encounter: exaggerating the distinctiveness of socialism; ignoring the differences between socialist and capitalist urban logic; and looking at socialist urban issues as 'continuations of patterns always qualitatively different from those of the West' (Bodnar, 2001, 14). Furthermore, she argues that it would be a mistake to assume that the socialist city was the manifestation of 'some absolute political will', and that the state was 'omnipotent' in shaping the socialist urban logic (Bodnar, 2001, 15-16). The socialist housing allocation system is a case in point, where human agency and ingenuity often sidestepped the will and the control of the state authorities, and developed the practice of property swapping. Individual residential decisions made during this period still impact on the lives of the long-term older residents I interviewed. My qualitative study which focuses on individual experiences and personal biographies of older people brings to light the place-based differences of gentrification in the two Budapest neighbourhoods in focus of my investigation.

Looking at the changes to neighbourhood dynamics due to gentrification has been the focus of research interests for a long time, but these discussions have mainly dealt with the mostly younger social groups moving in, or to a lesser degree with those who were forced to

leave the neighbourhood (Brown-Saracino, 2017; Bonnett and Alexander, 2013). Recently several studies called for addressing the need to focus on long-term residents who live in areas of urban change (Lewis, 2017; Jeffery, 2018; Buffel and Philipson, 2019). My study joins this line of research with its interest in older people, which is particularly significant because the gentrification literature tends to ignore the experiences of older residents (Lee et al, 2010). Furthermore, older homeowner residents are more likely to stay in neighbourhoods which undergo changes due to gentrification (Freeman et al, 2016). It is important to assess the advantages and disadvantages of these changes on the lives of older people, and explore their strategies of ageing in place. The research was conducted in the thirteenth district of Budapest, more specifically in two neighbourhoods, Újlipótváros and Angyalföld. The district was selected for its diversity as far as social and neighbourhood characteristics, and housing stocks are concerned. This study is an analysis of the findings which are based on the narrative accounts of older residents' experiences of living in these two neighbourhoods of Budapest.

Chapter One: Locating the neighbourhoods in time and space

The thirteenth district was established in 1938; a further area from the then fifth district, Újlipótváros, was attached to it in 1950. The district is located on the Pest side of the city, running along the river Danube north of the city centre. From the nineteenth century onwards, the northern section of the district, Angyalföld, was the centre of manufacturing industry. After the First World War, new industrial sectors opened their factories in the district, which further contributed to the already cramped living conditions of the factory workers. This neighbourhood had been relatively poor with a predominantly working class population. The massive socialist industrialisation further contributed to the working class characteristics of the neighbourhood by creating a large urban industrial labour force. White-collar workers started to move in after the Second World War, especially from the mid-1950s onwards (Horváth, 2012). Angyalföld has retained its suburban almost rural milieu well into the twentieth century. Today, the gentrification processes occurring in Budapest's inner districts spread outwards towards this formerly suburban area.

Újlipótváros has a long connection to the Jewish population of Budapest. In 1944, many of the yellow-star houses, and the majority of the protected houses - which were designated places of residence for the Jewish population of the city at the time - were located in this neighbourhood. After the Holocaust, those who survived and returned to Budapest came back to live in these houses often along with their new neighbours who in the meantime occupied the empty apartments. From the 1950s onwards these residential blocks of flats had a very mixed social milieu, where middle class and working class residents lived side by side. Due to the system of housing allocation during the state socialist period when Budapest's housing stock was in state ownership, these historical neighbourhoods received an influx of working class residents. The central location of Újlipótváros made it an attractive neighbourhood to live for a long time. Prior to the privatisation of housing and the liberalisation of the property market in the 1990s, residents swapped their social appartements in order to get to a more suitable housing or to

move to a more prestigious neighbourhood. Although this practice was initially actively discouraged by the state, it became so prevalent that by the late 1970s the local councils turned a blind eye to this form of bypassing their social housing allocation system (Horváth, 2012, 121). This was one sign of the loosening of the state's grip on the housing sector and neighbourhood characteristics. At this point it is important to acknowledge that the state socialist system didn't bring about the disappearance of social segregation and social differences between different areas of the city, despite the state's direct intervention and control of the housing and the labour markets (Kovács, 2009, p. 401). Several factors contributed to the growing social polarisation of the different neighbourhoods. After the Second World War, amidst the acute housing shortages, getting an apartment on one of the social housing estates didn't have negative social connotations. During the 1950s and 1960s gaining access to state owned social housing was much easier for middle class families than to blue collar workers (Szelényi, 1987). Towards the second half of the 1970s, this situation changed when the prestige of some of the social housing tenement blocks significantly decreased and people from lower social strata with lower income applied for social housing. The historical neighbourhoods of the city, such as Újlipótváros with its predominantly three and four storey buildings, most of them dating back to the 1920s, had retained its prestigious status for a long time. In the communist period, middle class families became even more common in the historical districts. Although even here upper-middle class families tended to occupy the bigger apartments on the lower floors, while the smaller apartments which faced the inner-courtyard were rented by less affluent families (Kovács, 2009). The districts on the Pest side of the river have in general always been less prestigious than in Buda, the housing was of lower quality. Újlipótváros offered a central location for the amenities of the city while it also had an easy access to work at the neighbouring industrial estates because of the good transport links. Due to disinvestment and lack of maintenance the historical housing stock of the city quickly deteriorated, prompting the moving away of some of the middle class families to better quality of housing in Buda, or the new housing estates from the early 1970s.

The thirteenth district has been an area of gentrification for a considerable time. The first development which contributed to the gentrification processes and the restructuring of the neighbourhoods was the mass privatisation of the state owned housing stock in the early 1990s, which resulted in a significant rent gap in the historical neighbourhoods (Beluszky and Timár, 1992; Hegedüs and Tosics, 1994). The post-socialist transformation brought about the return of self-governance in Budapest, which entailed the decentralisation of power from the city to the districts. Hence the state owned properties were transferred to the local governments together with responsibilities of maintaining them and subsidising the rent of the residents. Prior to the political changes fifty per cent of the Budapest's 800,000 housing stock was state owned public housing. The newly established local governments inherited the disinvested social housing, but they lacked the resources for any form of urban regeneration. They were keen to get rid of this burden, therefore they carried out the privatisation of the public housing sector. This was a 'give-away privatisation' to sitting tenants at a very low price, on average residents paid 15% of the market value for their apartments (Kovács, 2009). Since there was no restriction on reselling the properties many sitting tenants did so and made a significant profit. All of the old residents I talked to bought their social housing at this time, most of them still reside in them.

In the last decade the average property prices in the two neighbourhoods showed significant increase: in Újlipótváros in 2008 property prices cost 249,038 Ft/m², which increased to 839,073Ft/m² by 2019; and in Angyalföld average property prices rose from 314,828 Ft/m² in 2010 to 732,802 Ft/m² in 2019 (Ingatlan Statisztikák). Other changes which are associated with gentrification are also visible in the neighbourhoods in focus. There are an increasing number of coffee shops, wine bars, vegetarian and vegan cafes, and speciality coffee shops, especially in Újlipótváros, serving the lifestyle needs of the incoming creative classes. Increasing number of private properties are rented to students, and the presence of transnationally connected gentrifiers are also significant in the neighbourhood (Smith and Holt, 2007). There is also an

increasing demand for office space and houses with non-residential function to cater for the growing service sector providers in the district.

Furthermore, the thirteenth district has one of the biggest residential housing stocks in Budapest, and it shows the biggest increase in the number of new builds. Given the great variety of residential buildings to choose from, and the good infrastructure and services the district can offer, it is an attractive area for people to move in. At the same time, since the early 1990s, the number of social housing has been gradually decreasing in Budapest, the thirteenth district is still amongst the few districts which has the highest number of social housing stock (Budapest Városfejlesztési Konceptiója. Helyzetelemzés, 2011). These developments are manifested in several unique features, one of them is the neighbourhoods' diverse social and demographic characteristics, and the other is the mixed ownership of the residential housing blocks.

Chapter Two: The older residents in Újlipótváros

In the following section, I tell the stories of three Újlipótváros residents and present their viewpoints of their relationships with their changing neighbourhood. First, two Balzac Street residents' life stories are presented. There are several common traits running through the two women's lives: both of them are in their eighties, and have been living in their apartments for over fifty years; they brought up their children in the apartment they still reside; the Second World War had a significant impact on their lives albeit in very different ways; they are avid readers and keen gardeners; and both of them had a fall and fractured their hips which significantly curtailed their abilities to lead their lives as they did before. The list of similarities stop here, and as Ilona's and Judit's lives unfold in front of us, stark differences become apparent.

2.1 Ilona's story – "This is the Mariahilfer Straße of Budapest"

Ilona is the oldest resident in the Balzac Street apartment block where she lives with her husband in Újlipótváros. The building which dates back to 1900 had seen better days. According to Ilona's account those better days were actually sometimes around the time they moved in their apartment in 1964. In those days, scaffolding still enveloped the house following the recent redecoration of the facade. The building hasn't been renovated since then and it bears witness to Ilona's life and the city's past. It survived the bombings during the war, unlike the buildings next to it and straight opposite, where today two apartment blocks stand of socialist realist style in stark contrast to the houses where Ilona and Judit live.

Ilona's apartment is on the top floor of the three storey building. Her small living quarters overlook the inner courtyard of the house. As I came out of the lift which took me to the top floor, I spotted a short grey haired woman wearing a traditional pinny over her corpulent figure and resting one arm over a walking stick. Ilona had a broad smile on when she welcomed me at the small wooden gate to her apartment. I had the feeling that I was about to enter a rural abode

as we walked through the narrow walkway to her front door which was made even smaller with the abundance of potted plants on both sides.

Ilona was born in a small village in the Great Hungarian Plain in 1933 to a farming family. Her mother and grandmother brought her up on their smallholding. They lived off the land, and her mother substituted the family's income by working as a cook for different, mainly Jewish families in Budapest. Ilona has fond memories of her childhood in the countryside where she was the centre of attention of her mother and grandmother. In the early 1950s, like many other people from rural Hungary, Ilona joined her mother and came up to Budapest to study and later on to find work. She graduated as a midwife in 1956, and after a short stint in a hospital's maternity ward, she found employment at a nursing school in Hűvösvölgy where she worked for forty years.

Upon arrival to Budapest, she moved in with her mother to an elderly Jewish woman's apartment in Dohány Street, where they lodged for free. The woman who was a Holocaust survivor lived on her own and cherished the company Ilona and her mother could offer her. By then Ilona met her future husband and for a while the three of them moved into a tiny flat in Buda's Castle district. This proved to be too small for them, especially because in the meantime Ilona gave birth to their two children. Therefore, they relished the opportunity when due to the planned demolition of the house they lived in at the time, they were offered alternative places of residence. From the very different options on offer, one being a newly built prefabricated apartment block on one of the modern socialist housing estates on the edge of the city, and the other the Balzac Street apartment, they chose the latter. Ilona describes their reasons for choosing the apartments and the people who were her neighbours at the time.

We chose this one because it was close to the Danube and there was Margaret Island for the children. That was the most important thing for us. [...] In 1964 we moved here with my husband, my mother and our two little children. [...] This house used to be a yellow

star house. The house was occupied by Jewish families, and at the time [...] the original owner of the building came back from Auschwitz and he lived here. When we moved here many of the people who occupied the apartments were survivors who came back from Auschwitz or from other camps [...]. There were people living together, like a brother-in-law and sister-in-law, when either the wife or the husband died and they moved back here. So most of the residents were of Jewish background when we came here.

In 1964 Ilona moved into the apartment with her husband, two children and her mother. She explains that at the time the flat was heated with a tiled stove and because until the early 1980s the house didn't have a lift, they had to carry up the wood from the cellar on the stairs. The tiled stove is still in the living room where we sat for the interview, but today they heat it with gas. In 1993 they bought the apartment just like all of my informants during the mass privatisation of the state owned housing stock. According to Ilona's account, in those days, people from other districts flocked to Újlipótváros to buy the state owned properties on a reduced price by making arrangements with some of the sitting tenants.

Ilona's children attended the local primary school but for secondary school they went to the Kilián Grammar School in the north of the district, in a neighbourhood called Angyalföld, where most of the working class children in their area studied. Since her children grew up, Ilona's home is not only the hub of family gatherings and celebrations, but it continued to be the location from where several of her grandchildren went to school. The grandchildren lived with her while they attended grammar school in the neighbourhood or went to university during which time she also cooked for them. She clearly has a strong bond with her children and grandchildren who regularly visit her and her husband. Once a week her son takes them to their allotment in Buda by car.

In Ilona's apartment block all of the flats are privately owned. The composition of neighbours has changed a lot over the decades. While predominantly Jewish residents occupied the flats at the time when Ilona's family moved in, now there are a mixed group of people who own the apartments, several of them don't reside in the building, because many of the properties are bought to let. Ilona explains that three of the bigger apartments on the ground floor are owned by a French man, who rents them out to students. There are several businesses in the building, for example a solicitors' office and a private nursery. The properties change owners quite regularly. One of Ilona's next door neighbours for a number of years was a family from Israel. Couple of years ago they sold the apartment to a young family with two small children, and they moved back to Israel. Her other neighbour is an actor and an artist who bought two apartments and converted them into a living space and an artist studio. Today the house has a mixture of young and old residents.

Ilona cultivates good relationships with her neighbours, and she is confident that they would help her out if she needed it, but she also adds that she doesn't ask for help. Amidst the constant changes of the social fabric of the neighbours, she emphasises the continuity of her relationship with the people in her apartment block.

Ilona still does her shopping in the neighbourhood. Her trips to the local shops are as much a social activity as shopping for necessary items. She does most of her food shopping in the discount store one street up from her home. There are four of these discount stores in the thirteenth district, two of them are in Újlipótváros, and two of them are in Angyalföld. They are run by the local council, and serve low income families who have to be a member of the shop's cooperative to be able to shop there. Ilona used to go there every day, but since her fall she had to reduce her visit to a couple of occasions a week. She explains that every time she goes there she has a coffee and a chat with the shop assistants, who know her well.

I don't really ask for help, because until I can go downstairs I like to do my own shopping. Here in the thirteenth district, there is a discount store run by the local council in the Gergely Győző Street and I always shop there. I don't shop in the big supermarkets, not because I think that they don't have many good products, but because the crowd is alien to me. I can get everything here. It has been here for fifteen years. For vegetables I sometimes go to the Lehel market.

The discount store is clearly a hub of social activity for Ilona. Over the coffee she discusses recipes with the manager of the shop, and places her order for items she needs and which are not stocked in the shop, for example vanilla pods.

The first thing when I go to the shop is that the manager says to me let's have a coffee. In this vicinity everyone goes to that shop as if they were going home. They know all of us, what our good and bad habits are, and what we like to buy. The manager tells me 'Ilona, duck liver has arrived'.

Both 'practical neighbourhood use' and 'symbolic neighbourhood use', to use Blokland's concepts, are manifest in Ilona's narrative (Blokland, 2003). On the practical side, the neighbourhood offers all the services and amenities she needs to maintain her daily activities independently. From a wide selection of shops, and hairdressers to GP surgeries and pharmacists are all in walking distance to her apartment. On the symbolic level, there are two different aspects of the particular characteristics of the neighbourhood and the district which contribute to Ilona's strong sense of belonging to the place. On the one hand, the area is associated with cultural practices and consumption which lends itself to become a place of expression of status.

Pozsonyi Street used to be like the Mariahilfer Straße in Vienna. It is such a great place. There is everything here. From jewellery shops to clothes and food stores, you can find everything. It has been like this in the past and it is like this now. Now it is even better, because there are lots of books. I love reading, I'm an avid reader. There are lots of bookshops, and second hand book stores. There is a gallery where they organise exhibitions. Here is a music school. To me, this neighbourhood is a place that can't be found anywhere else. [...] Everybody is a local patriot, and they are proud of the fact that they live in Újlipótváros. [...] I feel that I'm at home here, but I also feel on the people around me that they feel the same that this is their home. This is a protective wall around us.

The other symbolic use of the neighbourhood which emerges from Ilona's accounts is the working class past of the district. Ilona has a strong nostalgia for the working class community of her apartment block and the area, and appreciates the efforts of the district authorities to preserve the memories of this once dominant social group.

I really love living here, but to be honest I like the whole thirteenth district. I used to like it because it was a factory city, there were lots of working class people and I respect them and like them very much. After the political changes the factories closed down. What I like about it now is that they don't try to forget that historical period, and that there were factories here. The memorial plaques are displayed everywhere where the different factories were. I like this about the thirteenth district that they keep the past, and they build the present. Working class people used to live here in this house as well.

Amidst the changes in her neighbourhood, Ilona's sense of continuity is maintained by commemorative presence of the local past. Like other long-term older residents, she is the

custodian of the rich cultural knowledge of her locality which feeds into her sense of place attachment. Her lifelong memories of her social environment make her an expert of local history. In Ilona's interpretation, the historic communities of her neighbourhood haven't disappeared completely but they maintained an organic presence in the built environment and in the living memories of older residents. This symbolic presence is in stark contrast with what Savage et al observes in one gentrifying neighbourhood of Manchester, where they argue that, 'there is no sense of a past, historic, community that has moral rights on the area: rather the older working-class residents, when they are seen at all, are seen mainly as residues' (Savage et al, 2005, 44). Claiming moral rights on the area for the historic working class community might not be possible in the thirteenth district either, but it is obvious from Ilona's account that she feels that the district has a strong sense of connection to the working class past, which gives her a sense of satisfaction and contentedness.

While several of my informants mentioned the number of senior residents' day centres in the district, it was only Ilona who actually said that she went to these facilities. She used to go there every week to socialise, borrow some books, or have lunch with one of her friends. Since her friend died last year, she hadn't visited the centre.

Clearly, Ilona is deeply embedded in her immediate social environment, which is in accord with her biography and values, and assists her in seeing the continuities of the place. While there are new social groups establishing themselves in Újlipótváros, from students to globally connected individuals, who also symbolically appropriate the neighbourhood in pursuit of their particular interests, long-term residents, like Ilona, don't become alienated. Most of the literature considers the conflicting interests and identity struggles within the diverse social and spatial practices of certain groups in society, in Ilona's story there is no sign of any conflict or struggle (Buffel et al, 2012; Phillipson, 2007). The changes are more nuanced in Újlipótváros than in other gentrifying areas of the city, or in fact than most of the gentrification research suggests.

The neighbourhood offers a unique blend of long established services and stores along with new establishments, such as wine bars, speciality coffee shops and vegan cafes.

2.2 Judit's story - "Today I'm more or less a normal looking person, but as a child

I was ridden with illnesses"

Judit's apartment block is located almost opposite to Ilona's house on the other side of Balzac Street, but unlike Ilona's it is very tidy since it has been redecorated inside out. When I ask Judit about the state of the house, she simply states: "The house maintenance fee is very big. I pay 32,000 Ft per month, which is considered very high. Having said that, with good management almost everything has been renovated here.' The two big rooms in Judit's spacious apartment overlook the street, while the smaller one has French windows and a small balcony opening to the garden of the inner courtyard. The first time I met Judit two corners away from her house, she was walking with the aid of a walking frame to her hairdresser accompanied by her daughter. She ventured out of the confines of her apartment, the first time since her fall during which she fractured her hip two months ago. Judit explains the reasons for her trip to the hairdresser.

It is my weak point. My husband asked me "Don't stop dying your hair." I would be completely grey by now. It stayed with me. People know me like this with brown hair. Shall I be a completely grey old woman? So I try to keep this standard.

Judit was born in 1937 in Budapest into a Jewish family. Her father was taken to a forced labour camp in 1937. In 1944 her mother was deported and later on died in Bergen-Belsen. Judit survived the war in the Red Cross Centre for children in Budapest. She recounts her time there with profound sadness.

It was a very sad place, many children died. [...] Today I'm more or less a normal looking person, but as a child I was ridden with illnesses, and I was painfully thin and scrawny. I was a weak little girl. It's a miracle that I survived.

After the war, Judit was adopted by one of her mother's aunts, who managed to escape deportation, and she didn't have children on her own. Judit considers herself lucky that her aunt and her husband offered her a loving home and family. Although later on her father came back, she decided not to join him when he emigrated with his new wife to Israel. Her adoptive father was a sewing machine mechanic, and her mother stayed at home to look after her. Judit became a doctor and she credits her achievements not a small degree to her adoptive family. For a while she worked in a hospital, after which she was a GP for thirty-five years. She retired at the age of sixty-three in 2001. Not long after her retirement, her husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and Judit devoted all her time to caring for him. Three years ago her husband died since then she lives on her own.

In those days the pensionable age for women was fifty-five, but I worked after retirement until the age of sixty-three. By then I was physically not fit to do the job, carrying the GP's bag and rushing all the time.

She was brought up in the seventh district in central Budapest. When she got married and had her first child they carried on living with her parents until 1965 when she moved with her husband and daughter to a small council flat. Due to the housing allocation system during the state socialist period the only way people could exercise their agency in their housing decisions and initiate their move up on the housing ladder was by swapping their state owned apartments. This was what Judit did when her family needed a bigger apartment. They swapped their small apartment to a bigger one and they paid a lump sum of money for the difference in value. Their new home was spacious enough to accommodate a bigger family. Judit had her second child, her son not long after the move. She describes the practical aspects of the move during the interview: 'In the seventh district we got a bigger flat and we had our son there. I worked in Korányi hospital. We chose this flat so I could pop home to breastfeed my son.'

Her final move happened in 1968, when her adoptive father died. That's when they moved into the Újlipótváros apartment she still occupies. The then state owned Balzac Street property was acquired by trading in Judit's and her parent's flats for it. The move was strongly motivated by Judit's strong sense of responsibility to look after her adoptive mother. Family caring commitment is a recurring theme in Judit's life story narrative. When her father returned from the forced labour camp, Judit declined his offer to emigrate to Israel with him because by then she grown attached to her adoptive parents, and decided that she wouldn't leave them behind but care for them in their old age. The close-knit family moved together to support each other. In the early 1990s they bought the apartment from the Holocaust restitution money they received.

We came here to live when my adoptive father died and my mother couldn't live on her own. She asked us to live together. That's why this apartment is so spacious. That room over there, which is mine, used to be my mother's living quarters. There is a balcony with it. [...] We came by this flat by giving two flats for it. We swapped my mother's flat in Visegrád Street and our flat in Jósika Street. It was one of the best decisions of our life. We moved here in 1968.

Judit clearly has a strong sense of place attachment to her home, because of the 'place biographies' she accumulated over the fifty-one years of her residing there. For Judit her home is imbued with positive memories. The different rooms remind her of the family members who used to live there, and of the family occasions which took place in them. These memories give Judit a sense of connection to her relatives, and support her in maintaining a level of congruence with the place as she ages and loses the ability to perform some of the daily tasks and routines she used to carry out in her apartment. Her place attachment is developed by a combination of physical and autobiographical experiences in her home.

Especially since her fall, her ability to execute the different tasks in her home environment, even with minimal energy, attention and effort gives her a sense of security (Lawton, 1990). Her intimate knowledge of the physical configuration of her home allows her to maintain her independent life and age in place. The concept of ‘physical insideness’ is at play here, by which Rowles describes the ‘sense of [...] being almost physiologically melded into the environment, [that] results from an intimacy with its physical configuration stemming from the rhythm and routine of using the space over the years’ (Rowles, 1984, 146). Her ‘physical insideness’ of the place combined with some minor modifications to the apartment they carried out since her fall, makes it possible for Judit to carry on living in her home, where she has been housebound for the last month.

I came home from the hospital [...] since then I use a walking frame. We rolled up the carpets, and pushed the furniture out of the way to the sides of the rooms. My daughter and her husband worked for days to make the flat more comfortable for me. They put up handlebars in the toilet and the bathroom. I’m much better now. I can adjust to life now.

When Judit welcomed me to her home and opened the door to her apartment, the first thing I noticed was a console table in the hall with the portrait of her late husband being displayed on it. Her husband’s photo is in centre stage in her home as a symbol of her strong connection to him. He is present in many other ways in the apartment, other objects and furniture remind Judit of him. These possessions also signify Judit’s connections to various family members.

Home possessions are important for older people because they are imbued with different meanings by them, and these meanings help them to sustain their identities in old age. Many of the possessions, such as objects given as gifts, are also symbols of others and represent interpersonal and familial associations (Kamptner, 1989). Family photographs are particularly

able to sustain the connection to the relatives portrayed on them (Rowles, 1987). They carry particular significance, because ‘more than any other object in the home, photos serve the purpose of preserving the memory of personal ties’ (Csikszentmihályi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981, 69). Judit clearly has a stronger attachment to her home.

I love this flat. All of us loved it. We enjoyed living here. [...] I love the flat because it is spacious. We did lots of improvements to it, when we received the [Holocaust] restitution payment we spent it on the flat. For the last fifteen years my husband and I remained in the flat.

Routines are unconscious and they are developed by repetitive use of space, and this in return anchors people to their environment. Having lived in one place for a long time allows older people to develop a sense of familiarity and ease in performing routine tasks (Lawton, 1990). A level of comfort and a sense of order derive from familiarity, which also contributes to place attachment. ‘Remaining where one has lived for a long time means living in a home that is ‘known’, in the sense of its providing a family of schemata for comprehension and action’ (Lawton, 1990, 639). Furthermore, since rituals and routines are individually constructed over time, they have a strong relation with one's identity. Judit has her own routine which allows her to maintain her identity even in changing circumstances.

I’m never bored, not for a second. I have never been bored and I’m not bored now. I read. I surf the Internet. I listen to music and the radio. [...] I have a physio who comes twice a week.

Preparing and cooking food also used to be part of Judit's habitual routine she carried out in her home. It helped her to maintain the connection with various members of her family, particularly with her granddaughter.

At the moment I can't do any work. [...] I have a lazy existence. [...] I don't cook myself good home cooked meals. Before the fall, I cooked every single day, because [...] my beloved granddaughter, who at the moment studies abroad, used to have lunch with me for twelve years. As I retired, I waited for her with a hot meal every day. I helped as much as I could. We have a strong bond, we love each other dearly. My daughter brings me some food she prepared at home, and we eat together at weekends. [...] At weekends I eat like a king, and during the week I'm satisfied with what I order. Not home cooking but it's good. It's edible.

Food choices in later life are determined by a lifetime of habits and customs, which shape food practices and give a sense of continuity and familiarity for older people. However, these established food habits go through modifications and transformations often to offset the negative effects of ageing. Studies show that the changes older people make to their food practices are influenced by a number of issues, such as decline in energy level and physical capacity, physiology of ageing, accessibility of shops, life transitions and changes in familial relationships (Drewnowski and Shultz, 2001; Winter Falk et al, 1996; Dean et al, 2008).

Food practices are also closely related to a sense of identity, particularly so in the case of older women who attribute specific meanings to food. Their social and familial relationships are underpinned by their lifetime of regular involvement in food practices (Devine, 2005; Schafer and Schafer, 1989). Sidenvall et al claim that preparing, cooking and enjoying meals with others are seen by older women as preparing a gift (Sidenvall, et al, 2000; Gustafsson et al, 2003). Food

shopping and cooking for the household are typically women's tasks, and women are culturally socialised to perform these activities as part of their daily routine (Douglas, 1984; Fieldhouse, 1995; Warde, 1997). The ability to cook 'proper meals' in their home was the fundamental role for women as wives and mothers (Charles and Kerr, 1988; Murcott et al, 1983). The social construction of gender is manifest in food related tasks and practices when food provision and procurement are still seen as predominantly women's role. The gendered nature of these practices makes it pertinent for older women to be able to carry out these tasks independently as long as they can, because depending on others with food shopping and cooking could be interpreted as giving up one's individual freedom (Sidenvall, 2001).

Relinquishing control over her cooking and food shopping curtails Judit's freedom and independence about what to eat, and what to buy. These examples show that food practices, such as cooking and food shopping which she used to do in the neighbourhood, had several positive effects on Judit from giving her independence, and a sense of identity, connecting her to the neighbourhood, to contributing to her wellbeing. Studies by Sidenvall et al and Föbker and Grotz also argue that older women's wellbeing and managing food procurement are closely linked; these practices also contribute to maintaining independence in later life (Sidenvall et al, 2000; Föbker and Grotz, 2006).

When Judit describes her relationship to her neighbours and to her immediate social environment she emphasises the continuities: 'To my mind the character of the neighbourhood hasn't changed. It's safe. One doesn't have to be worried when coming home late at night from the theatre.' Familiarity and continuity strengthen her sense of belonging.

However, probing her further about Újlipótváros, she admits to significant transformations: 'There are huge changes as far as local shops and restaurants are concerned. Before my fall happened, I did the shopping locally and these days just around the flat there are three big supermarkets. They are very close, only three corners away. There are more pharmacists, several of them opened recently. There are more restaurants, but the

neighbourhood is not noisy. As the city changed the neighbourhood changed with it.’ Even the incidents of crime and the safety of the neighbourhood are put into different perspective when she considers her experiences of the place, and the changing practices: ‘There were a couple [incidents] in the past, but none recently. Since we lock the front gates there is no problem.’

Judit’s everyday engagement of the neighbourhood has been drastically reduced since her fall a couple of months ago. The first time she ventured out of the confines of her apartment was to the hairdresser and her daughter accompanied her on this occasion. She is very optimistic about overcoming the curtailment of her mobility in the future. In her process of recovery, she is assisted by her immediate family who are in daily contact with her. Family support is fundamental in her everyday life.

The way Judit recounts her engagement with the neighbourhood is markedly different from that of Ilona’s description. While Ilona’s narrative is full of intimate details of her everyday practices and personal connections in Újlipótváros, Judit describes her use of the environment in broad brush strokes. She talks more about her sense of belonging to her home than to the neighbourhood. Currently, she doesn’t have much of a ‘practical neighbourhood use’, but even before her accident she wasn’t so intimately connected to her environment as some of my other participants. This is partly because she worked in another district and she commuted every day, which didn’t allow her to engage with her neighbourhood on a daily basis. After retirement, her relationship with her local environs didn’t become stronger because due to her husband’s illness and the rapid decline of his health she became his full-time carer.

When my husband’s condition got worse, and he couldn’t speak anymore, I read out loud for him, I took him for walks, and I washed him. This was my main duty. It was very important that I had time for him.

When Judit talks about the neighbourhood she discusses its symbolic aspect. This dimension of an environment is just as important as its practical aspects, but in Judit's narrative it gives the impression of her detachment from the place.

This district is considered an elite district. When we came here it wasn't so much like that, but compared to other districts it was. If you compare it to the eighth or the seventh district, I used to work in the seventh district, I know that [district] well, [...] compared to them, it has always been a good district.

Blokland refers to the concept of 'symbolic neighbourhood use', which reflects how places become associated with certain status (Blokland, 2003). Particular groups can appropriate places in order to express their social, cultural or political interests (Philipson, 2007).

Judit's apartment block, just like Ilona's on the other side of Balzac Street, used to have several Holocaust survivors as residents at the time when she moved in the apartment with her family. Judit is proud of the good relationships she cultivated with her neighbours over the decades, although she admits that the composition of the residents changed a great deal, and today she doesn't know many of them. What is striking though is the number of businesses, rented out properties and foreign owners in the house.

The house is full of solicitors' offices. There are barely any neighbours now.

There are a lot of flats which are rented out. I don't even know who is renting them. When new neighbours arrive, we still say hello to each other, what's more if I asked them they would help. When my leg was broken they came and said that if I needed anything I should let them know, they would help. I created the basis for these neighbourly relations because when I was still practicing as a GP and the neighbours asked I always helped them. Some of them didn't forget this. There are a few like this. Very few. I don't even

know who lives next door to me. [...] Opposite to me one of the neighbours moved here from Israel.

In her account Judit acknowledges the rapidly changing neighbourhood, but at the same time she clearly seeks a sense of continuity by connecting her past and present experiences. She states that her relationship with her neighbours is influenced by assisting them in her professional capacity as a doctor at times of need, but it was probably more than twenty years ago. Many of her current neighbours wouldn't be able to reciprocate her help, because at the time they weren't living in the house. For Judit referring to her old practice of helping out assists her in creating a sense of neighbourliness in the new social environment. Similarly to Ilona, Judit is confident in her neighbours' willingness to help her out in case she needed it, but their capacity and willingness to help have never been tested because her first call for assistance is her immediate family.

Judit's narrative shows an example of ageing in place where the activities she carries out independently are increasingly confined to her home. Furthermore, her apartment and her possessions in it sustain her sense of identity. Her neighbourhood doesn't carry such a significant importance to her as her home does, or as it does for Ilona. She registers the changes around her, but her self-contained world is comprised of her family, friends and home.

2.3 Teci's story - "I'm not an emblematic Újlipótváros resident"

Teci was the first person I interviewed for the project and she was one of the most forthcoming, she declared that she didn't have anything to hide. She has an air of confidence and self-assurance about her which is usually characteristic of people of certain class backgrounds and financial status. Teci's narrative of her life is a rags to riches story, where she takes pride in her professional and financial success. At the beginning of the interview she states that 'For a good quality life, pensioners cannot rely only on their pensions.' She explains that she has a portfolio

of houses which she rents out to substitute her pension. Eight years ago she and her husband moved from Debrecen to Újlipótváros to live in one of the few newly built apartment blocks of the historic neighbourhood where five years earlier she had bought a property for investment. The modern unintrusive grey building which was built in the early 2000s is sandwiched between two historical houses, and has an inner courtyard, underground parking, and a communal gym.

Teci is my only informant who is not a long-term resident in the district or in fact in Budapest. I included her story in my study because it highlights the significant differences of attachment to the neighbourhood between short-term and long-term residents. Secondly, she is a perfect example of an older gentrifier since the assets she accumulated over a lifetime allowed her not only to be the beneficiary of gentrification in the neighbourhood, but also to be an active participant in these processes. Furthermore, Teci's story demonstrates that amongst the residents of the district, there are some older people whose life trajectories compile with the concept of 'elective belonging' (Savage et al, 2005). Savage et al argue that there are an increasing number of older people who make conscious decisions about their preferred residential locations and about the lifestyle they want to lead. Teci's story allows us to have a better understanding of the complex residential processes in the thirteenth district.

Teci was born in 1943 in Debrecen. Her family was interned until 1947 due to her father's position as a military officer. She remembers her early childhood as a time of abject poverty and hardships when they often went hungry.

Every time when my mother cut a slice of bread for bread and drippings, she sliced the bread so thin that my brother knew that he would need another slice straight away. He used to say "Mother, the bread is droopy." This saying stuck with him. We were literally starving. The situation got a bit better after 1956.

This period profoundly shaped Teci's strong desire to succeed in life. Her parents instilled in her the belief that the only way for her and her brother to move forward in life is to study. After her graduation from secondary school, she applied to university in Debrecen, but her application was rejected due to her class background. After the abolition of the class discrimination in education in 1963, she reapplied and got accepted to the University of Agriculture. However, her dream job was to be a solicitor, so she studied law as a second degree. In her account, there is a strong sense of achievement, when her determination to study paved her way to accomplish professional success as a university professor and a solicitor specialised in agricultural law. In 1998 she retired from the university, but she still has her solicitor's practice and kept some of her clients.

Her residential history took her as a young graduate with her first husband to a tiny village in north-east Hungary, where they lived in a council property with their baby daughter. Soon she divorced from her husband, and some years later she decided to move back to Debrecen because there were better schools for her daughter. Due to her work, she was given another council property. Later on when she started her solicitor's practice she bought her first property. Throughout her working life she acquired further properties. In Teci's account her strive to succeed and to leave behind the poverty of her childhood comes through as a major theme. The deprivation and social exclusion she experienced early in life profoundly shaped her identity and influenced her motivations. When she describes her previous homes it is very difficult to detect a sense of place attachment. What comes through instead is that the financial security and the lifestyle she established for herself and for her daughter bears great importance to her. Her agency to shape her life and to be able to choose the lifestyle and the place she wants to live culminated in her move to Budapest's Újlipótváros.

She describes her move to Budapest as a positive decision, which was primarily motivated by her daughter's career move. She loves living in the city, and she cites the abundant opportunities for cultural activities as a huge advantage of metropolitan life: 'We enjoy the exhibitions. We go to the museums. I enjoy them very much. We go to the theatre and the opera

house.’ When she talks about her neighbourhood she highlights the easy accessibility of services and facilities: ‘Everything is nearby. I just reach out and everything is easily available. I like buying clothes. I can buy everything close by, I don’t need to go far to find the things I need. I can spend my money easier here, and the cultural opportunities are great.’ In her narrative the division between city and neighbourhood is blurred. Újlipótváros doesn’t register as a significant place in her sense of belonging.

To be honest, the neighbourhood as such doesn’t motivate me, because we spend the summer in Siófok, we travel a lot. I’m not so concerned about my immediate environment. We just get into the car and we can get out of the city and go somewhere. I’m not an emblematic [Újlipótváros] resident because I transitioned to a very comfortable lifestyle.

In the Újlipótváros apartment block, she lives now she also bought a flat for her daughter. Teci has a strong sense of responsibility to support her and her grandson. The extended family - Teci, her husband, Teci’s daughter and her son - moved together to the new apartment block, and Teci’s immediate social living environment is comprised by them.

We bought a flat for my daughter in this house because we can help each other if we are in one house. I have a very good relationship with my daughter. [...] This way we can help each other in everything. First of all, financially, this is my duty, maybe it comes from the fact that I experienced poverty as a child. I don’t want my daughter to be deprived of anything. But anyway, I only have one child.

When I asked about her neighbours in the house, unlike my other informants who gave personal accounts of their everyday encounters with the people they live with, Teci gave me a long list of the residents' names, and cited their professional backgrounds and their connections to the higher echelons of the Hungarian political elite as a proof for the prestigious nature of the residential block. She also added that a quarter of the apartments is not occupied permanently because they were bought for investment. Teci's housing block represents those homeowners in Újlipótváros who actively participate in the gentrification of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood attracts a great deal of younger and older gentrifiers who contribute to pushing up housing prices in the area.

The members of her social circle mainly come from her and her husband's acquaintances through work and professional contacts. Most of them are not long-term Budapest residents. 'Several of our friends moved from Debrecen to Budapest just like we did.' Since her move to the city, she lost contact with many of her friends in Debrecen, although she still goes there once a week.

Teci loves to entertain her friends in her home. On these occasions, she wakes up at four in the morning to prepare the elaborate three- or four-course dinners from scratch. These dinner parties are perfect opportunities for her to put out her best table services which are on permanent display in four vitrines in her living room. She clearly doesn't have a biographical attachment to her home, but this is a place where she is developing her identity in her old age. Her home is the place where she enacts this identity. Budapest allows her to have a busy social life, and to be the lady of the house who cherishes the opportunities to entertain. This is evident in the way she arranged the rooms in her flat. Her modern two-bedroom apartment doesn't have a separate dining room, therefore she turned the living room into a dining area which is dominated by a big dining table and the four vitrines. Space here is used as an expression of human agency, where she can lead the lifestyle of her choice. Furthermore, she likes her home

because of its convenience, it has everything she needs. The essence of her attachment to her home comes from the comfort and convenience it offers her.

I'm not a typical thirteenth district pensioner because we moved here. Maybe those who lived their entire life here [...] I never bother to look at the leaflets they put through our letterbox about different services and opportunities for pensioners here. I see that they take care of the pensioners in the district, but I never read these things because I have my own private life. It is hard enough to catch up with my husband, he has so much get-up-and-go.

Teci is clearly not embedded in the social fabric of the neighbourhood. She uses Újlipótváros as a backdrop for her chosen lifestyle. For her the 'place biography' of her place of resident is less important than her personal biography and her identity.

Teci's example shows that there are older people who make conscious decisions about the place they want to live and about their chosen lifestyle. These people choose their place of residence 'as a means of 'announcing' or 'reaffirming' their identities' (Philipson, 2007, 329). Philipson and Savage et al argue that the place of residence emerges as a central site for performing identities and in the process of 'elective belonging' people develop different relationships with their neighbourhood (Philipson, 2007; Savage et al, 2005).

Belonging is not to a fixed community, with the implications of closed boundaries, but is more fluid, seeing places as sites for performing identities. Individuals attach their own biography to their 'chosen' residential location, so that they tell stories that indicate how their arrival and subsequent settlement is appropriate to their sense of themselves. People who come to live in an area with no prior ties to it, but who can link their residence to their biographical life history, are able to see themselves as belonging to the area. This

kind of elective belonging is critically dependent on people's relational sense of place, their ability to relate their residence against other possible areas, so the meaning of place is critically judged in terms of its relational meanings (Savage et al, 2005, 205).

The most often cited example of 'elective belonging' in old age is the phenomenon of retirement migration and retirement communities (Warens et al, 1999). Retired people move to places which are congruent with their past and their expectations about their future (King et al, 2000). Teci's move from Debrecen to Budapest represents the final step in a series of accomplishment in her lifetime, and it is the manifestation of her ability to choose her location according to her biographical identity and preferences. Here she can enact her identity as a mother and grandmother living close to her daughter and grandson; as a wife who runs the household and entertains guests; and as a consumer of goods, services and culture of the metropolis. She has multiple attachments to places in Budapest, Debrecen and Siófok, she doesn't belong to one locality or a fixed community. What Teci's example of 'elective belonging' signifies is that there are new forms of integration and belonging which are very much different from the belonging of the long-term residents. In the 'elected' dimensions of places and communities space emerges as an expression of human agency for older people.

Chapter Three: The older residents in Angyalföld

3.1 Éva's story - "They erected a Berlin Wall and saying Hello repellents"

Teci is an example of those older people who are able to 'elect' where to live, however there are a significant number of older people who are less able to shape their physical and social environment. Éva's story takes us to Anygalföld, the other neighbourhood which is in focus of my study. In her account, an ageing experience emerges that is directly opposite of Teci's, where the effects of social exclusion are represented.

It was a crisp spring day when I visited Éva. As I approached the gate to the garden, she came out of her house and welcomed me. She walks with the aid of a walking stick because she is still recovering from a hip operation. When we sat down in her chilly dining room, she offered me a cup of tea and told me that she didn't want the interview to be recorded, but she wouldn't mind me taking notes.

Her home is a typical detached house in Angyalföld OTI estate, which is a garden city built at the beginning of the 1940s designed to house working class families who moved to Budapest from rural locations to work in the factories (Juhász, 2012). The estate was designed in a way to allow their inhabitants to continue with some aspects of their life in the countryside. Everybody had a kitchen garden and fruit trees, and they kept animals well into the 1950s. Éva recalls the sound of the cockerels' waking her up in the mornings when she went to school. The selection of stock house designs used on the estate reflected several features of the Hungarian vernacular architectural styles, which further contributed to the village feel of the area. Today there are very few houses which retain these original features, since most of them had been extended and rebuilt. Éva's house still has most of the original design elements except the open veranda, which she built in to give a dining room to the house. The houses on the OTI estate originally comprised of two bedrooms, a kitchen with a larder, a hall, a bathroom and a cellar. The disappearance of the typical verandas, which most of the houses used to have on the estate,

signified an important development in the neighbourhood. After the former council tenants became owners of the houses and implemented significant alterations to the properties, they used the open verandas to increase their living space. This immediately closed the houses off from the street, and reduced the opportunities for neighbours to meet and talk to each other. Today, the architecture of the houses reflects an inward looking community, where people moved their social activities backwards to the garden and to the patio there, and closed off the front of the houses and the front garden for parking.

‘This is a house which doubles up as a farm’, Éva says as we enter her dining room. The room is full of pot plants which wait to be transported to the garden with the arrival of spring. Éva is a keen gardener and since her retirement she became a bit of a horticultural expert. She became a member of a gardening club, where she attended several gardening workshops.

Éva was born in 1943 in Budapest. Her family lived in the centre of the city in the seventh district in Október 6 Street. They had to flee their home during the Second World War, because the building was bombed in the siege of Budapest. In fact, Éva was pulled from the rubble of the house. She was saved by a concrete pillar which fell on her cot, shielding her from the falling rubble. They came to Angyalföld OTI estate because some members of her family were already living in the neighbourhood, and they let them know that there were some empty properties there. Éva and her family occupied one of these vacant houses. She has been living there ever since.

Just like her parents most people on the estate worked in the local factories in those days. In the garden they kept rabbits and chickens. Talking about her childhood, she explains ‘my biggest desire was to eat bread and butter every day’. Éva started school in the barrack school of the infamous Tripolis neighbourhood of Angyalföld, where one of the biggest slums of the city could be found. She recalls her early school days with laughter. ‘When I was in first grade we used to jump up on top of our desks because there were rats running across the floor.’ When the Kilián, the model socialist school was built, she continued her studies there. She talks about her

new school with great pride and with fond memories. 'Kilián was the most beautiful school in Europe. [János] Kodály and [János] Kádár came to visit our school. It was a fully equipped school. Every student had their Bunsen burners for the experiments in the science lab.' After graduating from secondary school she started working in the same factory where her father was a foreman. Shortly after her father's death she got married and had a son. They carried on living with Éva's mother in the house. Éva talked about her strained relationship with her husband and their divorce. Twenty years after her graduation from secondary school, she enrolled at university to study tourism and hospitality. She recalled the difficulties of studying while being a working single mother.

Amongst all of my informants, Éva had the most checkered career history. After a short stint in a factory, she worked at various hotels and tourist offices before she set up her own travel agency. Her job allowed her to travel the world, but being a single mother and earning a living in a quickly changing industry was difficult. In her narrative the purchase of her formerly state owned house in the early 1990s emerges as an episode of great financial struggle and a decision which was forced on her and didn't have the freedom of choice about it. She was the only person amongst my informants who paid it off by monthly instalments instead of paying the whole asking price at once. 'I was told that I have to buy the house or it would be taken away. I had to buy it by 35,000 Ft monthly instalments. I struggled a lot to pay it off.'

The everyday existence is still a struggle for Éva financially since she has a small pension. She finds it difficult to heat the house in the winter months. After returning home from hospital following her operation, she applied for fuel allowance at the local council. Her application was refused on the basis that information was missing from the form. The authorities asked her to scan some further documents, which she was unable to do, because she didn't have a scanner at home and she was housebound at the time. Éva doesn't have a supporting family around her. She lives on her own in a house which needs renovation and modernisation for which she doesn't have the money. The only support she gets is from her nephew and his family, who live in the

same neighbourhood. Her great passion is gardening. 'I don't know what it means to be lonely. The garden keeps me going', she states. She tells me her life motto which says: 'If you can't change your circumstances, you have to change your mindset.' Regardless of her difficult circumstances, Éva has an air of resilience about her, which she puts down to her sports career as an athlete until the age of thirty-five.

In Éva's narrative her neighbourhood emerges as a place which used to have a strong community spirit that today doesn't exist. Several of her neighbours moved in the area from other parts of the city or from rural locations, and most of them did extensive changes to their houses. Éva experiences the change in the social fabric of the neighbourhood as a loss of community belonging.

All the neighbours were friendly in those days. Everybody used to be poor. Everybody worked in the factories. The kids played on the street. There was a community life. There is no community life now. In those days the neighbours met and talked to each other. Today they only meet if there is some rodent to catch. Nowadays, people put up big fences to shield themselves. There are lots of nouveau riche here. Many of them moved here from the countryside recently.

These developments in Éva's neighbourhood raise questions about her sense of belonging to, and integration with her social environment. It seems that the neighbourhood change is incompatible with her own view of herself. Her immediate social environment is not consistent with and affirmative of her own biography and life history; therefore she experiences rejection and exclusion from her locality.

She explains that while in the past, the neighbours talked to each other, today they barely say hello to each other. Éva points out some of the architectural features which make it difficult to talk to or even greet her neighbours across the fence anymore. She discusses that the

neighbour opposite erected a ‘Berlin Wall’ as a fence, while the next door neighbour put a plastic mesh on the fence which blocks the view to his garden. Éva sarcastically refers to this as ‘saying Hello repellent’.

The contrasting examples of Teci’s and Éva’s stories show that there are significant inequalities between those older people who are able to make conscious decisions about where and with whom to live, and those who feel marginalised and alienated by changes in their immediate social environment where they are ageing in place. While Éva feels out of place in the changing neighbourhood, she feels a strong attachment to her home: ‘I’m rooted here. My father and my mother died here. My child was born here. I would feel uprooted if I had to leave’. Her home possessions further enforce her place attachment to the house where she lived most of her life, because they recall memories which take her back to stages of her life when she had more agency to shape her environment than she has now.

3.2 Érszébet’s story - “A homogeneous social group used to live here”

At the bottom of Éva’s road, the buildings of the former model Stalinist housing estate flank the central square. The square is dominated by the statue of Attila József, the acclaimed poet of working-class origins, who is depicted in the unmistakable guise of a party agitator overlooking the red brick building of the Angyalföld house of culture. Erzsébet lives in one of the apartment blocks of the estate, in the small flat where she was brought up. She moved to Angyalföld in 1957 at the age of five with her parents; her family originally came from a small village in southwestern Hungary, where she was born in 1952. She recalls the poor conditions they experienced in the first few years when they moved to the city while they lived in a small shop. Their living conditions improved when they got the apartment on the socialist housing estate. She attended the local Kilián school, the same school where Éva went to, and in fact all the kids from this neighbourhood studied. Erzsébet’s mother was a seamstress, and her father worked as

a sewing machine mechanic. After her graduation from technical college, she worked in a local factory for a couple of years, but during most of her working life she worked for the Hungarian Optical Works until it was privatised.

She moved away from the parental home when she got married at the age of twenty-four, and lived on the other side of the city for over thirty years. Her move back to Angyalföld ten years ago signified a new phase in her life in many respects. She just got over a ‘messy’ divorce, and she became retired. Both of these turning points in her life initially filled her with dread, but now she considers her decision to move back to Angyalföld ‘the best decision of my life’.

While for Éva the changes in the neighbourhood impacted negatively on her life, Erzsébet talks enthusiastically about the positive transformation of Angyalföld and the whole district. Comparing it to her former place of residence in one of the most affluent districts of the city, the thirteenth district comes on top in every respect. She explains that Angyalföld has successfully shed the stigma of the neighbourhood where the poverty stricken Tripolis tenement blocks were, of which she has vivid childhood memories. Several of the positive things she mentions has to do with the good infrastructure, transport links and amenities of the area, but what really stands out in her narrative are the people.

If I need help I could rely on my son, but I’m sure that everybody would help here in the house if I asked for help. In the twelfth district where I lived for more than thirty years in a block of flats where there were nine apartments, I didn’t know the telephone number of any of my neighbours. Here I know the number of several of my neighbours. In the twelfth district people didn’t even say hello to each other. They didn’t want to speak to each other.

Erzsébet recognises that the composition of the neighbourhood has changed, there is only one old resident left in her block, and young people are moving in, but she views these changes as

beneficial to the area. She partly puts down the attractiveness of the neighbourhood to the nearby Váci Street Corridor Office development, which created a large number of jobs for young professionals. The only thing she is not satisfied with is that the outside of their building hasn't been redecorated for a long time.

Since people bought their council apartments at the time when they were privatised, most of the flats are now nicely redecorated, but the condition of the house is not too good. There are many pensioners living here and we can't raise the maintenance fee to such a degree to cover the refurbishment of the whole building.

She explains the difficulties they have encountered when they wanted to change the roof on one of the buildings in a housing community of hundred and forty apartments, eighteen percent of which is still owned by the local council. While there are several council tenants, an increasing number of flats are rented out to private tenants. Erzsébet herself owns two properties in the apartment block, the one she inherited from her mother and where she lives, and another one she bought for investment and it is rented out.

As far as her social networks are concerned, Erzsébet, more than any of my other informers, relies on her old school friends, and her former colleagues at MOM. She is aware of the several opportunities offered by the local council for senior citizens, but she doesn't use them because as she explains she has enough friends to socialise with. She recalls that with her old school friends they often talk about the strong sense of community they had at school. She explains the community cohesion by the presence of 'the homogeneous social group', 'the diligent working class' who used to live in this neighbourhood.

All the parents supported the school and the teachers. They all wanted their children to study and do better for themselves. Most of our neighbours were from the same social group, we were on the same level, that helped to create a close-knit community.

Erzsébet's social activities are not confined to her immediate neighbourhood. She uses the city's cultural and recreational opportunities extensively, and she often travels abroad. Her most reliable source of support comes from her son with whom she has a strong bond and regular contact.

Chapter Four: Processes of continuity and change

Barbara Myerhoff's ethnography *Number Our Days* comes the closest to a classic anthropology of old age (Myerhoff, 1980). Myerhoff reconstructs the lives of the members of a Jewish senior centre in Venice Beach, Los Angeles, when she observes and analyses the old people's struggle for continuity, autonomy, dignity and joy in the liminality of old age. She argues that rituals of the senior centre sustain a sense of continuity and community for the elderly Jewish members against their dissolution into meaninglessness. The main criticism of Myerhoff's work is that while she romanticises Yiddishkeit, she treats culture and rituals as inherently holistic (Kaminsky, 1992). Culture emerges as a totalising construct in her book, and it shifts the attention away from other aspects of social differentiation, such as generational experience and class location of the old members of the Venice Beach centre.

While my study doesn't focus on an institution or a specific community, the question still arises in relation to the role of culture playing a part in the lives of the older residents of Budapest thirteenth district. Especially so since one of the dominant discussions of the gentrification debate is concerned with the binary discourse of the 'emancipatory city' versus 'revanchist city' theses, where the 'emancipatory city' depicts the metropolis as a liberating space where gentrification creates tolerance and equality; while the 'revanchist city' is the location for a spatialised revenge against the marginalised populations of the urban centres (Caulfield, 1994; Smith, 1996). If one of the earliest understandings of gentrification which is concerned with working class displacement in the deindustrialised city centres is to be considered, the marginalised group under attack can be in fact the working class itself. Although, the working class history of the thirteenth district is beyond the scope of this study, by listening to the narratives of my informants, it becomes apparent that the working class presence used to be significant in both neighbourhoods under focus, and that all of the women relate to it in different ways. For Ilona the memories of the working class past in the district gives her the continuity to sustain her sense of self and belonging to her neighbourhood. Working class people might be as

much of a residue in Újlipótváros today as in the former working class district of Manchester, but for Ilona their commemorative past in the neighbourhood, and the physical presence of the built environment associated with the working class history are enough to give her the continuity to feel content with the apparent changes around her. The majority of Erzsébet's social network still comes from the close-knit working class community she was brought up with, and from the strong collegial community of her former workplace. She fondly recalls the strong sense of belonging amongst the people whom she went to school with which she puts down to the homogenous working class character of her neighbourhood at the time. Today, she still feels that Angyalföld gives her a much more supportive social environment than the neighbourhood in Buda where she used to live for a long time. The acute sense of loss of a working class community is most pronounced in Éva's narrative. She feels isolated in the changing social fabric of her immediate social living environment, where she increasingly feels an outsider. While in the interviews with Judit and Teci, the district's working class history doesn't even come up. Judit's sense of belonging to her neighbourhood was always much looser than for Ilona or Erzsébet, and due to her limited mobility her activities now are very much revolve around her family and her home. Teci as an older gentrifier moved into the area less than ten years ago, and she didn't have any previous association with the district, therefore she has no nostalgia for its working class history.

Far from trying to use culture as a totalising concept, there is still something to be said about the connection of a working class cultural past and the nature of changes in the neighbourhoods of Angyalföld and Újlipótváros, where many older people are able to feel some kind of continuity amidst the changing social landscape. I would argue that the geographies of gentrification which initiated the social and spatial processes of change in the district are more subtle, and maybe even more consensual than in other parts of the city, and than that of the North American experience most urban theorists describe.

Furthermore, there are clear differences between the gentrification processes the two neighbourhoods experience. Due to its attractive central location and its historic housing stock, Újlipótváros shows a more pronounced manifestation of gentrification, such as the appearance of globally connected property owners, high level of studentification, and the settlement of members of the artistic and the creative class. In Angyalföld, which used to have a much more homogenous working class population, and still has more of a suburban milieu, the Hungarian middle classes gain ground by buying homes to live or to invest in.

Éva's story stands out from the five older women's narrative. Her sense of loss of a community life of her neighbourhood also comes from her insecurity and financial struggles because her only source of income is her small pension. Her example clearly shows that the Hungarian social policy system doesn't provide adequate support for those older people who would need it. Furthermore, from the accounts of these women's lives it becomes obvious that in Hungary caring for older people is still predominantly provided by the immediate family. Those lacking family support and financial security are in danger of experiencing social exclusion in society, and they feel any change in their immediate social environment most acutely. Only seven percent of the older population have access to state provided home care in Hungary, and while it is the responsibility of the local councils to offer basic services for their older residents in need, such as lunch deliveries and home care, these services are very unevenly distributed across the country (Gyarmati, 2019). Three quarters of older people are not even aware of the social support they are eligible for (Gyarmati, 2019).

Conclusion

This study explored issues of ageing in the changing urban social environments of two neighbourhoods in Budapest, and the extent to which the transformations affect older people's everyday experiences of ageing in place. Since residential location and the social dynamics of a neighbourhood are inextricably linked to personal identity and a sense of having control over one's life, the congruence between self and place play a crucial role in maintaining continuity for older people. Furthermore, people's immediate social environment also signifies social status, which can become important for older people since after retirement their social status is being eroded as a consequence of losing their work based identities.

The five biographical narratives laid out in this research show different strategies for dealing with change and interpreting the transformations around them. While place clearly emerges as a significant factor in the process of ageing, depending on their level of embeddedness in and attachment to their neighbourhood, their state of health, the family support they receive, and their financial security, place matters differently to my informants. Neighbourhood could be a site where 'elective belonging' is played out, or where biographical identity is developed over a lifetime of residency.

The five women's life trajectories are very different later in life, even though they generational experiences show several similarities. For the subject of this study, one of the most significant similarities is that almost all of them bought their homes during the mass privatisation of the state owned housing stock, and most of them still live in these homes. In the context of the gentrification debate, this generational experience is important. One of the most significant changes the post-socialist transition brought about was this 'give-away' privatisation of the state housing stock which prompted one of the first waves of gentrification in Budapest in the early 1990s. It would be interesting to explore if this transformation of the public housing led to Western type gentrification or not. The biographical data collected for the study doesn't provide sufficient information to answer this question, but there is one observation which could be made

based on the narrative evidence of the five women. There is a strong argument for claiming that this early mass privatisation of houses contributed to the mixed residential character of the two neighbourhoods, and particularly to that of Újlipótváros, and even resulted in the more nuanced and consensual nature of the ongoing gentrification processes undergoing in the district since then.

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